

exploring the extraordinary

exploring the extraordinary

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Borrowing Boggarts: The diffusion of folk-tales in a Manchester park

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Andrew Lang, in his work on the diffusion of the classical myth of Jason and the Argonauts, themes from which appear as far afield as Japan, Russia, and Samoa, proposed his driftwood theory; tales can be swept 'like pieces of drift-wood' from one place to another (1898: 97), 'diffused by borrowing' (1893: 417). Myths, legends, and folk-tales are rarely exclusive to a single location; they travel across counties, countries, and continents, with communities 'borrowing' aspects or whole traditions from other communities. This process of diffusion 'by borrowing' is the theme of this paper, which focuses on the tales of Boggart Hole Clough, Manchester.

Boggart Hole Clough consists of 171 acres of dense forest and deep ravines, situated three miles north of Manchester's city centre. This park possesses a wealth of local folktales, the majority of which are aetiological in nature, centring on a supernatural character known as 'the Boggart'. The earliest known literary source detailing 'the Boggart' is John Roby's *Traditions of Lancashire*, published in 1829; Roby recounts a story concerning local farmer George Cheetham, whose farmhouse was haunted by a Boggart: a 'strange elf...sly and mischievous' (1829: 296). Tormented by the Boggart's pranks, Cheetham's family leave their home – only to discover that the Boggart has decided to 'flit' (move house) with them.

Uncanny similarities between Roby's tale of the 'flitting Boggart' and one set in County Cork, penned by folklorist Thomas Crofton Croker (1825) four years earlier, lead us to question the originality of Manchester's Boggart. Particular details also appear to have been 'borrowed' from certain Yorkshire tales, and close parallels with legends from Scandinavia (which included a 'flitting' brownie) and Italy (a 'flitting' *Laùro*) suggest that the diffusion of the Boggart tale was not isolated to the British Isles.

Folklorists such as Stith Thompson believe that, concerning tales which manifest themselves in various geographic locations, there is invariably a 'theoretical original' (1965: 417). However, as this paper aims to demonstrate, this should not devalue the later manifestations: the borrowings. Folklore is, by its very nature, protean, mutable, and multifarious. There are no 'accurate' or 'inaccurate' accounts of the supernatural, only numerous divergent versions; harnessed, reinterpreted, and recontextualised to fit various times and places.

A Sensitivity Continuum for Mystical and Spiritual Experience

Dr Terence Palmer

Scientific and academic investigations into extraordinary experiences have produced an increasing diversity of specialisms and disciplines, as the *Exploring the Extraordinary* conferences over the past seven years will testify. Consequently, our knowledge and understanding of anomalous psychic, spiritual, paranormal and supernatural phenomena is expanding in accordance with an expansion in our collective consciousness to accommodate it. However, as we probe deeper into mystical phenomena with our finely-tuned methodologies there is a possibility that we could lose sight of the bigger picture and our ability to apply our knowledge to those problems that are demanding attention by an increasingly strife-ridden modern world. The modern philosopher of science Erwin Laszlo, on the subject of scientific specialisation writes:

The unfortunate consequence of such speciality barriers is that knowledge, instead of being pursued in depth and integrated in breadth, is pursued in depth in isolation. Rather than getting a continuous and coherent picture, we are getting fragments – remarkably detailed but isolated patterns. We are drilling holes in the wall of mystery that we call nature and reality on many locations, and we carry out delicate analyses on each of the sites. But it is only now that we are beginning to realise the need for connecting the probes with one another and gaining some coherent insight into what is there (Laszlo, 1996, p.2).

Connecting the probes, as Laszlo puts it, is precisely what Frederic Myers did when he included clairvoyance, dissociation and all related phenomena within a single conceptual framework that could be explored with the aid of an artificially induced altered state of consciousness. He advocated that all of human mental experience should be seen on a continuum and that nothing ought to be regarded as supernatural or paranormal. Myers repeatedly emphasised that such unseen environments that can be accessed through the greater subliminal mind must somehow be fundamentally continuous and interrelated with the one we know through our sensory perception. 'If an unseen world exists we must in some sense be in it' (Myers, 1891, p. 634).

I have been guided by Myers' example and applied his epistemological principles in bringing together, through a multi-disciplinary approach, mainstream psychological methods with an analysis of altered states of consciousness and externally validated subjective mystical experiences. The result is what I believe to be an integrated model to explain the extraordinary diversity of mystical, spiritual, inspirational, creative, religious, and spirit possession experiences. The model may be used to

explain why some people believe in paranormal and supernatural phenomena and others do not. It may also be used to explain, in the easiest-to-understand terms, why some science disciplines are unable to accommodate spiritual or paranormal phenomena and why pioneering research into the nature of consciousness is paving the way for a potentially greater understanding of a wide range of anomalous experiences. The potential for future research, using this model, has, I believe, enormous potential in the practical application of solutions that are forcing politicians and health institutions to re-evaluate how to treat mental illness.

Spiritual Transcendence Through Physical Exhaustion

Matthew Evans, Columbia University

The origin of the word *transcendence* comes from the Latin '*trans*', which when translated means 'across', and '*scandere*', and when that is translated means to 'climb'; it [transcendence] is the ability to be or to go beyond one's range of limits. The purpose of this abstract is to provide the reader with an understanding that it is possible to transcend one's own perception of reality and existence by experiencing and participating in/through extreme physical exhaustion. The origin of the word itself means to merely '*climb-across*', or in other words, to *find-another-way*. When the body experiences tremendous duress, the sympathetic nervous system is affected, causing an increase in cardiovascular function and a release of adrenal catecholamine, more commonly acknowledged as the '*fight-or-flight*' response; the physiological reaction that occurs in reaction to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat to survival.

The example that will be given to the audience is a personal experience where *spiritual transcendence* took place under complete physical fatigue when taking part in the Royal Navy Potential Royal Marines Course (PRMC) at the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines (CTCRM) in Lympstone, United Kingdom in May 2011. The PRMC is a two-to-three day training course that is physically and mentally demanding and it is notoriously known that '99.9% of the attendees need not apply'. The course requires potential recruits to undergo various physical and mental aptitude testing in order to acquire a certain amount of points to complete, pass and enter a 32-week full training course to become a fully registered Royal Marine Commando.

After developing severe gastroenteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestines, typically resulting from bacterial toxins or a viral infection and causing severe vomiting and diarrhoea) on the eve of the second day, two options existed; (1) to quit and to go home with failure ever present in the memory *or* (2) the decision to dig-deep; deep into the complexities of the mind and pass the course, no matter how much psychological and physiological onslaught the Corporals could inflict.

The 20-minute presentation gives an academic underpinning to exactly what occurred over those 48 hours and leaves the attendee believing that when (assisted by certain techniques) their mind is an incredibly powerful instrument that can help them overcome any amount of physical or mental adversity, no matter the amount of duress it is assigned. It will also show the audience that when a person is illuminated by such an experience, a *spiritual expansion* occurs, propelling them to a new way thinking and consequently, a new level of existence.

The presentation will be comprised of a mixture of academia, personal experience and inspirational dialogue. Time will be allocated for a constant flow of questions and answers at the end of the presentation.

Lay Ritual: The Theoaesthetics of Grotowski's Lineage

Dr Mark James Hamilton, Regent's University London

My paper examines the particular techniques of “self-penetration” evolved by Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) and his collaborators to guide performers towards expression, in his words, of “those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality”. Grotowski researched to evolve new theoaesthetic practices. These he tactically positioned as ‘lay rituals’, seeking to evoke powerful human experiences by eluding and exceeding the limitations and demarcations that are sustained by the State, the Church and Commerce. Zygmunt Molik (1930-2010) was a founding member of Grotowski’s seminal Teatr Laboratorium – an arts organization dedicated to experimentation. Through decades of research (1959-1984), the group evolved an exacting and rigorous methodology for investigating a reconnection of spiritual quest to European notions of acting. Jolanta Cynkutis (1954-2013) was the wife and collaborator of Zbigniew Cynkutis (1938-1987), also a founding member of the group. She was an actor in the Laboratorium’s later manifestation as the Second Wrocław Studio. In my paper, I examine Molik and Cynkutis’ actor training pedagogies, as experienced by me in Britain in the early ‘nineties. A silence cloaked both Molik and Cynkutis’ work: he said he readily found necessary deeds for trainees, but knew not quite how; she limited discussion with trainees to ensure practices were transmitted from body to body. I consider their work as forms of neoshamanism – acts created to evoke transformation, but oriented not towards sustaining a social status quo but towards a revolutionary fusing of corporeality and spirituality. Both Molik and Cynkutis worked to sustain Grotowski’s emphasis on *verticality*: that is, his use of precise physical acts as conduits allowing transcendental notions to become imminent and tangible experiences. Under their instruction – in his *acting therapy* and her *paratheatre* – I experienced profound reorganization of my psycho-physicality. I examine two key moments. In a Cardiff gymnasium, Molik manipulated my body as I sang and moved, seeking to connect my sacrum and larynx, forging my realization of voice as vibration and synthesizing my understanding of *logos* and *corpus*. It was work on my the core, towards my fundament. Contrastingly, in a retreat on Dartmoor, movement techniques Cynkutis had taught in the studio expanded exponentially: what had been exercises became triggers to an expansive dilation of mind and body, triggering silent beatific dialogues across the moors and with the zenith above.

The Nature of Belief and Maintenance of Faith in Extra-Terrestrial Religion:

Getting to Know the Aetherius Society

Michelle Aaron, University of Glasgow

It has been argued that the post-modern rise in individualisation has contributed to the decline in traditional religious practice. Evidence suggests however that the lack of a generalised theological explanation of the world has allowed for the formation of a number of newly emerging religions or spiritual organisations whose beliefs are based on a discourse of nature and science, a justification of reality based on pseudo-science. In particular, following a spate of reported UFO sightings in the 1940s and 1950s, there rose to prominence a number of extra-terrestrial based movements. Contact was claimed to have been made through sightings, meetings with pilots of flying saucers and most commonly through channelling whereby the contactee receives psychic messages from beings from outer space.

These extra-terrestrial based religious movements are typical of the postmodern condition; they combine traditional religious themes with science. The gods of these extra-terrestrial religions are believed to have knowledge far greater than those of humans. However, since these beings interact with humans and must then exist within the laws of natural science; they are understood to inhabit a realm of science that humans are incapable of comprehending. These encounters mirror traditional religious beliefs whereby certain divine individuals are chosen to receive them and be the interpreter and preacher of these ideas. The beliefs of extra-terrestrial religious groups are a source of speculation at best and ridicule at worst. Members must manage and maintain their faith under the condition of empirical scientific evidence which counters these beliefs and a society which is sceptical of ideas that others may find unusual or unsettling.

This paper aims to explore, the belief system and maintenance of faith of one extra-terrestrial religious group, The Aetherius Society. The Aetherius society was founded by George King in London in 1956 and has since grown to an organisation with branches in several countries. It all began one weekend in 1954 when King was visited by a disembodied voice which told him that he “was to be the voice of interplanetary parliament.” From that point on he became a channel for beings from outer space, the 'Cosmic Masters' such as 'Mars Sector Six', 'Aetherius' and 'Jesus' who imparted advice and wisdom to King, in the position of the divine interpreter, a mystagogue who in turn shared this with his followers.

I recently conducted an ethnographic study which endeavoured to get to know The Aetherius Society through; participant observation by attending their services, extensive reading of the society's literature and an in-depth interview with the founders of the Glasgow based group. I will present the unique history, beliefs and

actions of the Aetherius Society as based on my own experience spending time with them as well as an exploration of the nature of belief and how that has been formed and maintained in the two founding members of the Glasgow branch of the society.

Restless Souls: Beliefs in Strigoi in Romanian tradition

Cristina Douglas, University of Bucharest

In Romanian tradition, the term “strigoi” designates extra-ordinary people who were born as such, due to unusual signs during pregnancy (e.g. “womb crying”), giving birth (e.g. born backwards), or who were transformed into them if funeral taboos were not respected. The most terrifying action of human strigoi is their return, during the 40 days following their burial, to “drag” the dearest person left behind after them, which manifests in that one as an inexplicable and impossible to be diagnosed illness (the strigoi “eats” the heart and the ill loses his/her energy). The term also refers to semi-divine creatures that come at certain times of the year (St. Andrew’s night) to fight at the cross-roads, causing illnesses or even death to those who happen to be near. In all cases, the strigoi brings extraordinary, yet predictable, events upon the community that need further ritual measures and practices, preventative or readjusting, in order to keep or to bring about a return to ordinary social life: healing incantations performed by “witches”, stabbing the strigoi’s heart and mixing some of the blood/heart into the ill’s food etc. My paper analyses the concept of the extra-ordinary in relation to these beliefs from two perspectives: on one hand, from an anthropological point of view, as a normal outlet of ordinary social life, based on an extended ethnographic field research, looking at their role in the community; and on the other, following the media-hype of a scandal, which occurred in 2003 after a ritual stabbing led to inter-generational conflict with legal consequences, my paper will analyse the mass-media perspective, which represents these beliefs as “extraordinary” (spectacular, fascinating) pagan remains and a sign of “cultural retardation” among Romanian rural communities.

The Psychic Self

Dr Fiona Bowie, King's College London

Certain forms of psychic healing, often under the label of 'spirit release', are becoming increasingly popular and available within the UK. In many instances healers work remotely, communicating with clients via email or telephone. While there are parallels with Spiritist healing in Brazil, and many other non-Western forms of spirit release or exorcism, spirit release work in the UK is developing its own characteristics. There is a range of specific types of healing, with each healer adopting a slightly different approach based upon their training and abilities as well as the demands of clients. They share an assumption that the healer/s, working with discarnate spirit guides, either alone or often in pairs, can make contact with the client's 'higher self' and obtain information concerning the client. Healers claim to work with spirit guides and sometimes angelic forces to perform healing, often but not always involving the removal of 'spirit attachments', which it is hoped will result in an observable improvement in the client's health. The problems for which healing is sought may be physical but are more often emotional, mental and behavioural. The task for the client is to integrate information received from a healer at a physical, emotional, psychic and spiritual level. This talk will present some case studies, illustrating the interplay between psychic and physical forces, incarnate and discarnate persons, angelic and human beings; consciousness, self and embodied action in the world.

Powered by the God Who Heals:
Charismatic Healing Rituals and Re-Imagining Religion

Nadya Pohran, University of Ottawa

Charismatic Christian beliefs of spiritual healing are a stark contrast to the secular West's emphasis on scientific positivism and rational-empirical ways of knowing. However, keeping stride with the West's increase in scepticism and spiritual apathy, the Charismatic spiritual healing movement has steadily increased over the past three decades in Western Europe and North America. Contemporary Charismatic claims of spiritual healing often defy etiological explanation and can include: a sense of unexplained euphoria; the alleviation of physical pain and/or mental illness; the biological [re]construction of properly-functioning limbs ("limb lengthening"), organs, and sensory perceptions; "inner healing"; and demonic exorcism. Based on approximately one year of small-scale ethnographic fieldwork with Charismatic Protestants in Ontario (Canada) I explore the phenomenon of Charismatic healing and consider how this belief and practice relates to broader Charismatic theology.

In this paper-presentation, I draw from my ethnographic work (2013-2015) to present several focused case studies of Charismatic healing. Reflective of the diversity of practices within Charismatic healing, each case study focuses on a different "process" of Charismatic healing. They range from physical healing in a group context (in which blindness is first healed and then the healing is 'revoked') to the healing of memories (in which the supplicant processes several memories with a prayer counsellor), to the exorcism of evil spirits in an individual setting. I use these case studies to explore the broader Charismatic theological focus on "healing" and "restoration" at the cosmic-wide level. Using Tanya Luhrmann's notion of "cultural kindling" I propose that there is a reciprocal relationship between individual Charismatic healing (both physical and non-physical) and the broader Charismatic doctrinal stance of "Kingdom theology," and I suggest that this relationship should prompt us to re-imagine what is meant by "religion." Namely, "religion" for Charismatics is not limited to a set of practices or beliefs, but entails an intricate, ongoing, healing process that results in individual and cosmological restoration.

Near Death Experiences: Cognitive and Sensory After Effects

Debra Diamond

Motivation: Near-death experiences, defined as a “profound psychological event that may occur to a person close to death in a situation of physical or emotional crisis” are experienced by 13 million people in the US alone. As a field, NDE’s are not well understood, often ignored and under-researched. Even less well understood are NDE after-effects, including permanent cognitive and sensory transformations. A better understanding of the cause and meaning of NDE after-effects will enhance NDE research and experiencer’s lives. The impact of this study will further consciousness research and assist individuals living with the permanent after-effects of near-death experiences.

Problem Statement: What are cognitive and physiological NDE after-effects? Included in these NDE after-effects are newfound musical and artistic talents, mathematical abilities, enhanced IQ, corrected vision, heightened hearing, spontaneous healing and electrical sensitivity. This study focuses on the specific after-effects mentioned above within the broader state of the near-death experience.

Background: There is limited understanding of NDE after-effects. The majority of NDE after-effects research concerns psychological and social after-effects, including the high incidence of divorce, increased spirituality, and loss of fear of death. What is not known about NDE after-effects includes what causes them, how they manifest and their meaning. This study sets out to examine those factors.

Approach: The research methodology included interviews with individual experiencers, questionnaires, investigation of public records and psi research. Fifteen individuals were chosen as candidates after analysis of a universe of approximately fifty individuals. Candidates were identified through several organizations including IANDS, NDERF, and NHNE. The findings were compared for all candidates to determine patterns. Many individuals did not qualify for the study if their after-effects were not relevant to this study (increased spirituality, enhanced psychic ability), were brought about by drugs or they experienced childhood NDE’s.

Results: 100% of the experiencers in this study experienced permanent transformations beyond their choosing from their NDEs. Each NDE is different and the experiencers’ after-effects differ but can be categorized into physical and non-physical or sensory components. These after-effects are transformative and higher level functions conveyed through the NDE experience. A higher level of consciousness is conveyed through the NDE that over-rides the temporary biological vehicle that is our physical body.

Conclusions: Consciousness is a field that is not well understood and for which science has no rationale explanation. Additional understanding can result through further exploration of the non-physical realm. By exploring NDE after-effects, experiencers can understand that there is an explanation for what they are experiencing. This work is a significant win as it is the first time a study has been undertaken focusing exclusively on measurable and verifiable NDE after-effects.

The Uncanny Landscape: An examination of Unheimlich Underground

Drew Mullholland, University of Glasgow

In 1906, German Psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch's *Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen* introduced the concept of unheimlich or the uncanny. Uncanny is the feeling of dread as relating to the known becoming strangely uncertain. Jentsch described the human desire for intellectual mastery of one's environment, it's certainty providing psychical shelter in the struggle for existence. When the familiar becomes strangely unfamiliar, an uncanny sensation results. In his 1919 paper *Das Unheimlichen* Freud describes the uncanny as belonging to all that is terrible, to all that arouses dread and creeping horror but furthers Jentsch's explanation, arguing that it is not simply the unfamiliar which induces the peculiar fear of the uncanny it is a mistrusting of the senses when the rational and familiar becoming aberrant and peculiar yet near enough to the familiar to cause confusion and self-doubt.

The use of the uncanny is frequently seen in pop culture; in Nigel Kneale's *Quatermass and the Pit* (BBC 1958/Hammer Films 1967) for example we encounter an everyday location, the familiar setting of an underground station. 'Hobbs End' is a fictitious London station that Kneale astutely positions on the Central line validating its credentials with a real location. It is within this setting however that something literally out of this world happens and the sense of eeriness is only amplified by the station's ordinariness.

Once experienced, the familiarity of all underground stations then becomes open to question and reinterpretation. What seems to be ordinary contains secrets, unknown and unwelcome surprises cloaked in the familiar. The uncanny landscape as a theme re-occurs frequently in film and television due to its ability to induce fear, dread and discomfort. Popular culture mirrors reality in the case of the uncanny, it works as a technique in film because it is something which most people have experienced, that moment of fear due to insecurity about our surroundings which were once familiar. Underground stations have long been the setting for experiences that seem paranormal. They are liminal spaces, which are used simply to travel through, a daily experience so familiar that little thought is given to it. Both open and inviting, crowded and public yet at the same time full of dark spaces and mechanisms that the ordinary commuter knows little about. Underground stations teeter on the edge of normality, a part of the city yet not. I will present experiences of the uncanny in the underground and explore why this familiar urban landscape is the source of unusual experience.

Exploring 'Pennies from Heaven': And Other Phenomena & Communication from Beyond Using a Symbolic Interaction Lens

Dr Laurel Hilliker, Park University

Stories related to after-death communication between the deceased and the chief mourners are often kept within small circles. Fear of being viewed as crazy and so grief-stricken that one is now hearing, seeing, or dreaming up things that are not real, are of large concern for many bereaved people. Yet, sense-of-presence and other extraordinary encounters reported by the bereaved are common in many cultures and need to be understood and supported. Various researchers have studied what Parker (2005) calls 'extraordinary experiences', such as vivid dreams, unexplainable help in times of distress, and signs of communication from beyond through objects. For the storytellers, comfort from these experiences often brings a great deal of hope, which is supported in the literature as a helpful and adaptive coping mechanism in the short term bereavement. As a death/grief educator and researcher, the author has been honored to witness many stories from bereaved participants in research studies and from bereaved students writing in a college death/dying/grief course, regarding the numerous ways in which they believe their deceased family members and friends communicate with them. This paper and presentation explore the wide array of meanings assigned to these extraordinary experiences in human culture, with a special focus on particular objects that appear in our paths, such as coins, as possible symbolic reminders of the hereafter. Included in this exploration are several accounts of unexplainable phenomena from a research study of widowed Baby Boomers in the U.S. Additionally, the author shares the story of her own loss and the subsequent (and unexpected) communication experiences related to the untimely death of her oldest brother in May, 2014 and the meaning of these experiences for herself and for her family. The goals of this paper include: understanding the significance of these experiences while describing any culturally specific aspects of them for the bereaved; discussing the personal impact of having the experiences using a symbolic interaction perspective; and recommendations of support for people who struggle with the telling of the after-death communication stories and for the professionals who work with them.

Screaming Cupboards and Burning Books: An exploration of the forbidden

Chris Lambert

This paper will explore how the memories of experiences in childhood and adolescence can influence artistic obsessions in later life. How the act of forbidding aspects of the supernatural and elements of the everyday can give them a greater power. How nostalgia for the forbidden makes the forbidden become more tangible. I will explore how these elements have combined and reacted to each other enabling me to create soundscapes and stories such as "Tales from the Black Meadow".

Using my own supernatural and religious experiences as a starting point, this paper will examine how the denial of the ordinary and certain aspects of the extraordinary have fuelled an atheistic and esoteric interest. Exploring the influence of forbidden children's literature, book burnings, fear of hell, laying on of hands, poltergeist activity and fundamentalist dogma, it will allow the symposium participants to journey into an edge space between certainty and doubt. It will attempt to reveal the artificial boundaries and overlaps between the "good" spirituality of organised religion and the "evil" of the supernatural, the secular, the other and the real. It will celebrate the confusion caused by the perceived superiority of one spiritual realm over another, examining how this confusion manifests in the world of the real. It will explore how these dichotomies act as fuel in the creation of art and story by examining the work and influences of other contemporary hauntological/psych-folk artists in the fields of sound (*Melmoth the Wanderer*), music (*The Hare and the Moon*), sculpture (*Goblin Fruit Studios – Carissa Swenson*) and story (*Gareth Rees*).

This paper charts the growth of my disbelief and the contradictory fascination with the arcane, giving an insight into how these experiences helped to create my own work in sound, my plays and short stories including "Tales from the Black Meadow".

This paper will include soundscapes based on and captured from these formative experiences.

Sweet-Talking the Spirits: The Use of Emotional Language in the Renaissance

Drew Manns, University of London

This paper will explore the ways Renaissance magicians, such as Marsilio Ficino, Tommaso Campanella, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Giordano Bruno conceptualised the practice of spiritual communication. Like human beings who were believed to be composed of spiritus, (a subtle medium that connected the soul to the physical body) spirits could only be affected by words that conveyed strong emotions. Thus the enchanter who wished to exhibit perfect spellcraft, would have to be a master of speechcraft; delivering orations and recitations with a sound knowledge of rhetoric, poetry, and the correlations between objects, symbols, and thinking patterns. For example in his *Three Books on Life* (1489), Marsilio Ficino writes: "...they hold that certain words pronounced with a quite strong emotion have great force to aim the effect of images precisely where the emotions and words are directed.¹ In *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1533), Heinrich Agrippa writes: "Words therefore are the fittest medium betwixt the speaker and the hearer, carrying with them not only the conception of the mind, but also the vertue of the speaker with a certain efficacy unto the hearers, and this oftentimes with so great a power, that oftentimes they change not only the hearers, but also other bodies, and things that have no life."

Similarly, Giordano Bruno, in his *On Magic* (1590) states: "We might also consider the art of speaking and its type of spiritual bonding. This occurs in songs and poems and in whatever orators do to persuade, to dissuade and to move the emotions."

My aim will be to show how the understanding of spiritual conversations in the Renaissance mirrored the understanding of persuasive human dialogue. Starting from Marsilio Ficino's concept of love as the primary binding power of all magical activity, I will trace the development of spiritual intercourse in Agrippa and Paracelsus and then examine its social aspects in Bruno's and Campanella's handbooks on magic.

Spirit Possession and Mediumship in a South Indian Fishing Village

Dr Charles W. Nuckolls, Brigham Young University

The purpose of this paper is to examine the cultural context of beliefs about spirit possession in a fishing village in South India. Residents say that bereaved mothers can be possessed by their own dead sons – an “extraordinary” statement from the perspective of nearby high-caste communities. According to Brahmins, for example, it is not possible for women, because of their lower status in the social hierarchy, to be possessed or inhabited by spirits. Yet, for the members of the Jalari caste fishing community, not only is the proposition seen as reasonable, it is the basis of recruitment to the role of “spirit possession medium.” A woman’s experience of losing a son, in fact, is a necessary condition for her transformation in the role of possession-medium. He “possesses” her, initially causing her great distress, and then invites her take on the role of a professional medium. Thereafter, when people consult her for the diagnosis of problems, the dead son is believed to act as a conduit for communication with a range of spirits, including other dead people and goddesses. This paper will examine the life histories of two Jalari caste possession mediums who live in a fishing village in the Telugu-speaking regions of coastal Andhra Pradesh state. What is it that makes their experiences “extraordinary,” when they first undergo possession, and then a matter of routine when they accept the tutelary role of their dead sons? How do adjacent higher castes understand the peculiar (from their perspective) beliefs of the Jalaris? And finally, what are the psychological dimensions of female possession-mediumship, and how different must they be in order to account for the transformation of some bereaved mothers (but by no means all) into mediums?

Caerimonia Metricus, Metricus Ritualis - Ceremonial Metrics, Metrical Rituals

Ben Freeth, University of Newcastle

We present a series of contemporary rituals enabling connections and encounters with non-humans and darker more beautiful realities. These encounters are deliberately invoked by using technology within a ritual context. We have developed a set of techniques and practices described as Ceremonial Metrics and Metrical Rituals for use by solitary or group practitioners. Both can be defined by their inclusion of techniques using sensor and logging technologies to carry out the measurement of aspects of a thing (for example, a place, person, object, situation, emotion, time). This is done by sampling data as a form of ritual activity with transformative intent rather than scientific method. The active engagement of a Metrical Ritualist acting in the capacity of human probe during data logging enables useful data to be collected within a speculative and transformative context. The human body, itself electrical and electrochemical, acts as a sensitive instrument by experiencing these tensions and then reflecting them back into the environment through changes in heart rate, brainwave frequency, electrodermal skin response etc. By engaging in this activity we explore the immaterial by rematerialising dematerialised aspects in a way that tells us something about contexts and topics in the contemporary present, the historic and the prehistoric past. The end point of these rituals is the presentation of ritual outcomes in two forms: sonifications - music created from the data, and reflections on the data sets in the form of speculative explanations by metrical ritual participants.

By enrolling technology to work alongside us, in this instance - sensors and data loggers, we overcome conceptual and semantic boundaries, enabling encounters with non-humans and darker more beautiful realities which are mirrored in the sonifications we produce.

“Most people think you’re a fruit loop”: An exploratory study of clients’ experiences of seeking support for anomalous experiences

Dr Elizabeth C. Roxburgh and Rachel E. Evenden, University of Northampton

Anomalous experiences (AEs) are those that “depart from our own familiar personal experiences or from the more usual, ordinary, and expected experiences of a given culture and time” (Braud, 2010, p.1). White (2001) has listed over 500 different types of anomalous experiences¹, including meaningful coincidences, out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, mystical or peak experiences, and extrasensory perception, to name just a few. Research has shown that a high proportion of the general population believe in or experience AEs (e.g. Haraldsson, 2011; Pechey & Halligan, 2012; Ross & Joshi, 1992), that AEs can occur after negative life events (Rabeyron & Watt), and that common reactions can include fear, anxiety and distress (e.g. Eybrechts & Gerding, 2012; Parra, 2012; Siegel, 1986). In addition, individuals may have existential questions following the experience and not know where to seek support or worry that they will be labelled mad if they do. Few studies have explored the perspectives of clients who report AEs in terms of the process of therapeutic intervention and how this is managed by mental health professionals. This seems pertinent given a recent study investigating the counselling experiences of bereaved people who sense the presence of the deceased found that the majority of participants felt their counsellors were not accepting of their experiences or neglected to explore the cultural and spiritual aspects of the experience (Taylor, 2005).

The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of clients who report AEs in secular counselling services so we are better informed about how AEs impact on mental health and how therapists have responded to such clients (e.g., What experiences have clients found helpful or unhelpful in terms of therapeutic intervention? Did they feel listened to and understood by their therapist?). Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee and ethical guidelines of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) were adhered. Semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted with eight clients (three males and five females aged between 21 and 52 years with a mean age of 37 years) whom had experienced at least one AE which they had discussed in counselling. A thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was applied to the data and produced four themes: “You have to go digging to get support”, “Why are you looking at that airy fairy crap?”, “It kind of shut the door”, and “Having someone to normalise and say you’re not crazy, you’re not

¹ We note that AEs are also sometimes referred to as exceptional human experiences, out of the ordinary experiences, paranormal experiences, or unusual experiences in the literature.

weird". Findings highlight the importance for clients of finding an open-minded counsellor so they can explore the meaning of the anomalous experience without being ridiculed or pathologised. Themes will be represented by participant extracts to demonstrate how they are grounded in the data and findings will be discussed in terms of their implications for the therapeutic relationship, the accessibility of mental services to meet the needs of diverse clients, and the growing field of 'clinical parapsychology'.

We're all tourists now and some are trying to listen

Richard Saville-Smith, University of Edinburgh

Academic purists shun retrospective diagnoses of religious figures, rightly so given the mess Pinel, Maudsley, Lélut and more recently Savers and Rabin have made, in their land-grab to extinguish the extraordinary, reduce the irreducible and suppress the supernatural. This paper accepts that the past may well be a foreign country, but we're all tourist now. The challenge is how we can journey in a way which is sensitive to different epistemologies, which both do and do not include the supernatural, not to colonise or convert, but to imagine.

In order to get to the past, this paper starts in the secure units of contemporary psychiatric units. Here around a quarter of populations in the USA and the UK articulate their experiences in religious terms. Due to a legacy of interpretation, which is often attributed to Karl Jaspers, the 'science' of psychiatry has distinguished between 'form' and 'content' and found that 'form' is sufficient for the diagnosis of disorder. Because the 'content' of 'delusions' serves no additional purpose, it can and has been ignored. When someone claims to be Jesus or to have heard the voice of God they are rarely met by sensible questions and answers which are taken seriously by psychiatrists. Listening to the 'deluded' does not fit into the scientific research process (Gearing, Cook). My question is: How did someone realise they were Jesus, what did God actually say? In the anti-tourist hotspot of the locked ward, the answers are missing because the very presence of the idiosyncratic 'form' is sufficient to tick the boxes, validate the detention and preclude thought of release.

If psychiatry declines interest in the religious experiences of the 21st century, how can their self-serving views on ancient religious figures be taken seriously? This is not to be rude or mean to psychiatrists, it simply reflects the consequences of an epistemology which has no means of accommodating the supernatural and no desire to listen.

Jumping from the contemporary to the historical, this paper will then consider whether Jesus thought he was Jesus and whether God has spoken and continues to speak to a privileged few throughout history. The paper relies on the distinction held by William James, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Abraham Maslow who all distinguish between religious experience and the cumulative traditions of religion. The bulk of quotidian religious practice has no relevance to the religious experiences of the few – the Shamen, the Spirit Possessed, the Prophets, the Sadhu, the Sufi. In a post-colonial psychiatry the epistemology which excludes the supernatural looks inadequate to address reality beyond modernity.

By arguing against the adequacy of the 'forms' of insanity as a diagnostic sufficiency, it is possible to recover the content of what DSM-5 posits as 'Disruption' – as a limited, definable, liminal, pre-diagnostic category. It is then possible to re-visit the Transfiguration, replete with anomalous events, which marks Jesus' intentionality to head to Jerusalem and trouble the Authorities until they took him seriously. Was he insane? Depends if you're a visitor or a local.

A tale of the temporal lobes and other mystical states

Louise King, University of Northampton

In this presentation I propose an exploration of why the temporal lobes are special for paranormal psychology and the non-accidental relationship that auras in temporal lobe epilepsy have with other altered states of consciousness and mystical states. I will introduce current research on the temporal lobes and their association with the paranormal, followed by a discussion of the similarities between accounts given of certain ecstatic mystical states and descriptions of epileptic auras.

My research explores spiritual experiences in epilepsy and these are transpersonal experiences that are difficult for traditional empirical research methods to investigate. For many, epilepsy involves an altered state of consciousness, unusual feelings and sensations - 'auras' (Fenwick & Fenwick, 1996). Some auras have a very particular quality; a 'numinous' feeling, or 'cosmic-spirituality' (Dolgo-Kaspar Ettinger et al., 2011). The medical model is reductive about them and pathologises these experiences, regarding them as, at best, hallucinations (e.g. Sacks, 2012) and at worst, a symptom of seizure-associated psychosis (e.g. Dolgo-Kaspar, Ettinger et al., 2011). Transpersonal psychology takes such altered states of consciousness seriously, rather than rejecting them as anomalous (e.g. Tart, 1975; Tart, 1977; Grof, 1975).

Transpersonal experiences offer personal transformation by highlighting the contrast between felt experience and a previously held sense of self-identity and world (Walsh & Vaughn, 1980). They are highly subjective – often labelled as irrational or pathological (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993), thus posing difficulty for 'objective' approaches to human research (Anderson & Braud, 2011). Considering the auras and seizures of individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy as legitimate transpersonal experiences, rather than symptomatic of a medical issue with the material brain and its function offers deeper insight into a spiritual and mystical state not discussed outside neurological circles.

Paranormal states and psi arise from a variety of circumstances: religious, mystical or spiritual practice (e.g. meditation, shamanism, visions); ingestion of entheogens (e.g. psychoactive substances - psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, LSD); migraines or recovery from alcohol addiction (e.g. Wilson, 2003). Persinger (e.g. 1983, 1984, 1993, 2001) has proposed a continuum of temporal lobe lability, indicating that some individuals – whether or not they have temporal lobe epilepsy – are more sensitive to others to the spiritual experiences reported by those who do have temporal lobe epilepsy. Neppe (e.g. 1983) has suggested that individuals who have more labile temporal lobes are more sensitive to psi and paranormal experiences. Paranormal

experiences, altered states of consciousness and ego-death may share more than superficial similarities with the auras and seizures of individuals with epilepsy, and this warrants further exploration.

The 'Voodoo Doll': The cultural endurance of figurative magic in the twentieth century

Natalie Armitage, University of Manchester

The 'voodoo doll' is a concept few are unfamiliar with; a small doll stuck with pins to bring about corresponding pains, or death, in an intended victim. As Sigmund Freud observed in his 1913 essay *'Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts'*: 'One of the most widespread magical procedures for injuring an enemy is by making an effigy of him from any convenient material.' And indeed, there is evidence of figurative magic (magic incorporating the use of a figure or effigy) in many cultures throughout history in varying forms.

Yet, while other forms of magic in western society have been consigned to the distant, less enlightened, past the material object of the 'voodoo doll' remains not only a concept that we are all familiar with, but in many ways still practise. Many shops stock novelty dolls for revenge upon your boss or ex-lover, and as with most things these days, there's now an App for that too, several in fact. While we may be inclined to situate these items as trivialities the significance of the material form and function of the 'voodoo doll' has been noted by psychologists and even been utilised in studies of aggressive behaviour (DeWall et al, 2013). The recent case in France of the 'voodoo doll' manufactured for sale of then French President Nicolas Sarkozy which resulted in a failed lawsuit to have its distribution halted also implies a perceived effect. Suggesting a more tangible psychological connection to such objects and hinting at the significance of the recurrence of figurative magic in various cultures.

Incorporating the wider themes of my research into the cultural history of the 'voodoo doll' and figurative magical practice, this paper seeks to look at modern incarnations of this historical magical object and how it's praxis has evolved. Why has this particular magical object endured culturally when others have faded? Especially when considering investment in the belief in magical practices in general has waned. Is there something more implicit about the material nature of the facsimile of the human figure, our connection to it, and the perception of our actions upon it which enables its cultural endurance?

“Did You Check that Corpses Credit?!” Supernatural Powers and Suicide as Displayed in *The Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service*: A Critical Manga Reading

Matt Coward, University of York St John

The Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service (*Kurosagi*), conceptualised and written by Professor Eiji Otuka, a specialist in comic studies from the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, and illustrated by Housui Yamazaki. *Kurosagi* follows the work of six young people from a Japanese Buddhist college, who, struggling to find work, combine their associated supernatural powers to assist the deceased with their final wishes so that they can find peace in the afterlife.

Kurosagi finds itself snugly within the Horror genre; which is more widely part of a growing sub-genre of manga targeted towards an adult audience rather than the tradition young-adult genre which it is most commonly associated with. First published in its native Japanese *Kurosagi* was part of the *Kadokawa Mystery* anthology, before being moved to its sister publication *Shōnen Ace* in 2006. The genre of *Shōnen* has a demographic of males, mainly between the ages of 17-30; *Kurosagi*['s] move was mainly due to it aligning more with the perceived demographic that *Shōnen Ace* was targeted towards. In the same year *Dark Horse Comics* started to produce English collections of *Kurosagi*. Since KCDS inception in 2002 there has been seventeen Japanese editions, the first thirteen of which are currently available through Dark Horse in English.

Over the course of the presentation I will be critically analysing and appraising three standalone chapters of the expansive series; in which the main plot-arc deals with at least one, if not more, suicides. With each chapter I will firstly provide the necessary background information to the story, outline the story; before finally analysing the narrative in relation to both religious and popular approaches to spirits and demons within Japanese society.

Paranormal Domesticity: The reinvention of the Irish home as uncanny, revenant space

Tracy Fahrey, Limerick School of Art & Design, LIT

This paper will explore the resurrection of the uncanny home in contemporary Irish art and its relationship to history, memory, and trauma. It considers the Irish Gothic home as a revenant space, and relates this contemporary revival to older versions of home as a contested and problematic space in Irish history and culture. Irish artists connect the problematic echoes of history with the anxieties and tensions of modern life to produce unforgettable responses to domestic space that range from burning buildings to fairy-tale houses, from manipulated automata to traumatic scenes of confinement and madness.

This paper looks at ideas of the uncanny, and examines how the depictions of home in fine art can refer to a range of phobias, surreal subversions, and disruptions of domestic norms. It considers the manifestations of the uncanny that fine art representation of the home draw on – ideas of involuntary repetition, automata, doubles, and concealed secrets – and methodologies used including fieldwork, documentary photography, and paranormal investigation. It also considers the overlap between fine art and narratives of the paranormal, including those of contemporary ghost hunters. This paper focuses on key art-works by Martina Cleary, Aideen Barry, Michael Fortune, Susan MacWilliam and Patrick Jolley that explore the resonance of the home as paranormal entity, from Big Houses, to famine cottages to ghost estates.

Crafting Coincidence: The Rhetoric of Improbable Events

Germaine Gunther, University of York

In recent years, the study of meaningful coincidences has been widely debated and researched in a range of disciplines, such as literature, statistics, counselling, therapy, and transpersonal psychology. The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung coined the term synchronicity for coincidences and arguably is the founding father of the scientific investigation of the phenomenon, giving it a mystical trajectory (Jung & Pauli 1952, translated into English, 1955). It stands for the occurrence of two unlikely events falling together, connected through meaning, not causality.

When questioned, the majority of people attribute meaningful coincidences to psi, intuition alongside chance (Coleman et al. 2009). In a paranormal framework, coincidences can be considered spontaneous psychic phenomena (Grattan-Guinness 1983). This is contrary to psychological explanations that revolve around coincidences being due to fallacies, misunderstanding of chance (Griffiths & Tenenbaum 2007), and other psychological processes (Pletcher 1982). Thus, this latter perspective focuses on the ways in which coincidences are produced by human error.

However, coincidences rely on being spoken about to be 'out there' in the world, their existence rests on being told. Coincidences are sculpted, fashioned and cultivated in talk. Thus, moving away from a perspective seeing coincidence as a phenomenon to explain (away), this study seeks to explore the ways in which people construct experiences of coincidences in their everyday lives.

Drawing on the Cambridge Coincidence Collection with more than 8000 coincidence accounts, as well as interviews and other textual and verbal data derived from the Internet, this talk will show how cognition is 'done' in discourse. This will be exemplified in the device '*What a coincidence I thought. But it was no coincidence*' – a coincidence identifier followed by a reported thought. Focusing on the ways in which coincidences are talked and written about in everyday life, this talk will present analyses of data showing that coincidences are constructed as 'ordinary' in the backdrop of extraordinary events. Thus, the analysis of this discursive construction addresses firstly, the myth of coincidences as extraordinary events, and secondly, the myth of cognition as an inner process.

Ganzfeld stimulation Facilitates Performance at a precognitive Remote viewing task

Chris A. Roe, Laura Hickinbotham & Johnny Ryan, University of Northampton

Recent research by the lead author has sought to incorporate ganzfeld stimulation as part of a remote viewing protocol. Initial research suggested that novice participants can successfully describe a randomly selected target location while in the ganzfeld (Roe & Flint, 2007). Subsequent replications compared ganzfeld performance with performance in a waking condition in a counterbalanced repeated measures design, and found that significant above chance performance occurred in the former but not in the latter (Roe, Cooper & Martin, 2010; Roe, Hodrien & Kirkwood, 2012). In those studies participants completed Pekala's (1991) *Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory* (PCI) in order to gauge their responsiveness to the ganzfeld protocol, and of the 12 sub-dimensions ganzfeld performance correlated significantly with greater absorption in their subjective experience, lower physiological arousal and less internal dialogue (Roe et al., 2010) and Time Sense (Roe et al., 2012). Additionally, suggestive relationships were found between dissociative experiences scores and ganzfeld condition performance ($r = .238, p = .078$), and between openness to experience scores and waking condition performance ($r = .269, p = .054$), but not vice versa. The present study was an attempt to confirm those findings with a new sample of 30 participants and a new primary researcher (LH). Experimental trials consisted of two counterbalanced conditions as previously. Hit rate in the ganzfeld condition increased slightly to 43.3% (SOR z-score = 3.02, $p = .001$) whereas performance in the waking condition was at chance levels (HR = 26.7%, SOR z-score = .24, $p = .405$), confirming previous findings. However, we were unable to replicate the positive correlations between ganzfeld condition performance and PCI scores, nor previous correlations with scores on measures of openness to experience and dissociative experiences, although the association between openness to experience and waking condition performance was positive and of a similar magnitude to previous studies ($r = .203, p = .301$). In accounting for the failure to confirm a relationship between phenomenological shifts in conscious awareness while in the ganzfeld and performance at the psi task, the authors consider the possibility that success might have more to do with lab atmosphere, social interaction and excitement / expectancy rather than ASC induction itself. This presentation would also include outcomes from a further replication study that is currently underway, which separates the elements of the 'classic' ganzfeld protocol into relaxation and sensory habituation elements to explore their relative contribution to success.

The Embodied Emotion Management of Extrasensory Practitioners: A Reflexive Approach

Dr Sarah Roberts

In 2009 I embarked on ethnographic doctoral research consisting of extensive involvement within esoteric/new age subcultures, participant observations at a residential mediumship college and interviews with practitioners and spiritualist leaders. I sought to explore the emotion management of people who claim to have extrasensory abilities (such as psychics, mediums and clairvoyants). The research process was designed to get practitioners to reflect upon their phenomenological experiences, how they 'develop' as a medium and the self-management strategies they use. I also aspired to capture experiences that practitioners reflect on ordinarily in their workaday lives. I sought to account for inner feelings and sense making processes that may be motivated by social factors (e.g. social position, presumed client expectations, identity and experience, context and power, morals and values). In sum, I wanted to explore how studying the potential interplay of different emotion management techniques can aid our understanding of extrasensory work.

I knew though that even for the researcher, belief in extraordinary occurrences plays a significant role in how research into this area is conducted which led me to creating a new method, which accounted for my changing position and involvement in the research (e.g. researcher emotion management). Systemic Embodied Emotional Reflexivity not only enhanced the research process but also developed organically with it. SEER, I recommend, will be particularly useful in promoting and improving transparency in extrasensory research because it allows researchers to reflect back, especially when conducting research in persuasive environments (both extrasensory related and academic), especially those that involve uplifting and therapeutic practices.

This paper gives you an overview and conclusion of the journey I went through (the stages of emotion management) where I discuss some of the key findings of this research relating to the practitioners. It is widely reported that authenticity guides the identity work that practitioners do, however I found that authenticity, as described and acted upon by practitioners, is more spiritually complex than it appears. I show how Spirit is socially constructed within the college setting, including the promotion of philosophy, language and adoption of specific promoted practices, emotionality and rituals. Silence for example allows students to be an effective communicator and adhere to community solidarity. Key issues arose relating to the student's sense of self ('extrasensory curious' and 'spiritually consumed') and the context ('phenomenological exposure'). Overall, interaction for the practitioner is often significantly embodied, based not simply on thought and

feeling but on the bodily senses and cues. Effective emotion management for the practitioner involves achieving distance from the self in order to successfully present Spirit to the recipient. However, practitioners experience interactional dilemmas when considering the ethical dimension of their work contradicting the detached experiences they report. Finding such as these show, the importance of engaging reflexivity with these individuals, settings and communities to understand their role in modern society.

A New Demonology: John Keel, Charles Fort and the occult revival

Dr David Clarke, Sheffield Hallam University

Charles Fort's books and the Fortean philosophy they inspired left an enduring legacy that influenced the literary output of many 20th century writers and thinkers. But it was during the occult revival of the 1960s that the Fortean approach to strange phenomena re-emerged in the form of the 'New UFOlogy' that was identified with the writings of John A. Keel and Jacques Vallee. Keel's books **UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse**, **The Mothman Prophecies** and **The Eighth Tower** re-defined the Fortean philosophy for a new generation born into the space-age. Keel's writing style emulated the new journalism of Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson in that he mixed his journalism with literary techniques found in fiction. In doing so Keel provided narrative and theological frameworks that were lacking in Fort's books, introducing concepts such as the **Men In Black** (MIB), **ultra-terrestrials** and the **super-spectrum**. This provided an explanatory context into which the many and varied phenomena and experiences associated with UFOs and related phenomena could be interpreted. Emulating his mentor, Keel said 'the universe does not exist as we think it exists. We do not exist as we think we exist'. This chapter examines John Keel's writings in the context of Fortean approaches to the study of religion.

Under the Volcano

Andy Sharp

This talk will draw on the research from English Heretic's 2014 project "The Underworld Service". The Underworld Service was a broad survey of katabatic narratives in culture since 1947. One strand of the project explored modernist literature's apprehension of a shift in creative consciousness that occurred in response to the atrocities and eschatological weaponry of World War II. Widely accepted as a key text within this canon of literature is Malcolm Lowry's *Under The Volcano*.

First published in 1947, Lowry's novel draws inspiration from Dante's *Inferno*, but on an esoteric level it employs Hebrew Qabalah to form its narrative and structure. Lowry's tutor in this mystical system was Charles Stansfeld Jones, a major figure in the Thelemic world of Aleister Crowley. The person of Stansfeld Jones provides a pivot point at which modernist sensitivity to this katabasis collides with the more outre theories of Post Crowleyean magick. The talk will argue that the visions and readings following Stansfeld Jones' heralding of The Aeon of Maat provide a narrative continuum from non-occult sensibilities to the flagrantly occult.

Taking the volcano as the transpersonal marker of an eschatological consciousness, the discussion will draw on my own peregrinations during the construction of *The Underworld Service* to suggest that we can use systems such as Stanislav Grof's Basic Perinatal Matrix to explore both our personal creative co-ordinates as well as our understanding and acceptance of wider shifts in human consciousness.

**'Not true, but fun to talk about at parties' ..?: exploring the challenge of
otherworldly encounters for the sociological imagination**

Dr Sara MacKian, The Open University

When William Foote Whyte published 'Street Corner Society' (1943), now recognised as a 'classic' in participatory ethnography, he received criticism for his relations with the community he studied. He had effectively 'gone native' in the Italian American slums of Boston, and academia was uncomfortable with the closeness he had cultivated with this then decidedly 'other' population. Yet his study challenged the sociological imagination, revealing structures where none were presumed to exist, and he stood resolutely by his method. Since then 'encountering the other' is something social scientists have increasingly embraced, working carefully to ensure academic representations are sensitive and faithful to the participants involved and their relationship with them. In researching alternative spiritualities, I find my encounters with 'the other' often involve discarnate entities and inexplicable relations. In Whyte's spirit, therefore, this paper reflects on how the sociological imagination might accommodate that. Using my experiences from when I was unexpectedly recruited as a Tarot student during my fieldwork, I reflect on the implications of ethnographic relationships which generate extraordinary encounters beyond the usual frame of research protocols; and the challenges of re-presenting such things to an academic audience largely convinced they are 'not real'.

The Experience of Magic: Performance, Embodiment and Materiality in the Magical Workings of Humphrey Gilbert and John Davis

Phil Legard, Leeds Beckett University

Following the defeat of a rebel army in autumn of 1566, Humphrey Davis, half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, returned from the Tudor conquest of Ireland with dispatches for the Queen. A true Renaissance man, Gilbert was a military leader, a scholar and a dreamer. A preoccupation with the prospect of discovering a Northwest Passage and the drive to exploit such a trade route for the Crown, seems to have driven Gilbert and his young friend John Davis to pursue magic during the spring of 1567 as a means of discovering hidden knowledge from the spirits of the dead, and from demons and angels. The manuscript that remains, bound within BL Add. 36,674, preserves the pair's own grimoire and record of their workings: a precursor to the spiritual actions of John Dee, this manuscript provides a rare document of not only ritual magic methods, but also the results of their practice.

Based on the author's own transcription and analysis of the Gilbert manuscripts, this paper will concentrate not only on a philological analysis concerning how the sources gathered by Gilbert and Davis were synthesized into a system of ceremonial magic, but will primarily examine the performative, material and embodied aspects of Gilbert and Davis' workings. One of the themes to be explored is the role of the 'master' as one that is declamatory and oratorical, bringing with it an attitude of authority and power embodied in the 'choleric' temperament of Gilbert himself. The significance of books as symbols of learning and spiritual power is also an important theme, found here in terms of both material objects ('books to call by') and spiritual ones (variously with crystal covers, and bound 'with the hairy side out'). Furthermore, based on the diary of their workings, the visionary world that Gilbert and Davis engaged with became entangled with physical, waking reality, resulting in Gilbert and Davis interpreting the actions of animals as those of embodied spirits, and even encountering ghostly apparitions in the Devon landscape, where Gilbert and Davis held their estates.

The two manuscript articles, *An Excellent Booke of the Arte of Magicke* and *Visions* provide a rare insight into the 'extraordinary' experience of magic as practiced in at the height of the Renaissance magical revival in the wake of the dissemination of Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, and are potentially valuable documents for reconstructing the practices of early modern magical practitioners, as well as

providing insight into the subjective, psychological conditions arising from a prolonged magical engagements within the esoteric *weltanschauung* of the 16th century.

On the head of a pin: A consideration of the methodological issues raised by approaching belligerent nationalism as a form of spiritual commitment.

Dr Andrew Fergus Wilson, University of Derby

This paper develops themes first examined in a micro-study of web-based cultural expressions by neo-fascist individuals (Wilson 2012). Whilst that initial study explored the appropriation and reinterpretation of pagan religion(s) by individuals and groups identifying as white supremacist and/or neo-fascist, this paper will seek to build on the conceptual framework established therein. What emerged was a tendency to reify a mythic version of 'the nation' that depended upon a reading of the nation which situated it within an eschatological framework. The argument rests on the idea that as globalisation becomes ever more embedded in public cultures then ethnically and/or geographically-bounded sources of identity, most particularly national identities are increasingly felt to be under threat. This perception of threat becomes mobilised as apocalyptic-conspiratorial rhetoric focussed on signifiers of global change (the 'New World Order') and/or changing value systems ('God hates fags'). What this raises is the question of the extent to which commitment to extreme forms of national identities relies upon the same kind of faith in immaterial forms as what is more properly considered to be religious or spiritual commitment. The aim of this paper, then, is to explore the viability and desirability of constructing a scale of extreme nationalism in order to quantitatively explore the rich ground that Ward and Voas opened up with the concept of 'conspirituality'.

