



exploring the
extraordinary

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ABSTRACTS

A qualitative study of anomalous telephonic experiences

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Although it is often assumed that the most useful results are produced by 'controlled laboratory experiments' of the social sciences, there is a lot to be learned from people's accounts of real world experiences. In the case of parapsychology, and its roots as psychical research; observation, documentation and categorisation of any new phenomena is the most fundamental and primary investigative method of nearly all sciences. Previous research into the relatively unheard of phone call phenomenon (Rogo and Bayless, 1979), produced only casual documentation of such reported events, and no full qualitative or quantitative methods and findings which were applied by the investigators were presented.

Recent research into anomalous telephonic experiences has attempted to address any criticisms raised from the original study. Thus, outlining the methodology applied and any findings produced from the analysis (Cooper, 2012). This presentation aims to address the appropriate research methods that should be applied To spontaneous case collections, particularly those surrounding unusual experiences with the telephone, and similar 'new' phenomena. It was the hope and request of the late Dr. Gertrude Schmeidler, that D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless would someday give such a presentation, or at least publish a full report in a peer reviewed journal.

The second aim of this presentation is to demonstrate that the collection of spontaneous cases using appropriate methods does not just produce 'useless anecdotes', contrary to certain views and opinions (e.g. Hardy, 1979; Anderson, 1981). It has been argued by Ruffles (2007), that if we take advantage of what research methods the social sciences have to offer us, particularly from psychology and sociology, then by no means can appropriately investigated anomalous experiences be considered useless anecdotes. Common characteristics of the phone call phenomenon will be explained and discussed, along with other quantitative findings produced from the qualitative analysis of percipient accounts and interviews.

The nature and quality child-parent relationships as predictors of adult paranormal and New Age beliefs

Paul Rogers

According to Irwin's (2009) Psychodynamic Functions Hypothesis, adult belief in the paranormal (BIP) helps provide a sense of mastery over what is an otherwise uncontrollable and chaotic world and ultimately stems from experiences of diminished control in childhood. Support for this claim comes from previous research linking adult BIP to, for example, childhood trauma (e.g. Irwin, 1992), having alcoholic parents (Irwin, 1994), frequently moving home (Lawrence, Edwards, Barraclough, Church & Hetherington, 1995) and insecure attachment (Rogers, Qualter, & Phelps, 2007) as well as to a global measure of retrospectively perceived diminished childhood control (Watt, Watson, Wilson. 2007).

Despite the apparent robustness of this model, surprisingly few studies have explored the relationship between adult BIP and more 'subtle' aspects of diminished childhood control that focus specifically on the nature and quality child-parent relationships. As such, the current study examines the extent to which both global BIP and beliefs in specific paranormal phenomena (e.g. witchcraft, Spiritualism) – as well as claimed experiences, abilities and fears of the paranormal - were predicted by retrospective perceptions of parental rejection (including punishment, shaming, criticism, abuse and sibling favouritism), emotional warmth, over-protectiveness, parenting style and family unpredictability (relating to parental discipline, nurturance, meal-times and financial security). In line with evidence linking trauma-induced disorganised attachment, parental rejection and role-reversal ('parentification') to a broader endorsement of New Age spirituality (e.g., Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001), the extent to which these factors predict New Age Orientation (NAO) was also explored. It was hypothesised that these factors would be predictive of higher global and specific BIP, more claimed paranormal experiences, abilities and fears, and more NAO.

Overall, hypotheses were partially confirmed. Whilst no significant predictors of global BIP were found specific beliefs in psi and precognition, as well as NAO, were all predicted by greater parental over-protectiveness. Similarly, specific beliefs in superstitions and Spiritualism were both predicted by more inconsistent paternal discipline with superstitions also predicted by higher levels of parental rejection. Finally, the tendency to have paranormal experiences was predicted by greater parental over-protectiveness whereas the tendency to claim paranormal abilities was predicted by higher levels of both parental rejection and paternal ambivalence. The notion that adult BIP functions as a needs-serving mechanism for coping with negative child experiences is discussed.

Extraordinary claims, uncanny history: Testing historical interpretations of Spiritualism and the First World War
Ben McDonald

My fellow historians working on the extraordinary subjects of nineteenth and 20th Century Spiritualism often insist that it is irrelevant to them whether spiritualistic phenomena were genuine, this being a matter beyond the reach of historical inquiry. That historically-distanced phenomena are beyond our grasp is true enough, but it is inescapably the case that historian's beliefs influence even their most determinedly objective historical treatments. Consequently, our attitudes towards the extraordinary are immediate to our practice and reveal themselves in our works.

Read closely, historical studies of spiritualism commonly reveal one of two unspoken positions. The first, more hostile position is that mediums and psychics were calculatingly fraudulent and that their victims succumbed to errors of logic and reasoning. The second, more sympathetic position is that while paranormal phenomena are scientifically impossible and therefore cannot have been veridical, those who believed in them may well have experienced phenomena that were real in a sophisticated subjective sense. This latter position suggests an (equally unacknowledged) Freudian stance: unconscious feelings about grief or religious doubt may cause otherwise rational, sensible people to experience convincing delusions.

In this paper, I consider the ways in which the latter stance reveals itself in historical treatments of British spiritualism after the First World War. I suggest that historians, being very often secular and materialist, are strongly attracted towards the interpretation of spiritualism as a pathological response to grief. This has led to historians figuring spiritualism as evidence for chronic grief and death denial in the first half of the twentieth century. Historians are not necessarily in error by assuming this position; it would be negligent, however, to assume it as given fact rather than as a contestable academic perspective, and to ignore the abundant scholarship from sociology, psychology, and comparative religion that casts doubt upon this interpretation.

The paper identifies several such criticisms, considers their significance for the dominant historical narrative, and explores the possibility of a new historical engagement that takes these critiques into account. I conclude the need for a kind of uncanny history, one which is not only cognizant of the limits of historical inquiry but also of the historical significance of that which resides beyond those limits. In effect, a history of the extraordinary depends upon interdisciplinarity in order to do fullest justice to its subject matter.

Reconstructing Seaford: A historical methodology to trace the rise of the psychokinetic theory of the poltergeist phenomenon
Christopher Laursen

In this presentation, I visually reconstruct a historic poltergeist case that took place in Seaford, Long Island, New York in 1958. This case is particularly meaningful because it saw the emergence of the term recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis (RSPK) coined by parapsychologist William Roll who investigated the case along with J. Gaither Pratt for Duke University's Psychical Research Foundation. The theory of RSPK posits that a living person can unconsciously emit an invisible force that unexpectedly moves solid objects and creates peculiar sounds. While this theory did not entirely dislodge the long-standing idea that a discarnate entity or spirit caused the mischievous disruptions, it significantly resituated understandings of the phenomenon to focus on an individual's potential to produce psi effects (see for example Pratt & Roll, 1958; Roll, 1972; Gaud & Cornell, 1979; Spencer & Spencer, 1997; Roll & Persinger, 2001).

In this presentation, I will project an interactive three-dimensional model of the Seaford household reconstructed from diagrams and photographs made during the investigation. Through it, we will journey through the recorded events, emotional responses, and intellectual debates that took place between February 3rd and March 10th, 1958. This virtual walkthrough will be interspersed with visuals of primary documents, photographs, diagrams, illustrations, material evidence, and press clippings to accentuate the records made of this case study. The aim of this reconstruction is to demonstrate a historical methodology that shows how and why the RSPK theory became so dominant in subsequent poltergeist research.

I will focus on two major themes in this reconstruction. Firstly, I want to show the ways in which a chain of authoritative figures who investigated – extended family, police, the fire department, building inspectors, engineers, newspaper reporters, parapsychologists, etc. – impacted the interpretations made about what was happening. Secondly, I wish to move beyond interpersonal relationships and focus on how individuals related to the objects that were manipulated as part of the phenomenon. Bruno Latour and Michel Callon’s actor-network theory traces how the relationships between individual historical actors – both living people and non-living objects – create specific networks that make scientific knowledge. Taking their approach into consideration, I will emphasize the networks found between animated household objects and the interpretations made by historical actors about the significance of their animation that facilitated Pratt and Roll making psychological connections, which in turn successfully enabled the RSPK theory.

This presentation is part of a larger project which examines how knowledge about the poltergeist was remade in households in which the phenomenon manifested in the decades following the Second World War in the United States and Britain.

The spectacular supernatural: Victorian Spiritualism and the rise of modern show business

Simone Natale

With the publication of books such as Jeffrey Sconce’s *Haunted Media* (Duke University Press, 2000), Catherine Albanese’s *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* (Yale University Press, 2007), and Molly McGarry’s *Ghosts of Futures Past* (University of California Press, 2008), studies on spiritualism have been growing in the fields of media history, religious studies, and American culture. As Daniel Herman put it, however, most scholars have addressed spiritualism with “an almost grim seriousness that obscures its playfulness and its willingness to explore the profane as well as the sacred” (2006, 418). Since both religion and science are “serious” matters, some scholarship seems to imply evoking this playfulness would mean undervaluing the cultural and historical significance of the spiritualist movement.

In contrast to this perspective, I will argue in my paper that Victorian spirit séances were an amusing and highly spectacular environment. Focusing on the performances of mediums on the theatrical stage, on the relationship between beliefs in spirits and fictional representation of ghosts, and on the entertaining character of the spiritualist experience, I will discuss the mostly disregarded history of the role of show business in the spiritualist movement. The craze for séance-sitting originated in, and was made possible by, a century that experienced the development of new kinds of audiences, the industrialization of commercial entertainment and, ultimately, the introduction of the new spectacular technology of the moving image. Spiritualist séances can be seen as spectacular events, where ancient beliefs in ghosts, haunted houses and spirit rappings were incorporated in the rising domain of nineteenth-century show business

Revenant revolutions

Jonathan Ferguson

Zombies are the monster of the moment, to the point of posing a serious threat to that perennial favourite, the vampire. I will explore how and why this emergence from cult status to mainstream popularity has occurred and show why many feel that this unappealing undead everyman now fills a pop cultural niche that the better turned-out vampire has become ill-equipped for.

In tracing the evolution of the 'living dead' zombie, I will examine the suggestion that it is unique amongst fictional horrors in having no direct folkloric antecedent. One noted authority, whilst quite rightly pointing out the strong links between the vampire and today's zombie, actually asserts that 'there is no connection between the voodoo zombie and the modern zombie'. In this, I will argue, they go too far. Not only is there some very definite common ground between the two 'species', they can be viewed in a wider context. In fact, the zombie follows (albeit at an accelerated pace) a traditional evolutionary pattern in the reinvention of mythical creatures to suit both changing times and emergent forms of media. It can be seen as a close relative of both the zombi of Haitian folklore, and the vampire of Western European literary tradition. Beyond this, it is a contemporary extension of the traditional European revenant, fulfilling many of the same needs as a scapegoat and metaphor for societal ills and natural disaster. Like its revenant cousins, it also acts as an outlet for the expression of our fear of death, corruption, and the loss of both will and self.

Even the apocalyptic setting typical, though given new emphasis in zombie fiction, is unique only in its increasing tendency to depict and even revel in the eschatological consequences of an imagined zombie plague. Nonetheless, because of this the zombie has become a means to actively explore and raise awareness of real-world (if not wholly real) social, political, medical, and scientific issues. If this does not return the zombie full circle to the realm of folklore, it at least lends it a new cultural relevance and reality not afforded any of its undead relatives in Western society.

Limbo of destruction: Ghosts, malevolence and tragedy

Hannah Gilbert

Many supernatural experiences recall a terrifying perception of the intentions of spirit entities they have encountered: namely, that they harbour malevolent feelings towards them. This paper will look at some of the features and contexts of malevolent entities, arguing that they can be considered with two specific distinctions, i.e. malevolent *personalities* that reflect malevolent individuals and their legacies, and malevolence *following tragic events*. Furthermore, I will argue that tragedy and rage concerning certain circumstances of death may result in a lingering emotional disposition of malevolence that reaches out from the disrupted afterlife conditions of certain individuals and groups, seeking to disturb the everyday worlds of the living, and remind them of the existence of those less fortunate.

The Fortean tales of Lapis Lazuli

Christopher Laursen

Lapis Lazuli is a Canadian multimedia music project that explores Fortean, animism, human awkwardness, and cross-cultural encounters. The sound and style of Lapis Lazuli was founded by composer and visual artist Kristofir Dean. Co-creator and historian Christopher Laursen comments on three short videos by Lapis Lazuli: “*The Light Inside*” (04:44) summarizes an investigation conducted by the late Dr. William Roll into anomalous flashing lights in 1960s Clayton, North Carolina using shadow puppets, maquettes, and children’s storybook-style animation; “*Pearl*” (04:08) is a fantastical narrative about a squirrel that haunts a neurotic taxidermist using a combination of stop-motion animation and live action; and inspired by historian Alex Owen’s *The Place of Enchantment*, “*The Canary*” (in production) recreates the documented adventures of late-Victorian astral travellers. Laursen will briefly discuss the process, challenges, and rewards of combining history and fictional narratives about paranormal experiences with surreal visuals, comedy, and soundscapes.

“The Light Inside”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QMeJbNTIw>

“Pearl”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v7gdzuZokU>

“The Canary” will be completed by June 2012 and can be previewed prior to the conference.

You can also view Lapis Lazuli’s first video, “Bella Cosmetica”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNGRwi-UieA>

In this paper, we would like to explore the everyday geographies of alternative spiritualities. For us, a core question is about how different geographies overlap - in particular the social, the practical and the otherworldly - as people encounter new conceptions of worldliness and otherworldliness. These geographies of spiritual encounter serve to locate the individual practitioner into something 'bigger' than the Weberian world of disenchantment we might assume constitutes the modern condition. Something bigger both practically - in terms of the practical encounters they might have with other people; and also spiritually - in terms of their journeys mapping these encounters into something which expands habitual space and time.

This paper explores how the resulting geographies map within and beyond the everyday spaces of two English cities, Manchester and London. We reveal a practical side to these extraordinary geographies, concerning the social, material and economic spaces where people meet and interact to enact their spirituality; but we also project beyond those habitual spaces into the metaphorical and/or otherworldly spaces habited by people on spiritual journeys. These geographies take practitioners beyond the contours of the everyday world to worlds beyond - accessed through meditation or astral travel, or sometimes appearing more spontaneously - which subsequently become fundamental to what it means to fully experience the extraordinary geographies of their spirituality.

Whilst the practical contours of their embodied spiritual pursuits provide a much needed material location for spiritual identity and practice, we suggest the otherworldly contours which map across and beyond them offer an equally 'real' and essential world to belong to. Encounters with these otherworldly geographies foster a sense of freedom from the strictures of the everyday, but also encourage a re-enchantment with that everyday upon returning to it. This paper therefore explores the various geographies which open up around enchanted spiritual practice and allow the individual to comprehend, experience and live in the world in radically different ways.

Crystals, angels and a discourse of healing: Exploring extraordinary therapeutic landscapes

Sara MacKian

'I wake up and thank the angels for keeping us safe... If I'm feeling down I carry a rose quartz or ask my guides to look after me. I take them with me to work as well' (Kathryn).

Albanese (1993) has suggested that healing is 'a preoccupation, even an obsession' within contemporary spirituality, and Heelas and Woodhead (2005) suggest the 'holistic milieu' - composed of a diverse range of healing practices and practitioners - is one of its defining characteristics. A 'discourse of healing' is therefore understood as central to contemporary spiritualities. However, this is not exclusively the sort of 'healing' we might consider in an embodied or medical sense, but rather a discourse of healing which involves 'more than the physical body' (Albanese, 1993. 135), and a deepening of understanding around the self in the world (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). In my research I found it is a healing which cuts across and binds together the individual's earth-bound needs, their social and material circumstances and the universal spiritual energies they aspire to attune to. In this emergent discourse of healing therefore there appear to be three key strands, which together go towards creating a distinctly therapeutic spirituality:

A discourse of self healing
A discourse of social healing
A discourse of 'universal healing'

In this paper I explore how this discourse of healing is presented as a fundamental part of what it means to experience and practice alternative spiritualities involving spirit energies and encounters. An emphasis on the role of the otherworldly in these healing relationships has the effect of releasing the act of healing from the hands of trained 'healers' - so for example individual healing might not come through a particular therapy or treatment, but rather through a direct and personal link with spirit. This takes our gaze outside the 'holistic milieu' and into new therapeutic landscapes of healing.

I then move on to explore how we might locate this discourse within the social science literature on 'therapeutic landscapes'. Such landscapes appear to provide otherworldly spiritual practitioners with comfort, support and strength in the same way that a profound belief in God does for a Christian or the power of Dreamtime will for Aboriginal Australians. The triad of 'self healing', 'social healing' and 'universal healing' operates to not simply solve the 'ills' of these spheres, but towards establishing a harmonious beingness across them. These therapeutic landscapes provide a conceptualisation of practitioners 'in relation with' others, the world and the universe, which exposes as an illusion the extreme individualism many commentators suggest underpins contemporary alternative spiritualities, and demands that we think of new ways of seeing the place of the extraordinary in the modern Western world.

GHosts, Guests and Hosts and how to make them
Sarah Sparkes

As a visual arts and creative research project GHost takes on and explores the conceit of guests, hosts and ghosts, both metaphorically and practically, in its activities. Functioning in its capacity as a supporting platform (or host) GHost aims to enable invited guests to visually and conceptually manifest and interrogate the idea of the ghost. The project was initiated by artist Sarah Sparkes and cultural studies lecturer Ricarda Vidal in 2008. To date the project has had two central strands: a consideration of the relevance of ghosts in contemporary culture, centred around a programme of interdisciplinary seminars – so-called Hostings – held in Senate House at the University of London; and a series of exhibitions, screenings and performances designed to make manifest and, by extension, examine the aesthetics of ghosts and haunted spaces.

GHost is primarily concerned with the contemporary visual arts and as such is interested in how artists have manifested what might be broadly referred to as "haunted" artworks. The project takes its title from a work by the highly influential French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), *A GUEST + A HOST = A GHOST* (1953). Etymologically guest and host go back to the same roots: the Latin word *hospes*, from which hospitality is also derived. The words guest and host reunite in Duchamp's ghost pun, "killing both parts", as Stephen Jay Gould remarks, "in the ghostly conjunction!". It is only a small step from the word "host" to "ghost", to, that is, the designation of a disembodied spirit, the shadowy or evanescent form wandering among the living like an indisposed but uninvited guest.

Whilst being, in part, a homage to Duchamp's work the project's name also identifies the subject matter of our visual art exhibitions and creative research – ghosts. It is important to make clear the central thread of GHost's working definition of a ghost. One generally accepted definition of a ghost is that it represents the immaterial part of a human – sometimes animal or thing – returning after death, in visible form or otherwise, to manifest itself to the living. Numerous cultural and historical commentators on ghosts such as R C. Finucane (1982) and Owen Davies (2007) concur with this and, it is this definition that the GHost project largely concerns itself with.

GHost is not a psychical research project; the intention is to examine how ghosts are rendered both conceptually and sensorially within contemporary society. This presentation will use case-studies from the GHost project's programme of visual arts exhibitions and interdisciplinary seminars –Hostings – to illustrate the ways in which ghosts are manifested in visual art and contemporary culture.

English Heretic: An application of magical psychogeography and modern necromancy
Andy Sharp

English Heretic was instigated in 2003 as a magico-creative project, subverting our notion and consumption of history. Through its Black Plaque scheme English Heretic attempts to achieve rapport with the spectres of tragic figures in popular culture. Concomitant with this English Heretic engages in a form of natural magic, decoding and extrapolating new mythic wyrds from unusual and suggestive locations. For the symposium, English Heretic will deliver a report of the magical resonances and synchronicities that have emerged as the project has progressed. Discussing the Black Plaque scheme, it will speculate on the possibility of an unintentional cursing during the making of the film "*The Witchfinder General*".

Following on from this the talk will explore the interplay between film location and ceremonial magic, with particular reference to the horror film genre, asking the question: *'Is it not beyond the bounds of credulity that a well staged, suitably ornate ritual portrayed through the visual arts may harness the power to tear the fabric of consensus reality - and with what results: the letting in of monstrous denizens from a fantastic and bloody celluloid nightmare? The blind atavisms of the preternatural realm may not know the difference between theatrical ceremony and the incantations of the supposedly initiated.'*

Illustrative of the use of literature and magical practice, the lecture will detail a pathworking carried out using the location setting of Daphne Du Maurier's "*The Birds*". In this case landscape was used to scry for hidden myths with very unexpected results in which rapport was achieved with the spirit of Joseph Kennedy Junior. Taking this example the talk will open up the prospect of using landscape as a magical tool, evoking the necromantic traditions of neoplatonic occult philosophy but within a modern context.

The talk will discuss the ceremonial intent of pilgrimage, more particularly to sites of heresy: cold war establishments, horror film locations, abandoned psychiatric hospital. Can these venues be used to adumbrate what the Hebrew termed the "qliphoth" but again within the context of 20th century history?

Expressions of spirithood: Performance and the manifestation of spirits

Jack Hunter

The body is the primary tool for the expression of personality. It is our interface with the physical world and our everyday means of communicating with each other, both verbally and non-verbally. The way in which we use our bodies, therefore, is of key importance to the way we are perceived as individual personalities. In trance mediumship, and spirit possession, practices the human body is used for the expression of multiple personalities and non-physical entities. This paper will explore the differing ways in which the human body is utilised as a means for the expression of spirits in a variety of different cultural contexts, from the ecstatic dancing of Afro-Brazilian Candomble mediums to the relatively static demonstrations of Euro-American trance mediums. It will explore the different methods employed by mediums to signify the presence of spirits and will examine the role of performance in making the spirit world tangible.

In the light and shadow: Turning the dead to keep the world alive

Christel Mattheeuws

The people of West Bezanozano in Central East Madagascar have a particular way of dealing with death. For them death does not mean being without life-force, but the life-force having become immobile. 'Immobility' as 'a holding firm of life-force' is expressed in the spring weather when the dried soil appears in the heat of the 'wind that does not walk' (still wind), in uncooked rice grains or in the bones of dead bodies that emerge from the decaying flesh. Immobility of life-force of weather, rice and bones has to be restored into the flux of life by respectively the northwest wind bringing thunder and rain, cooking the rice grains and organising a famadihana for the dead (turning the dead into ancestors). Life is a constant task, searching to build fruitful relationships with the Creator, the sun and moon, the weather, plants, animals and people, the dead and particular places in order to keep the world alive. Each agent plays a particular role defined by the astrological destiny it carries.

In its most subtle tangible manifestation, astrology in West Bezanozano can be defined by the foundational sensations of light and shade according to the crosswise leadership of the sun and moon in the annual, monthly and daily cycle of the destinies. In the eyes of the Zanadroandrena colours range between white and black, respectively the colour of the Zanahary (young life-giving forces) and the colour of the lolo (old deadly spirits). In between are all kinds of colour gradations and their shadows. Astrological practice in West Bezanozano takes part in life's magic interplay of light and shadow, heaven and earth, sky and soil.

The most difficult assignment for an astrologer is to lead a famadihana. He must create a secure path between the village and the grave so that the living can bring the blessed shrouds and the spirits of the dead to the tomb to unite them with the bones. If he fails, the earth-sky world in which people live can fall apart and become deadly instead of life-giving. While most scholars analyse the famadihana in terms of economical, political and social strategies of and for the living, an astrological perspective shows that this ritual is essentially a blessing for the dead to become ancestors. Only through blessing can the dead become part of the pantheon of life-giving spiritual beings that are requested to bless (make alive) the people's creations and activities in other circumstances. I will explain how this is made possible by following the astrologer during the ritual of the famadihana.

The shamanic journey: Ordinary into extraordinary reality

Zoë Brân

Shamanism is not a path of belief but of knowledge, of learning to 'see' the true, non-material, nature of things. Due to increasing public interest it is also an often misunderstood practice/path which conflates supernatural and psychic elements with indigenous tradition. This presentation will introduce shamanism not as an incomprehensible mystical path but as the simple heightening of emotional experience through the transcendence of ego boundaries. Shamanism is all about change: changing consciousness, changing self, empowering change in others and, ultimately, changing the nature of material reality. In a shamanic context change becomes transformation and is seen as inevitable and life-giving. The profound nature of the shamanic journey offers access to previously unimagined worlds and states which allow fresh, fluid perspectives on an exhaustive range of problems, from simple, everyday life challenge, to existential crisis. How these worlds are accessed and these changes achieved, how the ordinary can access the extraordinary is the subject of this presentation.

*Magic, materialism and mushrooms: Psilocybin mushroom user's constructions of the reality of
psychedelic entity encounters*

James Thompson

It has been argued in popular and academic literature concerning psychedelics that certain tryptamine substances (notably DMT and psilocybin mushrooms) in sufficient doses can occasion encounters with discarnate non-human entities (Luke 2011). Terrence McKenna (1993) famously reported that taking a 'heroic dose' of psilocybin mushrooms can allow one to encounter the 'machine elves', conscious entities who occupy a psychedelic realm. Similarly, it has been suggested that psilocybin mushrooms can be used to encounter folkloric creatures or nature spirits (Letcher 2008). The notion that one can access an alternate reality and encounter 'real' entities through the use of psychedelics sits in opposition to contemporary materialist and psychological 'regimes of truth' regarding drug experiences (Letcher 2008). According to these psychological 'regimes of truth', all phenomena experienced whilst in a psychedelically induced altered state of consciousness are understandable only as neurobiological epiphenomena or psychological hallucination. To argue otherwise is considered 'mad' (Letcher 2008).

In this paper I wish to present an empirical exploration of how a sample of psilocybin mushroom users discursively constructed the reality of psychedelic entity encounters. The data is drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted as part of a social psychology PhD at the University of Bath. Utilising a Foucauldian Discourse Analytic framework, three key discourses were identified in the talk of participants who described consuming large doses of psilocybin mushrooms. Firstly, a 'Psycho-biological Discourse', where participants constructed possible entity encounters as exclusively psychological in nature, as products of neurochemical interaction, belief, or hallucination. An alternative 'Animist Discourse' (Letcher 2008) was also identified, where participants constructed experiences of encountering folkloric creatures, demonic entities and 'machine elves' as encounters with ontologically 'real' beings who occupy an alternate reality. Whilst a minority of participants constructed their understandings using predominantly one or the other of these two discourses, other participants offered more complex, contradictory and synergetic constructions of the potential 'reality' of psychedelic entities. This represents a third discourse of 'Pluralism and Pragmatism' which consists of a negotiation of the seemingly incompatible positions of psychological and animist discourses.

The nature of these discourses and their negotiation will be discussed, as will the possible further implications of these findings for understanding how psychological and alternative discourses may be negotiated by people to construct meanings of extraordinary experiences.

“Knock, knock...who's there?” Orientating to spirits in the spatial and personal environment

Rachael Hayward

Raps, disembodied voices, a rattling table and the movement of a glass...for the Modern Paranormal Group this is simply an average encounter with a spirit. However, it is in this exchange between the corporeal and the spiritual, that something quite extraordinary occurs and those interactions usually associated with mundane communicative practise help to shape and strengthen an anomalous experience. This presentation aims to give an initial examination of this interaction between group and spirit, exploring the vocal and non-vocal components that make this possible.

The work of researchers such as Heath (1985), Goodwin (1981) and Robinson (1998), show the importance of orientation during communication in order to elicit a response from the co-participant. Attempting to converse with the unseen, however, causes certain problems achieving this and therefore requires the group to adopt an appropriate medium through which interactions can occur, be defined and undergo confirmation. We will therefore look at the means by which groups cope with this deviation, including the adoption of a primary object (such as a Ouija Board, Table) and orientation to peripheral objects external to the groups central engagement. In addition, as in our everyday encounters, conversation plays a large part in directing experience, and in fact these vocalisations often help to trigger events (e.g. asking questions/ giving demands), assert the strength of the experience (e.g. exclamations, out-breaths), and align the information in order to give it meaning and importance (e.g. correcting the name, describing an experience). Alongside this participants employ a number of different non-vocal mechanisms, such as gaze, expressions and body movements, to engage each other and communicate an ‘unsaid knowledge’ about the experience where vocal cues are deemed unnecessary.

These interactions that take place both in the spatial and personal environment result in a complex relationship between vocal and non-vocal components, enabling the group to orientate fluidly between the participants, objects and spiritual entity, as and when required. Within this presentation we will explore the importance of this relationship and its ability to determine the strength and composition of an anomalous experience.

The material remains of presence on an excavated "hauntscape": A transductive ethnography of a spectral soundscape

John Sabol

In any analysis of spectral geographies, there is a view of the landscape as performative in nature and a setting that evolves, not merely transforms. In these spaces, there is a surface layering in which actors "haunt" each other through interactions in resonating situations. This landscape is not so much a series of physical objects as it is a "verb", an occupation that becomes present (again) through contemporary site-specific contextual socio-cultural acts. Performances, both past and present, must become active engagements within specific spaces of this landscape, as spaces become expressions/depositories of memory. Cultural behavior is materially-expressed as contextual sensory identifiers of becoming and being present. This depositing of trace situations means the landscape, as a "hauntscape", is already performed and accumulative. When one interjects resonance, as a "field" of specific acts that target particular past performances, there is more probability of unearthing a presence from the past.

In *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001), Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks dealt with the material remains left over from transient performances. I propose that it is such "transient performances" that become cultural hauntings. They examined how performance can become an archaeological tool for excavating the past in the present. The field of excavation, I propose, is a "presencing field" or "hauntscape". This is an active "digging" into remains that become present during contemporary site-specific performances. The "hauntscape" is mediated through aural "soundings" that create morphic fields, and evolve the contemporary setting into one still active for a specific past context. In my presentation, four modalities of

this “presencing” will illustrate how a normally tranquil landscape can evolve into an active “hauntscape” transformation. These modalities will include historic ethnographic, transductive, agentic, and residual (both historic and contemporary) elements.

Noise and the infinite

Adam Potts

Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot's account of alterity, this paper will explore an idea of transcendence through the phenomenon of Japanese noise music. While a relatively nascent topic in musicology, the discourse surrounding Japanese noise music or Japanoise often circles around notions of the outside, escape and loss of self. As a music categorised without rhythm, melody or chord, but instead through white noise, static feedback and walls of indiscernible sound, it is commonly argued that Japanoise is the closest approximation we have to an absolute deterritorialization of music, that is, to an absolute non-music. But as something that is listened to as a genre in itself, Japanoise cannot be said to transcend music absolutely, but must instead be thought from within music as an attempt to escape music.

Working through both Levinas and Blanchot's account of alterity, I will argue that an understanding of transcendence is still necessary to the discourse of Japanoise but only if thought through an idea of immanence. What will emerge out of this discussion is no longer a language of opposition, in which Japanoise as Paul Hegarty argues, is thought through a failure to stay noise as it becomes music. But instead a language of entanglement, in which the outside that Japanoise so vehemently works toward is already implicated in the inside of music. Distinguishing between what I will call active noise (materiality of noise, Japanoise as something to be heard) and passive noise (noise understood as a language of alterity) I will argue that what is transcendent, infinite and other within noise music does not belong to the active materiality of its sound, but instead to a pre-subjective and passive realm of noise that is found in the language Japanoise turns us towards. This noise, I will argue, comes before the materiality of sound and before the subject who is there to hear it. It is the noise of absolute alterity that is the very condition of what it means to be and what it means to play noise music as genre.

Paramusicology: The fusion of music and the paranormal

Melvyn Willin

There are a number of phenomena that baffle science by not obeying the laws that we have been led to believe are true. My introduction will comment on these and my own research into paranormal music phenomena. Brief mentions will be made of music as a possible agent in telepathy experiments and music that was claimed to have been heard when no physical source was available. Details will be given of a series of ganzfeld (telepathy) experiments concerning the former and examples of investigations into alleged haunted properties and the results of these explorations. Here, and elsewhere, a balanced view will be sought always attempting to provide normal answers before the paranormal realm is entered. In addition to this an unpublished experiment into past-life regression involving music phenomena will be outlined as well as recent research (2011) into the hearing of music at near death experiences. However, the main thrust of

the talk will concentrate on the purported channelling of music from dead composers and performers. This will include the statements of historical characters such as Jesse Shepard, Florizel von Reuter, Charles Tweedale and Jelly d'Aranyi as well as details of interviews given to me by 20th and 21st Century composers and performers such as John Tavener and John Lill. So-called 'musical mediums' will be discussed with reference to the validity of their music and the claims attached to their works. The main person presented will be Rosemary Brown, but not exclusively since I have been in good contact with several other less famous mediums from this realm. I shall discuss whether the musical mediums' music, dictated by the composers specified, could stand up to professional scrutiny. A number of well-known classical composers and famous performers will be examined including Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin and Caruso. I shall make the point that they managed to compose or perform beyond their normal capacity. Music examples will be played during this talk.

It takes one to know one: Imaginal cognition and the question of spiritual reality

Angela Voss

This will be a digest of my recent contribution to *Paranthropology* on the same theme. It is concerned with the epistemology of 'paranormal' visions and the ontology of spiritual apparitions, arguing that in order to assess the 'reality' of the dimension we call spiritual, modes of perception and knowledge beyond the rational are required. Neoplatonic and esoteric models of different levels or senses of cognition can be very helpful in providing a framework for investigating what kind of 'truth' is revealed during a 'paranormal' experience, but they tend to be outweighed by research paradigms arising from rational, sociological or historical criteria. I will argue for a return to the imagination and what Plato calls the 'intuitive intellect' as research tools, which means a willingness for the researcher to engage with his or her own capacity for moving beyond the limits of a purely rational discourse.