

# exploring the extraordinary

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**Abstracts**

## **Memoirs of the Extraordinary: Women's mystical experiences with the Goddess**

*Patricia 'Iolana, University of Glasgow*

Experiential writing, in particular those literary works documenting mystical, spiritual, magical or religious experiences of the Divine, is an enduring tradition for humanity; its study is an elemental form of theological reflection and enquiry. While honourable women have written about their personal experiences of the Divine in the past (Hildegard of Bingen, Mechtild von Magdeburg, or Catherine of Siena come to mind) there has been an unprecedented increase in the publication of Western women's spiritual memoirs over the past few decades. These works are theologically significant as they document the current reclamation of the feminine face of the Divine (also known as 'Goddess Spirituality') and espouse an alternative *theology* that is having an impact of great consequence in the West. In my current case study, I examine the spiritual memoirs of five individual women: Jean Shinoda Bolen (1994) *Crossing to Avalon*, Sue Monk Kidd 1996 (2002) *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, Margaret Starbird (1998) *The Goddess in the Gospels*, Phyllis Curott (1998) *Book of Shadows*, and Christine Downing (2007 [1981]) *The Goddess*. These women are not hiding behind the mask of fiction as found in my previous research (*Literature of the Sacred Feminine: Great Mother Archetypes and the Re-emergence of the Goddess in Western Traditions*, 2009), but sharing their most personal and often painful quest for their own spiritual and personal growth (known in Jungian terms as the Path of Individuation) through experiencing a transcendent and immanent Goddess.

Mirroring ancient oral traditions generally maintained by women, these authors speak of exchanging ideas with others as a fundamental part of their spiritual quests. They seek to continue these conversations and, accordingly, many of them have cited this invitation to dialogue as a main reason for writing their spiritual memoir. As members of various forms of 'Goddess Spirituality' these women embrace faith traditions that believe in the fundamentals of the interconnectivity of all things within nature--by extension, implicating an interconnectivity of all faith traditions. This presentation shall examine three key elements of this exceptional literary trend: 1) the authors' personal, extraordinary experiences with the Goddess, 2) the relevance these spiritually-plural and syncretistic works hold for humankind on a sociological level and 3) the distinctive implications to the academy and praxis in the fields of intercultural/interfaith, theology, psychology of religion, and analytical psychology.

## **The British music festival as a context for mystical experience**

*Deirdre Ruane, Goldsmiths University of London*

Many British music festivals are consciously constructed, or contain areas constructed, with Hakim Bey's theories of the Temporary Autonomous Zone in mind – creating a sense of a place outside reality where the rules are different. This is a context conducive to extraordinary experiences of a spiritual nature and outbreaks of what Tramacchi (2004) calls 'spontaneous communitas'. The effects of 'community-focused dance rituals' (ibid.) are well documented by Tramacchi and others such as Malbon (1999), who presents nightclubs as safe spaces facilitating the oceanic experience and what he refers to as 'playful vitality'. But do these experiences have lasting value, or as Sarah Thornton (1996) suggests, do they merely represent a temporary illusion of freedom?

This paper will summarise the results from a series of qualitative interviews now being conducted, as an exploratory study for a larger piece of work. My participants are volunteers found via a variety of online forums. Through semi-structured interviews using elements of narrative inquiry, I explore the following research questions: What were the circumstances surrounding the experiences, and which aspects of the situation facilitated them – or interfered with them? Does the otherness of the festival context make it difficult to take an extraordinary festival experience back to the 'real world'? Finally, what significance do the subjects now attach to these experiences? Have they become part of the subject's belief system, or are they simply dismissed as anomalous and without relevance to ordinary life?

When properly integrated, mystical and oceanic experiences can have positive effects that last for years (Griffiths, 2008). As a tentative prediction, this study will help shed light on how best they may be facilitated and how those who have them may be helped to integrate them into daily life.

**In possession of my senses?**  
**Reflections from social science on engaging with the otherworldly**  
*Dr Sara MacKian, The Open University*

*'In a secularised Protestant society such as Britain, the living and the dead are separated not only physically, but also conceptually, with transgressors across the boundary (ghosts, prayers for the dead, appearances of the dead to the bereaved, spiritualist mediums) treated with suspicion' (Walter, 2004. 472).*

For those who regularly weave a 'spirit world' into their everyday living, it becomes a vital component in the fabric of their social and material worlds. Encounters, possessions and transgressions across Walter's boundary are therefore part of the everyday landscape for many people. As a researcher, seeking, encountering and interpreting these worlds, this multi-dimensional lived experience has implications for the way in which I understand and represent those experiences; because they cannot be extracted from how we think and theorise about the visible and material worlds we think we know. However, when speaking to an audience of peers - with both feet firmly planted on one side of this exigent boundary - I have found it is not only the transgressors who are treated with suspicion, but also those who choose to present them as valid research concerns.

In this paper I consider the process of researching across this boundary, based on participatory fieldwork with individuals and groups, engaged with spirit guides, angels and divination. I reflect on three stages of transgression as a social scientist: crossing to the other side (or broaching the subject with colleagues), boundary transgressions in the field (or the importance of participatory experience), and finally, coming back over the boundary (presenting in an academic context).

I conclude by outlining a geographically inspired conceptual framework that provides one way of capturing the unseen and unseeable as a legitimate part of knowing the multi-dimensional realities we live in. In wanting to be true to both my research participants and my academic role, I hope that this may offer one way to move forward social science's research engagement with the magical, mysterious and otherworldly which lie across the boundary.

## **Closed Circles: Following in the footsteps of Scole**

*Mike Ganley*

This paper will explore the striking similarities and mutually beneficial links between the phenomena recorded in Scole and a circle sitting regularly for over 18 months in the north of England. At the same time it intends to launch a possible longitudinal research project (possible PhD?) and / or article for general consumption as all areas of spirituality continue to gain increasing public awareness.

The Scole circle opened itself to intense scientific scrutiny and highlighted the problems social scientists have trying to impose tight controls in field experiments. It is unlikely that rigid controls and checks will ever compensate for laboratory conditions and so other ethnographic and qualitative techniques need to take place. Establishing a data base of closed circles and analysing accounts using techniques such as discourse analysis will help to establish a big picture, the possible credibility of séances and ultimately help scientists, theologians as well as social scientists build a model of a spiritual reality.

The role of researcher and participant are intertwined in a way not often seen in most social studies research. An objective and impartial circle member will be a barrier to development in most circles and this of course was why the Scole Experiment was so unique in that such scepticism was encouraged in the scrutiny of proceedings. Establishing a data base of circles will enable researchers to be both spiritual as well as scientific though of course the ultimate aim is to show the two are not mutually exclusive.

The 'Scole Hole' threw a gauntlet to other spiritualists striving to achieve similar results using 'new energy'. The extent to which results achieved will hopefully corroborate the findings of the Scole Report retrospectively. We will hopefully have a 'what is happening here happened there' thing happening. At the same time blue prints for increasing dialogue with spirit will be established.

I will explain what results we have achieved and the steps I am taking to ensure that the phenomena experienced is real, objective and out there. Zerdin could be used as a starting point - analysing the sittings with physical mediums such as David Thompson. As more circles develop, try to get them to register with a spiritual HQ which will help start to map out a big picture.

Let's find out what's going on behind those closed doors.....

## **Effects of pagan healing practices on health and wellbeing**

*Charmaine Sonnex, University of Northampton*

The aim of this paper is to discuss proposed research into the effects of Pagan magic on health and wellbeing. It is hoped that this will make an original contribution to the study of spiritual healing, by investigating the efficacy of an approach to healing which has not (to the researchers knowledge) been explored before. It is a further aim of this study to bring Paganism to the attention of the research community, as a legitimate system of beliefs, and to examine the experiences (with particular emphasis on healing) of those within this neglected population. The first phase of the proposed research involves conducting a Meta analysis of healing studies that have used either whole human or non-whole samples (e.g. blood cells, plants, animals). The purpose of this analysis is to examine the efficacy of healing and to identify any methodological issues which could be addressed within the proposed research. Non-whole samples are of specific interest as they would be unlikely to be subject to placebo effects. Next semi structured interviews will be conducted with practicing Pagans, to generate a detailed account of their individual practices and beliefs and to explore what practices are concerned with enhancing wellbeing and what effects are expected. These interviews will be analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a system of analysis designed to explore an individual's understanding of their life experiences. Finally, an extensive double-blind randomised controlled study will be conducted to see if there is evidence of healing effects as a consequence of being treated by experienced Pagan healing practices. The study will be informed by findings from phases 1 and 2 so details are yet to be finalised. However, the study is intended to look for evidence of healing effects as a consequence of being treated by experienced Pagan healers as they conduct healing rituals for specified persons. This will be achieved using an interrupted time series design.

## **Spirituality, Philosophy, & New Technologies: Exploring the Extraordinary Through Photography**

*Christina Rawls, Duquesne University*

Quite unexpectedly in 2011 I purchased my first digital camera and began taking photos around my new home in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. Soon I noticed that within some of the photos appeared what seem to be “orbs.” Being of a philosophical and, at times, scientific mind, I began examining the photos in depth, taking as many pictures as possible each day or night, and inquired with my scientist and philosophy friends at several universities as to the nature of the photos, including Carnegie Mellon University (with camera vision and robotics researchers). The typical explanation (rationalization?) is that *all* photos of “orbs” seem to only be captured in low lighting and thus, is a rare phenomena of certain kinds of digital cameras. But there is a problem with this scientific explanation and my photographs seem to provide evidence of a more supernatural sort. I have captured the three dimensional spheres of light (some as different colors at times) in the daylight, in motion, in different locations away from my home now, and with different cameras. I have also captured them in the rain and in the snow, thus it is easy to compare the difference in appearances between the “orbs” and various weather conditions. Currently, there seems to be absolutely no solid scientific explanation for what I am capturing on film repeatedly that can explain all the photos. I continue to capture the orbs on film to date. My photography slide demonstration consists of only these photos, which are also digitally time and date stamped. I have selected the best examples, including those examples which defy the current scientific explanations being given to the contrary and I am prepared to discuss how they seem to not fit with scientific explanations that they are simply a defect in some digital cameras...

A few better examples of the photos are included as attachments to my submission by email and one other following email. They are copyrighted by me and cannot be used for any other purpose other than as consideration for your conference in September. For my demonstration I would like to give a slide show of the best examples of these photos with room for discussion should time permit

## To Kill a Vampire?

*Jonathan Ferguson, Royal Armouries Museum*

"...a sacred bullet fired into the coffin will kill him so that he be true dead; and as for the stake through him, or the cut-off head that giveth rest, we have seen it with our eyes." Professor Van Helsing, Bram Stoker's *'Dracula'*

The collection, study, and display of material culture has come a long way from its origin with the Renaissance cabinets of curiosity and their sensational and often spurious exhibits. The concept of authenticity is today a crucial aspect of museum collections, auction catalogues, and antiques shop displays. This despite continuing interest in the paranormal, both fictional and purported. Yet there exists a surprising category of object with distinctly supernatural connotations and at least questionable authenticity that has nonetheless penetrated all of these venues.

As its name implies, the so-called "vampire killing kit" comprises a set of tools for personal protection against the "undead", cased after the fashion of (and usually including) a gentleman's travelling or pocket pistol. Although low-budget imitations are often sold as honest props or collectibles, the "high-end" versions that are the subject of this paper are almost routinely presented and sold as Victorian originals. These attractive and intriguing objects routinely sell for thousands of dollars on the antiques market, are the subject of sporadic media attention, and have been displayed in public museums. Such kits are said to have been produced for the sincere believer in the supernatural, or alternatively as tongue-in-cheek novelties. The evidence for such claims is lacking, and in fact there is every reason to believe that their origin is far more recent, though perhaps no less interesting.

This paper outlines attempts by the author to record and analyse this phenomenon. Though definitive conclusions on their origin may never be possible, it can be argued that their true place in history is as an echo of gothic fiction and 20th century popular culture rather than superstition or folklore. It may be that some consumers of antique and museum objects are not interested in authenticity so much as a suggestion of the supernatural. In closing, the paper nonetheless argues for the status of such kits as legitimate museum pieces and art objects on that very basis.



## **Mesmerism and Victorian Arctic Exploration**

*Dr Shane McCorristine, University of Cambridge*

Arctic environments have always been described as “enchanted” and Canadian Arctic tourism today promises that visitors will enjoy a “dreamscape” (Natural Focus Safaris, 2009). The premise of my research is that the history of human experience in Arctic environments requires serious re-thinking because of a failure to take sufficiently seriously Victorian debates about the legitimacy of supernatural, disembodied knowledge, and other interactions with extreme landscape. Approaching the history of Arctic experience through the idea of the dreamscape highlights networks of feeling that have hitherto been bypassed by historians working in one specific field. The notion of the dreamscape has been previously used in various aesthetic contexts and in the indigenous contexts of shamanistic practice and traditional ecological knowledge (Helander and Mustonen, 2004). As I understand it, the dreamscape is a category of mental imagining that expresses the percipient’s disembodied thinking about (Arctic) place, which in the period was frequently grounded in the material technologies of the séance. ‘Landscape’ and other structural aesthetic categories run the risk of ignoring the value of the wider intangible networks of communications: dreams, fantasises, speculations, imagined geographies, visions.

Nowhere can the use of dreamscaping as a connective concept be used more fruitfully, I would argue, than in the cultural trauma of the disappearance of the John Franklin expedition from 1845. This paper deals with the attempts to contact, map, and describe what happened to the Franklin expedition through the use of mesmeric travel to the Canadian Arctic in the 1850s. During this decade dozens of mesmerists from Britain, Ireland, India, and Australia placed female mediums into a trance and reported on the mental voyages these women, sometimes explicitly termed “clairvoyantes”, took. Coming at the onset of modern spiritualism, the mesmeric séance operated as a new technology capable of transmitting human thought and locating lost explorers over vast distances through an exalted sensory system. Beginning at the time of greatest anxiety regarding the fate of the expedition, these clairvoyant visionaries and their operators formed part of an incredibly vibrant field of rumours, speculations, and experiments. Both critics and supporters of mesmeric clairvoyance tried to use the Franklin episode as a unique experiment to prove or disprove the claims of this new technology. This paper seeks to address the extent to which the North been imagined as a place that can be spiritually as well as physically travelled. Questions of gender, pseudo-science, and how the Arctic was envisioned as place where access could be gained through supernatural methods will also be addressed.

**Animated places. Ritual-sites as stages of communication with Norse gods in  
modern Asatru-Paganism**

*Dr. René Gründer, University of Freiburg*

Alternative religious movements such as polytheist Asatru-Paganism often understand themselves as 'religions of experience'. Experiences of gods are much more essential for a pagan commitment than personal belief in gods. In order to enable such forms of collective religious experiences, the social construction of ritual-places is one of the main strategies in 'framing' a situation as 'sacred' for modern pagans. Therefore, the usage of natural environment as setting for rituals was the interest of an online-survey amongst contemporary Pagans in Germany (Hengst 2011). The findings of that study will be presented first.

The results of ethnographic field-study on Asatru-Paganism in Germany (Gründer 2010), conducted between 2006 and 2009, suggest that religious knowledge emerges from a complex 'setting' of meaningful places, rites, artefacts, spoken words and behaviour of the participants within a sacrificial ritual (Blót).

Communication with gods – as an essential part of any sacrificial ritual – is therefore not only requested but can also be evidently recognized by the focused attention of the participants. For a sociology of religious knowledge, the recognition, interpretation and understanding of such forms of communication with 'invisible forces' are still as essential as challenging.

Field data documenting, for example, meaningful correlations between liturgical intentions of the ritual, shared religious knowledge of a group and stunning (co)-occurrences of weather-phenomena illustrate such problems of interpretation very clearly. The striking evidence of documented forms of a collective experience of 'the presence of Norse gods' therefore conflicts with a scientific approach that reduces religious meaning to its social constructed elements. The problem of 'meaningful coincidences' becomes better understandable by analyzing time and place of a ritual event as dimensions of its liturgical structure. Even if (often) nothing really 'impossible' happens the mere act of visiting ritual places for reasons of worship enhances the possibility and probability of occurrence of potential 'signs of the gods' for their adherents.

## **Haunted Ground: Journeys through a Paranormal America**

*Dr Darryl Caterine, Le Moyne College*

This presentation will summarize the main findings of my soon-to-be released book - *Haunted Ground: Journeys through a Paranormal America* (Praeger Press; August, 2011). From 2007-2009, I made repeated visits to a number of "paranormal" conventions in the United States: multiple immersions in a Spiritualist camp in Upstate New York; two visits to the Roswell UFO Festival in New Mexico; and three visits to the American Society of Dowsers conventions in Vermont. As a historian of American religions, I sought to explain why paranormal phenomena have exerted such a perennial fascination in this country. What I found is that the ambiguity of phenomena labeled as "paranormal" mirrors back to the public the rarely acknowledged instability of modernity itself. I found that paranormal conventions do not end (and arguably did not begin, historically) with investigations of the phenomena at hand, but spill over into unanswered questions about the nature of being human, the nature of nature itself, and origins of national culture. In other words, a cluster of interests misleadingly labeled as paranormal actually encapsulates the normal state of affairs; notwithstanding sociological arguments about the rationalization and disenchantment of modernity, self-identified moderns are cosmologically cast adrift.

This conclusion is both based on and necessitated by ethnographic data collected along my journey. My presentation will unfold as a photographic slide show and the sharing of anecdotes from my participant-observation and historical research on a "paranormal America." These include a rich repository of symbolic and material culture - busts and paintings of Indian spirit guides, megalithic memorials to the Unknown Others in the Southwestern desert, architectural ruins of unidentified origins in the New England countryside variously attributed to Indians, Druids, or Welshmen; performances of mediumship, alien abductee interrogation strategies, and dowsing for pre-Columbian energetic "grids"; and passages from primary paranormal texts articulating the rootlessness of modern subjectivity and/or culture.

My goal as a researcher is not to reduce parapsychological or ufological questions to issues of cultural analysis; I hope that my questions will compliment and enrich, rather than discredit, their own. Indeed, one implication of my findings is that forays into the paranormal are so highly charged in normative religious and scientific communities precisely because they threaten to expose the fragility of unexamined modern assumptions. Having said this, my interests are not focused on paranormal phenomena per se, but rather on the cultural myths that frame such explorations into their nature, particularly in the United States context. My suggestion that paranormal concerns are an integral part of the modern search for

origins is supported by historical considerations as well. Widespread American interest in the paranormal (a term used here anachronistically) did not burgeon until the Spiritualist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, during a time when industrialization and science were eroding the inherited certainties of religion. Since that time, waves of widespread interest in the paranormal have unfolded (during the interwar metaphysical revival, and in the late twentieth-century "New Age" movement) as efforts to come to peace with the "haunted ground" of modernity.

## **Conversing with the Dead: Considerations of the Collective in Modern Paranormal Groups**

*Rachael Hayward, University of York*

The concept of forming groups for the purpose of exploring the extraordinary events of ordinary life can be traced back to ancient civilisations. Spurred by a belief that an existence beyond ourselves is not only real, but can be experienced individually and collectively, has engrained within humanity a sense of intrigue and awe, which remains with us to this present day. The formation of groups with the intention of experiencing paranormal phenomena can be traced back to tribal beliefs and practices, which demonstrate extreme cases of paranormal-type experiences. Early shamanism arose through the congregation of small communities that used trance states to generate anomalous experience, and subsequently attach ideologies to these (Houran, 2004), much of which have provided the foundation of modern religions. These practises often relied heavily on magic and divination (Inglis, 1979), shamanistic leaders and a belief in contact with spirits. Rituals were often carried out in groups with a strong reliance on participation from the individuals, an atmospheric environment, and often the inducement of altered states of consciousness (Noll, 1985). Similar beliefs and practises are echoed throughout religion, and although the terminology differs significantly the prospect of communication, invocation and observation of supernatural forces is acknowledged.

Belief in the ability to communicate with paranormal sources is an extensive area to examine and could arguably be determined as the foundation of many modern religions and subsequently society. The modern paranormal group is a cultural phenomenon that has emerged from this innate interest to communicate with a spirit world, defined in the context of this talk as 'a group of people formed with the intention of experiencing paranormal phenomena'. Little academic research has been carried out in respect to the sociological issues that surround modern paranormal groups. Examining a brief history of the emergence of them within modern society, this talk will broadly address why it is of interest to study modern paranormal groups and the potential benefits they can offer to sociology and the wider academic community. Furthermore, we shall take a look at the communication methods used by groups (including the Ouija Board, Table Tilting, 'Asking Out' and Electronic Equipment), and explore the fascinating aspects of group behaviour and interaction that emerge during their use. Integrated within this topic we shall address the methodological issues of researching modern paranormal groups from a sociological perspective and link these to potential avenues for further research. Combining reference to previous multi-disciplinary studies, personal experience within the field, and a range of media to demonstrate the fascinating world of the modern

paranormal group, this talk hopes to bring a new perspective to the study of this popular cultural phenomenon.

## **Lability, paranormal beliefs and psychokinetic experiences: A questionnaire-based survey**

*Sophie Louise Drennan, University of Northampton*

Although reports of psychokinetic (PK) occurrences, including poltergeist activity, are consistent, investigations in real-world environments are acknowledged to be notoriously problematic due to the spontaneous nature of such events. However, anecdotal reports regarding protagonist poltergeist agents and observational experiments using individuals with alleged abilities have led to theories regarding the causative nature of PK manifestation. In addressing these issues, recent experimental PK studies have begun focusing on identifying the optimal conditions needed for PK effects using tasks involving random number generators (RNG). Factors under investigation include strategies towards achieving PK effects, the interaction between the experimenter and participants and various individual differences. Within these individual differences, particular interest is being given to the relatively new construct of lability. Defined by Braud (1981), as 'a system's ready capability for change' it has been theorised that manifestation of PK is mediated by inherent levels of lability within the cognitive, emotional and physiological processes of an individual. This theory takes its cue from Rex Stanford's Conformance Behaviour Model (1978), whereby psi effects are produced via the interaction between two systems with differing levels of lability, such as human processes and RNGs. Previous PK-RNG studies conducted by Holt and Roe respectively (Holt & Roe, 2006; Roe & Holt, 2006), have shown supporting results with significant PK performance being achieved via the interaction between low and high level lability systems. However, at that time, there was no comprehensive scale with which to measure lability. To this end, the initial stage of this PhD project has been twofold - to construct a new Lability Scale from existing individual difference measures of creativity, temporal lobe activity, mood affect and openness to experience and then use it to explore the relationship between lability, paranormal beliefs and psychokinetic experiences with an online survey.

Preliminary analyses has adjusted the Lability Scale to a measure of 71 items ( $\alpha = .89$ ) with 5 retained factors - Intuitive Cognition, Conceptual Cognition, Ego-Orientated Cognition, Emotional Interpretation and Analytical Cognition. Results show an obvious positive relationship between paranormal beliefs and psychokinetic experiences and also support the mirrored interaction between low and high levels of lability. Furthermore, there are strong inverse relationships between paranormal beliefs, psychokinetic experiences and Intuitive Cognition, Ego-Orientated Cognition and Emotional Interpretation factors, with no apparent relationships with either Conceptual Cognition or Analytical Cognition factors.

This paper will discuss the construction and results of this survey and subsequent implications for the following sequential experimental PK-RNG studies.



## **Two studies assessing paranormal believers' susceptibility to probabilistic reasoning (conjunction fallacy) biases**

*Dr Paul Rogers, University of Central Lancashire*

Under conditions of uncertainty, people tend to make systematic and predictable errors in their judgements of probability, particularly when two or more events co-occur. Misjudging the [probability](#) of events co-occurring (i.e. occurring in conjunction) as being more likely than the probability of either one event occurring alone has been termed the 'conjunction fallacy' (Tversky & Kahneman, 1982). The conjunction fallacy may have particular relevance to perceptions of seemingly paranormal events such as when one thinks of a long-lost friend (event 1) who unexpectedly phones (event 2) at that precise moment (conjunction). Whilst numerous studies have shown paranormal believers to be poor judges of probability (e.g. Blackmore & Troscianko, 1985) none have yet examined whether believers are especially prone to the conjunction fallacy. Two studies explore this possibility.

In Study 1 an opportunity sample of 200 respondents (59% female; mean age=22.2 years) read 16 hypothetical vignettes describing either a paranormal or a non-paranormal event and indicated which of three potential event outcomes – two singular and one conjunctive – they believed to be the most likely. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) - controlling for respondents' levels of qualification in maths, statistics and/or psychology - revealed believers made more conjunction errors for both event types than did non-believers. Surprisingly, both groups made fewer conjunction errors for paranormal (vs. non-paranormal) events with conjunction format having no impact whatsoever.

Study 2 develops this work by examining the extent to which believers' heightened susceptibility to conjunction biases is explained by group differences in the potential surprise value of, and/or variations in the temporal relationship between, individual component events. An opportunity sample of 156 respondents (59% female; mean age=32.0 years) read either a paranormal or virtually identical non-paranormal version of each scenario which differed only in terms of the apparent paranormality of information source. Half the scenarios incorporate two component events which were (virtually) co-occurring, with half incorporating components which are temporally disjointed. ANCOVA again revealed believers made more conjunction errors than non-believers. Contrary to expectations neither event type nor the temporal relationship of component events had a significant effect on conjunction biases. Additional analyses confirmed believers' tendency to produce larger conjunctive estimates was unrelated to group differences in the probabilities (potential surprise values) assigned to each component event and further, did not reflect group differences in the perceived functional relationship between the

component and conjunctive events. Results are discussed in relation to paranormal believers' susceptibility to the conjunction fallacy and more generally, to their tendency towards probabilistic reasoning biases.

**A sense of presence in the land of medicine: How hospital staff respond to encounters with the extra-ordinary**

*Simon Robinson, Stephen Sayers & Chris Swift, Leeds Metropolitan University*

Hospital chaplains frequently encounter people and places manifesting experiences resistant to normalising discourses. Typically such experiences will involve some sense of the presence of a deceased person known to a patient or of a person unknown to anyone on the ward. In a context where such experiences are likely to be systemically suppressed by a dominant culture of evidence and objectivity our paper argues that the levels of reporting will be conservative. Building on existing research data, we suggest that a limited or negative response by staff to such experiences is detrimental to a patient's well-being and recovery. In conclusion we set out a proposal for research to more fully evaluate this experience and describe how potential findings may lead to the development of new staff training resources.

**Integrating 'extraordinary' bereavement experiences into everyday life**

*Dr Mary Murray, Massey University & Josefina Speyer*

Extraordinary Experiences surrounding dying and death, such as Near Death Experiences and Death Bed Phenomena have been, or are increasingly becoming the subject of research. Drawing on research we conducted in the UK and New Zealand, in this paper we will consider Extraordinary Experiences of the Bereaved (EEBs). The medical model of bereavement and grief may pathologise EEBs, denying and ignoring their validity, and so add to the sense of isolation that can accompany bereavement and grief. Our research suggests that EEBs can be very comforting to those who experience them, and can contribute to the process of spiritual and psychological healing. We found that the bereaved appreciated the opportunity to speak about their EEs to researchers who respected their importance for the bereaved. Whereas such experiences may be accepted and openly acknowledged in other cultures, the denial of the validity of EEBs within the Western cultural model of healing may not be conducive to the process of psychological and spiritual integration that is part of the grieving process.

# Documentaries

## **Personal Electronics**

*Steven Ball*

Personal Electronics is an experimental documentary tracing the experiences of victims of phenomena associated with electronic harassment (such as gang stalking, directed energy weapon attacks, voice to skull transmissions, and so on), using video material found on the internet.

## **GHost Project**

*Sarah Sparkes and Dr Ricarda Vidal, University of London*

GHost explores the various roles ghosts play in contemporary culture by bringing artists, writers, curators, researchers and others together. To date GHost has held three exhibitions and screenings of moving image art and performance at St John on Bethnal Green, four workshops and one performance event, so-called 'hostings' in the haunted rooms at the Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies, University of London. This documentary provides excerpts from these events. Visit their website - <http://host-a-ghost.blogspot.com>