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Blather: Unconventional Means II

From: **Daev Walsh - Blather** <daev@blather.net>
Date: Tue, 11 May 1999 22:24:55 +0100
Fwd Date: Wed, 12 May 1999 17:03:52 -0400
Subject: Blather: Unconventional Means II

B L A T H E R

p a r a n o r m a l p r o v o c a t e u r i s m

By Dave (daev) Walsh daev@blather.net
Web: <http://www.blather.net>

May 11th 1999, Dublin, Ireland Vol 2. No. 43

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UNCONVENTIONAL MEANS II - THE SUNDAY

Having savoured the delights of Saturday night London, and after crept into my bed with the sun well above the horizon, this Blatherskite was in rag-order by the time he stumbled into the Commonwealth Institute on Kensington's High St., a little too late to barge-in and search for the thread of Jan Bondeson's 11 o'clock 'Basilisks, Vegetable Lambs, Stuffed Mermaids and Other Monsters and Marvels from Old Natural History', or Daniel Wojcik's 'From Spirit Photos to Apocalyptic Polaroids'. If we hadn't been so tardy, we would have lurched into the latter, familiar as we are already with vegetable lambs, and Bondeson's *A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities* (I.B. Tauris, 1997, ISBN 1-86064-228-4), and intrigued by what Wojcik had to say...

Instead we managed to make it to see Ted Harrison's 'Pre Millennial Tension' at 1200. Harrison - writer, TV producer and journalist - gave forth on the symptoms of tension appearing in the months before the (alleged) change of millennium. We say alleged, as Harrison, Robert Anton Wilson, Arthur C. Clarke, Conor Cruise O'Brien, and others (including this Blatherskite), seem to be sporting wry grins at the current 'glitz and glamour' attitude leading up to January 1st 2000, guessing that if it weren't for the romanticism of fine round numbers (ahem, '2000'), there's bugger all else to celebrate,

contentious as our current calendrics seem to be (and that isn't to say that this writer *won't* be celebrating... like we need an excuse).

As in Daniel Wojcik's talk in part I of 'UnConventional Means', Harrison enjoys pointing out the daftness of it all, the coming about of the belief in Messianic return, the disillusionment of prominent Y2K consultants, their subsequent fleeing to rural bunkers, and the fact that apparently 25 per cent of the United States population believe that 'Jesus will return in their lifetime'. This millennial tension - as opposed to millennium - is nothing new, we know - the Old Testament documents as much. The current spate of it, is, relatively speaking, nothing new either - Rev. Billy Graham was stirring it up back in '73. This methodology appears to be rooted in getting one's people on the edge of expectation, of imminent change.

Harrison has recently been to Jerusalem, and entertained us (at least those of us with finely tuned cruel black humour) with tales of 'Jerusalem Syndrome', a psychological state suffered by many visitors to the city, consisting of several steps:

Anxiousness of the Christian tourist to Jerusalem

Breaking away from main tour group

Purification - washing, ridding of worldly possessions...

The wearing of white robes

Singing

Preaching

Most sufferers recover after a week - for others it's not so simple...

Harrison reckons that, in a few years, we may see a new condition appearing: 'Anti-Climax Syndrome' - a 21st Century version of the Millerite 'Great Disappointment' of the 1840s - and again impacted by constant 're-calculation' of the allegedly impending apocalypse. He notes with dry amusement some of the millennialists who, in recent times, flew to Jerusalem for the End of the World - but bought return tickets. He also proposes a dip in Christian end-time tension after 2000, hitting a low in the second decade of the new millennium, and rising again in time for 2033 - to 'celebrate' the crucifixion.

As for the Y2K bug problem - Harrison reckons that, in some ways, millennial studies can tell us far more about the bug than knowledge of computers. He is sceptical about massive disaster scenarios, but he says that if his toaster isn't working on 01/01/02000, he'll eat his words...

After lunch, and the Charles Fort Institute AGM, we were off to see neuropsychologist Professor Sergio Della Sala of Aberdeen University discussing 'Mind Myths: Exploring Popular Assumptions about the Mind and Brain'. Della Sala has to be one of the most entertaining speakers we have ever encountered - his university lectures must be a howl, interspersed with comedy and trickery... at one point he walked to the front of the stage asking the audience members to raise their right hands... and say 'banana'. Like good students, we did so... He clicked onto the next slide... which said something like 'At approximately 2:15pm on Sunday 25th April 1999, several hundred people in an auditorium in Kensington will say 'banana' for no apparent reason...'

Della Sala isn't shy about criticising the pervasive myths abounding about the mind - he carefully points out the differences between what we actually 'know' about the brain, and what popular opinion and media assumes we 'know'.

He went on to show some of the cognitive disorders that he has been studying - using such test as 'the burning house' - conditions, where for instance, a patient can only 'see' half of their 'visible' universe - if shown, e.g. a cow, and told to draw it - *they will only draw half the cow*...

Professor Sergio Della Sala
<http://www.psyc.abdn.ac.uk/homedir/sergio/sergio.htm>

With the tiniest of breaks, it was once more into the breach, and on to Lyn Picknett and Clive Prince's - 'Masters of the Millennium' - a sharp criticism of the 'new egyptologists' Hancock, Temple, Bauval and West. Picknett and Prince, authors of *The Turin Shroud: In Whose Image?* and *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardian of the True Identity of Christ*, sought to reveal the occult, ultra-right-wing roots of the alternative Egyptology of Hancock, Temple, West and Bauval, by tracing it back to French mathematician Schwaller de Lubicz, who, as Picknett and Prince allege, was a known fascist and racist, since venerated for his pyramid theories by the new egyptologists. We won't even *attempt* to try and recreate the picture drawn in the lecture, but suffice to say it referenced Aleister Crowley's Cairo Working - i.e. *The Book of the Law*, Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy's influence on Nazism, Edgar Cayce's Atlantis beliefs, millennialist belief in hidden Egyptian secrets which, when discovered, will prompt apocalyptic change, corraling of circumstantial evidence to fit a given hypothesis... All of this apparently leads the current popular 'understanding' of what 'Egypt is all about', thanks to the proliferation and easy accessibility of the bestsellers on Alternative Egyptology.

Egyptology is something that we at Blather tend to steer clear of, as it's a vast and controversial minefield that we have neither the time or conviction to devote our time too. However this talk, even if relying heavily on circumstantial evidence was a delight - Picknett and Prince weave a damn fine story... stay tuned for their new book on the subject...

A dash upstairs saw those improbable peers, the celebrated Duke of Mendoza and the honoured Count O'Blather, loitering at the back of the hall for Ian Simmons' 'Proof of Everything'. Ian, a biologist and contributing editor to *Fortean Times*, sought to illustrate a model for the most advantageous use of the fragile concept of 'proof'. He broke it down into three main areas:

Personal Proof
Legal Proof
Scientific Proof

This talk was arguably the most practically applicable of the weekend, yet some audience members fell prey to Sunday afternoon jitters and seemed displeased with the 'academic' content. Shame on them - Simmons' knowledge, wit and charm are not to be dismissed lightly. In fact, Ian has furnished us with a copy of his talk, so that we may quote from it - saves us from mucking up what we thought he said...

Personal proof, says he, is often confused with the other two - "I believe this is true - you have to trust me that it is" - akin to religious belief - or as Simmons puts it, 'Many UFO reports, cryptozoological sightings, alien abductions and psychic events are in the realm of personal proof, we have to rely on the stories of the experiencers who believe it, but can produce no corroboration from other people or physical traces of the event'...'in essence, the evidence is the proof'.

Legal Proof - 'This collects the evidence, and tries to prove something "beyond reasonable doubt" while it is more objective than personal proof, it is still to some degree subjective. It is designed to gather all the material evidence and personal testimonies of people involved in an occurrence and to work out from them a consensus of what took place under a particular set of non-repeatable conditions. This does not mean something is absolutely objectively true, just that the consensus of informed opinion viewing the evidence thinks it is so.'

Scientific proof is different in that 'it is an objective method which makes an attempt to pin something down in a way which is testable and repeatable to anyone, with all the parameters influencing a phenomenon understood so that it can be reproduced at will. It works by proposing hypotheses which can be tested. These must account for all observed phenomena, must have predictable outcomes, must be able to generate further testable predictions and must be disprovable.'

Questions? Flames?

At 1700 hours, we prepared ourselves for the final talk of the

day, Peter Brookesmith's hilarious 'Flying Round Armageddon: Ufology and the coming Apocalypse'. Brookesmith touched on areas covered by both Harrison and Daniel Wojcik, but with his own quintessential brand of acerbic wit - such as proposing Nick Pope (who used to record UFO sightings for the British Ministry of Defence) as the possible Antichrist.

Brookesmith, 'gun-toting lecher' and 'known' Mossad intelligence officer, painted a picture of how ufological belief - beginning as a 'solution' to doomed humanity, has achieved a more negative millennial approach over the last fifty years, with the change from the positivist UFO contactees of the 1950s, to the apparent horrific abductions of the last couple of decades.

Brookesmith is quick to point out that if the Christian 'rapture' does occur - and they're all sucked up into heaven, 'The World Bigotry Index will drop like a rock.'...

And so - despite fond farewells, and gin expeditions with agents Wojcik, Brookesmith and Barrett (with sundry members of ASSAP and some lady doing a thesis on 19th century erotica), the arguably last UnConvention of the Millennium achieved closure, or something. There was naught left to do but gather the flock together to search the public houses of Notting Hill...'Oh show us the way to the next absinthe bar...oh don't ask why...'

Later on:

'I took another big swig of absinthe, and by the time we left the Pharmacy, my heart was full of joy... I felt like a human reincarnation of Spring Heel Jack... the Man on the Moon, and just weird enough to be totally confident...'

Dave Walsh
11th May 1999

[Speakers we didn't see on the Sunday of UnCon: Jan Bondeson, Daniel Wojcik, Michael Cremo, Jack Cohen, Lionel Fanthorpe, Tony Healy, and the ASSAP results...any reader wishing to comment, contact Blather...]

As for speakers we missed on Saturday, Paul Holloway has come up with the goods:

Randles' talk comprised her own findings on precognition, and experiments with the audience. The results of the experiments were less than impressive, but as they were a part of a wider experiment, we will have to wait until the results are published in a future copy of FT before we can assess them properly.

Much of the material presented by Randles was taken from her book 'Time Travel: Fact, Fiction and Possibility' (Blandford 1994, ISBN 0-7137-2404-8).

She observed that precognition often foresees the experiences of the subject, who might see a news report in a dream rather than the event itself.

This observation was also made by Dunne, in 'An Experiment With Time' (A & C Black, 1927), which inspired Randles' experiments. Dunne dreamed of the eruption of Krakatoa in 1902. He knew in the dream that 4000 people died, and it was not until 15 years later that he realised he had misread the total, which was in fact 40,000. It would seem that his dream of the number of dead was related to his future misreading of the newspaper headline.

Randles related another interesting tale: A woman had a dream of making banana sandwiches, when a friend phoned to tell her that her boyfriend had fallen off his motorcycle and was in hospital. In the dream she incongruously replied "Oh yes!" and burst into laughter. She told her friend and boyfriend about this dream, and so, the next day, when her friend called her to tell her that her boyfriend had fallen off his motorcycle and was in hospital, she assumed he was joking, and responded, more congruously in context, "Oh yes!" and burst into laughter. There is a certain exquisite paradox contained within this tale.

Randles also mentioned the apparent relationship between the accuracy of a precognition and the event's distance in time. The further away in time the event foreseen, the less likely it will transpire. This is interesting as it suggests some sort of mathematical law in operation. Randles also mentioned the often cited 'fact' that emotionally charged events are easier to foresee than the mundane. She intends to set up a premonitions 'newsdesk' on the Internet, with the aim of using the increased speed of communication we now enjoy to correlate premonitions, and assess their predictive value. If this works we might have a way of predicting or even avoiding disasters!

Paul Holloway
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As Blather didn't get a chance to suss it out, Very Special Agent K was checking out the 'Mind Machine':

The Mind Machine experiment was a touch screen monitor and video experiment.

I approached it cautiously, flanked by my two snazzy companions, the three of us were curious about the device advertised to travel the world collecting psi data. It did not match the Star Trek brain tube chamber we were expecting, rather it looked rather benign on its sleek pedestal.

After pressing the invitation to begin, I was addressed by the image of an earnest scientist in a video lab. Our Video Host informed us that the experiment was going to travel around to various populations and ask the same questions of each person thus forming a database for psi-research. With that all too brief explanation, I began the Test. First I had to select my gender, then I was informed that the experiment would be trying to predict the outcome of four coin tosses, how many guesses did I think I would get correct. This caused me to blink a lot while figuring out the implications of psychically guessing my psychic abilities, and I was already off balance trying to figure out what aspect of the video toss I was supposed to influence. Luckily I got prodded by my companions or else I would have stood there caught up in the maze of paradoxical logic thrashing possibilities. I selected that I would get 2 out of 4 questions correct, being hobbled back to statistics.

I was then shown a dual image of a British coin, heads and tails, too quickly for my American brain to do anything more than go 'Ah'. Then the Test really got weird. Surreal is an understatement when describing the strange moment in which I was watching a video clip of a coin flipping through the air, I had selected tails, it landed heads. I wasn't really paying attention to the toss, I was trying to figure out if I should be influencing the video computer's selection of clips, or send my little psi-abilities across the space-time-sex continuum and try to influence the initial toss. Sigh, such a Luddite. Anyhow I kept picking tails because I'm perverse and so succeeded in getting one guess correctly. Thus rendering my initial guess of two coin toss guesses wrong. But what I really wanted to know was the premise of this experiment. Give me a live action toss and I got the objective of influencing the coin's landing. But this beastie seemed to have a whole lot more going on with it in terms of variables. The aspect of time was strongly felt by all three of us, the machine as our interface made me feel like Milo with the eye dropper in the Phantom Tollbooth. So with that weirdness behind we went into the ASSAP live experiments.

KUDOS

Congratulations to the folks of the Centre for Fortean Zoology for having not one - but two run-ins with the police during the UnCon weekend... all for having bald tires... Send all remoulds to:

<http://www.eclipse.co.uk/cfz/>

Fortean Times
<http://www.forteanimes.com>

The Charles Fort Institute
<http://www.forteana.org>

Wild paraphrasing from
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas
Hunter S. Thompson

This issue (with photographs) is archived at:
<http://www.blather.net/archives2/issue2no43.html>

Unconventional Means 1
<http://www.blather.net/archives2/issue2no42.html>

IRELAND UFO-WATCH

Rumour has it that yet other prediction of Irish UFO activity was made for tonight, May 11th by our favourite UFO group. There's no *expected* astronomical phenomena of any significance tonight, but doubtless those that look will see what they expect to...

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