

Rhine Online

Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

"Possibly the biggest obstacle to the progress of science at the present time is that our whole civilization is so neurotically suspicious of anything remotely suggestive of the supernatural. This actually affects believers in the supernatural by bogging them down in unproductive defensive arguments as much as it affects nonbelievers. The irony is that this suspiciousness is widely considered to be rational and 'scientific,' whereas it is actually the very opposite, that is, highly emotional and quite out of tune with the general spirit of modern science." John Wren-Lewis, 1974, "Resistance to the Study of the Paranormal." *J. Humanistic Psychology*, 14 (2), 41-48.

Several years later in a coffee house near the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on November 4, 2004, having a conversation with Stanley Krippner, he clarified the views expressed by John Wren-Lewis. Telling me, "My feelings about psi phenomena are that they're alleged interactions between organisms and other organisms, or organisms and their environment that appear to violate mainstream science concepts of space, time and energy. Furthermore psi phenomena apparently exist, but they are not supernatural, they are natural; they are not paranormal, they are normal. They're anomalies; we just haven't figured out how they fit into the scheme of things." Stanley Krippner, 2004.

This quote and other views by Krippner are forthcoming in "The Physics of Psi: An Interview with Stanley Krippner" by Mark A. Schroll, *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 14 (1), 2010

This document is available online at Rhine.org

Rhine Research Center

2741 Campus Walk Ave. Bldg. 500, Durham, NC 27705

(919) 309-4600

Submission Guidelines

The Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine is a publication of the Rhine Research Center: Institute for Consciousness Studies, Durham, North Carolina. Its purpose is to serve as a current periodical for anyone wishing to keep up on the latest psi news. We are interested in articles that are both scholarly and yet at the same time can speak to a more general audience. Our areas of interest include articles written from the perspective of data driven science, as well as theoretical, philosophical, personal and or ethnographic/experiential accounts.

Submissions are welcome all the time. Send your submissions to either Mark@rhine.org or Jennifer@rhine.org. Most of our manuscripts submissions range from between 800 and 1850 words, including bibliography, brief bio, and an optional photo. We do publish longer feature length manuscripts up to 3,000 words (including bibliography, bio and optional photo). If you are interested in publishing a longer feature length manuscript we ask that you submit an email inquiry to one of our editors, with a working title and a paragraph synopsis. All submissions will be edited for length and clarity.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Table of Contents

Editorial Overview: New Beginnings and Reassessment by Mark A. Schroll, Ph.D.

We begin this issue by calling attention to our new direction and name Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine. We also want to announce in this issue our call for contributions and our corresponding Submission Guidelines. Contributors interested in publishing an article in Rhine Online can now contact our Editors by writing to us at Mark@Rhine.org, and Jennifer@Rhine.org. We look forward to hearing from you...... 3

Interesting experiment at the Rhine Research Center by Christine Simmonds-Moore, Ph.D.

Subjective paranormal experiences often occur against a backdrop of “randomness” – e.g., telling the future by reading the tea leaves, crystal and mirror gazing and hearing electronic voice phenomena of apparently discarnate spirits amid static. An experiment is currently being run at the Rhine Research Center which explores personality differences in the tendencies to see patterns and pictures in noise and detect weak normal information 5

Overview of Journal of Parapsychology 73 Spring/Fall, 2009 by John Palmer, JP Editor

In the lead article for this issue, Diane Dutton and Carl Williams provide an exhaustive review of research on possible psi in animals. They begin with a discussion of research conducted in laboratory situations, most of which involved cats and rodents, but extended to goldfish and even cockroaches. The results of these studies were mixed. 6

"The Unexplained Powers of Animals" by Rupert Sheldrake, Ph.D.

For many years animal trainers, pet owners and naturalists have reported various kinds of perceptiveness in animals that suggest the existence of psychic powers. Surprisingly little research has been done on these phenomena. Biologists have been inhibited by the taboo against "the paranormal", and psychical researchers and parapsychologists have (with few exceptions) confined their attention to human beings. 8

Reflections on Psi and Sheldrake's Morphogenetic Fields by Mark A. Schroll, Ph.D.

All my life (since my first psi experience at age six in 1964) I have sought to both personally and professionally understand the mystery of psi. In addition to my depth of inquiry into understanding the modus operandi of psi, the psychological or personality orientation of people who claim to experience psi has also been of interest to me...... 12

A Sociological Perspective on ‘Becoming’ A Spirit Medium in Britain by Hannah Gilbert, Ph.D.

Psychical research and parapsychology have accumulated an impressive body of research into Western spirit mediumship. Since 1848, when the Fox sisters’ earliest demonstrations spawned a quick succession of spirit mediums, a number of researchers have sought to use the latest scientific techniques in order to evaluate whether such phenomena provided evidence for life after death...... 16

A Critical Look at the State of Paranormal Investigation -- Setting the Higher Standard by George Matthis, President, Paranormal Resource Alliance

I am frequently asked what I think about the new ghost hunting/paranormal reality shows that seemingly pop up every few months on network, cable or satellite television. My answer is always the same: they are a mixed blessing...... 22

Sports Superstars and Sixth Sense by Chrisanne Gordon, MD

We all love our sports heroes! We marvel at their agility, stand in awe of their ability, and often stare in disbelief at the wonders of their moves, their neuromuscular genius, so to speak 26

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Editorial Overview: New Beginnings and Reassessment

By Mark A. Schroll, Ph.D.

We begin this issue by calling attention to our new direction and name *Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine*. We also want to announce in this issue our call for contributions and our corresponding Submission Guidelines. Contributors interested in publishing an article in *Rhine Online* can now contact our Editors by writing to us at Mark@Rhine.org, and Jennifer@Rhine.org. We look forward to hearing from you. Some of you may also be interested in serving as participants in an experiment that Christine Simmonds-Moore is conducting at the Rhine Research Center.

To keep you up to date with the latest Rhine Research Center lectures and workshops, Co-Editor Jennifer Moore provides us with a summary overview. This is followed by an overview of recent papers published in the latest issue of *Journal of Parapsychology* by its Editor, John Palmer. Palmer's overview offers a summary of Diane Dutton and Carl Williams recent research on possible psi in animals, a discussion this issue elaborates on in one of our feature article's "The Unexplained Powers of Animals," written by Rupert Sheldrake.

Nevertheless we should keep in mind the idea of inter-species communication is a tentative outgrowth of Sheldrake's work that continues to call out for more experimental verification. Some of the current areas on which he has written about is on how animals (dogs specifically) know when their human caretakers are coming home. Sheldrake's research on dogs and their human caretakers, as well as how pigeons home, was first explored in his book *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World* (1994). He elaborates on this discussion and continuing attempts to verify these claims in his article for this issue.

Another fruitful direction I would suggest (that to my knowledge Sheldrake has yet to include) is the work of John Lilly, whose work with dolphins was an attempt to explore inter-species communication. Lilly is also famous for his *samadhi tank* or *sensory deprivation tank* experiments (Lilly, 1971), which is one experimental thread that could be useful to psi researchers interested in investigating inter-species communication. Bringing together the work of Sheldrake and Lilly would facilitate this inquiry, as well as a further a synthesis between psi research and transpersonal theories of consciousness.

My own contribution to this issue, "Reflections on Psi and Sheldrake's Morphogenetic Fields," briefly explores the relationship of Sheldrake's research to the work of Charles T. Tart, and David Bohm's transpersonal physics. Likewise this article encourages more scholar's to explore the experimental investigation of Sheldrake's work, as well as applying Sheldrake's ideas to our understanding of consciousness.

Our second feature article in this issue is "A Sociological Perspective on 'Becoming' a Spirit Medium in Britain," by Hannah Gilbert, founder of the York University, UK group "Exploring the Extraordinary." Gilbert's inquiry into mediums begins by treating the reality of mediumship as a "social fact," focusing her investigation on the personality orientations of mediums from an ethno autobiographical perspective. This focus shifts the emphasis of inquiry to the psychodynamic rites of passage that shaped the developmental process of persons who become spirit mediums. Gilbert's inquiry calls to mind the work of David Lukoff's *DSM-IV* category of "Religious and Spiritual Problem" as a normal condition of mental health in need of greater understanding, instead of a pathology to be treated and extinguished. Similarly Julie Beischel and Adam Rock (2009) offer a related inquiry into a phenomenological process-focused investigation of mediums, versus the orientation toward proving the physical

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

reality and parapsychological mechanisms that are involved in mediumship research.

George Matthis, President, Paranormal Resource Alliance, examines the new ghost hunting/paranormal reality shows and their subsequent influence on psi research in his article, “A Critical Look at the State of Paranormal Investigation – Setting the Higher Standard.” Finally, Chrisanne Gordon's article offers us her views on “Sports Superstars and Sixth Sense.”

References

Beischel, J. and Rock, A. J. (2009). Addressing the survival versus psi debate through process-focused mediumship research. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 73, 71-88.

Lilly, J. C. (1971). *The center of the cyclone: An autobiography of inner space*. New York: Doubleday.

Sheldrake, R. (1994). *Seven experiments that could change the world: A do-it-yourself guide to revolutionary science*. London: Fourth Estate.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Interesting experiment at the Rhine Research Center

By Christine Simmonds-Moore, Ph.D.

Subjective paranormal experiences often occur against a backdrop of “randomness” – e.g., telling the future by reading the tea leaves, crystal and mirror gazing and hearing electronic voice phenomena of apparently discarnate spirits amid static. An experiment is currently being run at the Rhine Research Center which explores personality differences in the tendencies to see patterns and pictures in noise and detect weak *normal* information (a real object that has been degraded in quality or a very quiet word that has been embedded in auditory noise) and *extrasensory* information (targets which have been selected by the computer but which are not actually presented). In this study, some trials contain “targets” and others do not, and where is a target, this may be a “weak” target or an “ESP” target. In this way, we will be able to further understand the processes involved in creativity and finding meaningful patterns in randomness, and extend our current understanding about the ways in which people are able to perceive weak signals (including ESP and weak stimuli).

For this study, we are looking for people who believe OR disbelieve in paranormal phenomena (so we would very much like to encourage skeptical friends and relatives to take part!). If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire and take part in a computerized experiment which takes one and a half hours. We will also give you a cinema or book voucher (worth \$15) to thank you for taking part.

The study is funded by the Bial foundation (who are currently the key funders of research on paranormal experiences). Dr Christine Simmonds-Moore will be conducting the study in the lab suite at the Rhine Research Center in Durham, North Carolina and at the lab suite at the Cedar Creek Institute which is associated with the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. Dr Christine Simmonds-Moore is a Visiting Research Associate from Liverpool Hope University in the UK, and will be running the study until July 2010. If you have any questions, you can contact her at simmonc@hope.ac.uk. You can also sign up to the participant pool at the Rhine Research Center by sending your contact details to experiment@rhine.org. There is also a web site about the study at <http://www.wix.com/simmonc/patternexperiment>.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Overview of Journal of Parapsychology 73 - Spring/Fall 2009

by John Palmer, Editor

In the lead article for this issue, Diane Dutton and Carl Williams provide an exhaustive review of research on possible psi in animals. They begin with a discussion of research conducted in laboratory situations, most of which involved cats and rodents, but extended to goldfish and even cockroaches. The results of these studies were mixed. In most of the rodent studies, animals had to move around on a grid floor in such a way as to avoid randomly assigned electric shocks. What success there was seemed to be on trials where the animals moved spontaneously or haphazardly. The cockroach study, in which the insects acted against their self-interest, highlights the problem that the source of psi could be the experimenter (who hated cockroaches) rather than the animals. The cat studies in particular suggest that the emotional relationship between animal and human is key to success. This principle becomes the theme of the second half of the review, most notably the recent studies by Sheldrake, which indicate that a pet dog could precognize when its owner is leaving to come home. This research became the subject of a debate with critics, the main issue concerning exactly how the dog's anticipation behavior should be defined.

Julie Beischel and Adam Rock begin their article on mediumship research by noting that most past research has been "proof-oriented." By this, they mean that the research was aimed at determining whether the medium could acquire otherwise unknown information about the deceased rather than whether the source of that information was a discarnate being. They go on to argue for "process-oriented" research that focuses on the survival issue more directly. They then describe previous process-oriented research of their own in which they compared the "phenomenology" or content of readings of deceased persons with those of living persons. They found several differences. For example, in the deceased-directed readings, the mediums felt more compelled to provide evidence of contact, whereas only in the living-directed readings did the mediums appeal to precognition. The authors conclude by describing the next stage of their research, in which the medium will not be told whether the target is living or dead. This modification will allow the researchers to more directly test the survival question. They also considered the pros and cons of adding a third condition in which, unbeknown to the medium, there is no target person at all.

Erlendur Haraldsson reports the results of intensive interviews he conducted of 337 people from Iceland who reported experiencing apparitions of the dead. Names of the deceased and cause of death were confirmed by official records. The sample was demographically representative of the general Icelandic population and the results were consistent with those of previous surveys. The most frequent type of apparition was visual, followed by auditory. In 14% of the cases where time of death was known, the experience occurred within 24 hours before or after the death, and in 86% of these the experiencer had no normal knowledge of the death. In 30% of the cases the deceased died violently, which is much higher than the percentage of violent deaths in the Icelandic population. Most of these were male and, in contrast to the other cases, the deceased was not well known to the perceiver. The author infers from this that the deceased took the active role in the encounter, which he sees as supporting the hypothesis that we survive death.

According to decision augmentation theory, when a person attempts to influence the output of a random number generator by, e.g., having it produce more 1s than 0s, successful results are not really due to PK. Instead, the person starts the test (by, e.g., clicking the computer mouse) at a time when the computer produces a segment that by chance happens to contain more 1s than 0s (like a good poker hand.) While in Switzerland, John Palmer tested

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

this mechanism in an ESP test. Participants were asked to guess a sequence of numbers by calling each number out loud while simultaneously clicking a mouse. If the mouse click occurred during a randomly determined 20% of the time that the computer registered a 1 at a hidden location, participants were “rewarded” by receiving on the next trial a target that would increase the likelihood of a correct guess, based on their guessing tendencies in earlier runs. (For example, if the tendency was not to call the same number twice in a row, the manipulated target would never match the previous guess.) As predicted, believers in the paranormal obtained the reward significantly more often than the 20% chance expectation and significantly more often than non-believers.

Finally, Etzel Cardeña and his co-authors report an experiment examining the effect of hypnotizability (how easily one can be hypnotized) and tendency toward dissociation (a state of consciousness characterized by detachment from the self or others; the classic clinical example is multiple personality) on performance on an implicit ESP task. “Implicit” means the participants did not know they were being tested for ESP. Participants were first asked to memorize a list of words and then asked to recall the words. Later, they would get a chance to practice memorizing half of the words. The idea is that these practice words function as precognition targets during the initial memory task. Thus, the measure of ESP is how much better the participants memorize the words they will see later (targets present) than the words they will not see later (targets absent). Surprisingly, the main finding was *psi-missing* by participants who scored high on hypnotizability but *low* on dissociation. The authors offer no explanation of why this group would be the one to show ESP. They also found that believers in psi scored significantly higher than nonbelievers on dissociation, and women had significantly higher belief scores than men.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

The Unexplained Powers of Animals

Rupert Sheldrake, Ph.D.

For many years animal trainers, pet owners and naturalists have reported various kinds of perceptiveness in animals that suggest the existence of psychic powers. Surprisingly little research has been done on these phenomenon. Biologists have been inhibited by the taboo against "the paranormal", and psychical researchers and parapsychologists have (with few exceptions) confined their attention to human beings.

According to random household surveys in England and the United States, many pet owners believe their animals are sometimes telepathic with them. An average of 48 per cent of dog owners and 33 per cent of cat owners said that their pets responded to their thoughts or silent commands. Many horse trainers and riders believe that their horse can pick up their intentions telepathically.

Some companion animals even seem able to tell when a particular person is on the telephone before the receiver has been picked up. For example, when the telephone rang in the household of a noted professor at the University of California at Berkeley, his wife knew when her husband was on the other end of the line because Whiskins, their silver tabby cat, rushed to the telephone and pawed at the receiver. "Many times he succeeds in taking it off the hook and makes appreciative meows that are clearly audible to my husband at the other end", she said. "If someone else telephones, Whiskins takes no notice." The cat responded even when he telephoned home from field trips in Africa or South America.

Since 1994, with the help of hundreds of animal trainers, shepherds, blind people with guide dogs, veterinarians and pet owners, I have been investigating some of these unexplained powers of animals. There are three major categories of seemingly mysterious perceptiveness: namely telepathy, the sense of direction and premonition.

Animal telepathy

The commonest kinds of seemingly telepathic response are the anticipation by dogs and cats of their owners coming home; the anticipation of owners going away; the anticipation of being fed; cats disappearing when their owners intend to take them to the vet; dogs knowing when their owners are planning to take them for a walk; and animals that get excited when their owner is on the telephone, even before the telephone has been answered.

As skeptics rightly point out, some of these responses could be explained in terms of routine expectations, subtle sensory cues, chance coincidence and selective memory, or put down to the imaginations of doting pet owners. These are reasonable hypotheses, but they should not be accepted in the absence of any evidence. To test these possibilities, it is necessary to do experiments.

My colleagues and I concentrated on the phenomenon of dogs that know when their owners are coming home. Many pet owners have observed that their animals seem to anticipate the arrival of a member of the household, often 10 minutes or more in advance. The pets typically wait at a door, window or gate. In random household surveys in Britain and America, an average of 51 per cent of dog owners and 30 per cent of cat owners said they had noticed such anticipatory behavior.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

The dog I investigated in most detail was a terrier called Jaytee, who belonged to Pam Smart, in Ramsbottom, near Manchester, England. Pam adopted Jaytee from Manchester Dogs' Home in 1989 when he was still a puppy, and soon formed a close bond with him.

In 1991, when Pam was working as a secretary at a school in Manchester, she left Jaytee with her parents, who noticed that the dog went to the French window almost every weekday at about 4:30 pm, around the time she set off, and waited there until she arrived some 45 minutes later. She worked routine office hours, so the family assumed that Jaytee's behavior depended on some kind of time sense.

Pam was laid off 1993 and was subsequently unemployed, no longer tied to any regular pattern of activity. Her parents did not usually know when she would be coming home, but Jaytee still anticipated her return.

In 1994 Pam read an article about my research and volunteered to take part. In more than 100 experiments, we videotaped the area by the window where Jaytee waited during Pam's absences, providing a continuous, time-coded record of his behavior which was scored "blind" by a third party who did not know the details of the experiments. To check that Jaytee was not reacting to the sound of Pam's car or other familiar vehicles, we investigated whether he still anticipated her arrival when she travelled by unusual means: by bicycle, by train and by taxi. He did.

We also carried out experiments in which Pam set off at times selected at random after she had left home, communicated to her by means of a telephone pager. In these experiments, Jaytee still started waiting at the window around the time Pam set off, even though no one at home knew when she would be coming. The odds against this being a chance effect were more than 100,000 to one. Jaytee behaved in a very similar way when he was tested repeatedly by skeptics anxious to debunk his abilities.

The evidence indicates that Jaytee was reacting to Pam's intention to come home even when she was many miles away. Telepathy seems the only hypothesis that can account for the facts. All our published papers on Jaytee, and on another return-anticipating dog, Kane, can be found on my web site here:

<http://www.sheldrake.org/Articles&Papers/papers/animals/index.html>

Currently, Alex Tsakiris is replicating this research with dogs in the US. Details of his investigations are at <http://www.skeptiko.com>

Other kinds of animal telepathy can also be investigated experimentally, for example the apparent ability of dogs to know when they are going to be taken for walks. In these experiments the dogs are kept in a separate room or outbuilding and videotaped continuously. Meanwhile their owner, at a randomly selected time, thinks about taking them for a walk and then five minutes later does so. Our preliminary experiments have shown dogs exhibiting obvious excitement when their owner is thinking about taking them out, although they could not have known this by normal sensory means. They did not manifest such excitement at other times.

The most remarkable case of animal telepathy that I have encountered is with an African grey parrot, N'kisi, who has the largest vocabulary of any animal in the world, currently more than 1,400 words. N'kisi uses language in a meaningful way and speaks in sentences. His owner, Aimee Morgana, is primarily concerned with exploring his linguistic abilities, but noticed that he often responds to what she is thinking by saying out loud what her thoughts are. Aimee and I carried out a controlled tests with randomized photographs in sealed envelopes. In a series of

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

videotaped trials, Aimee opened an envelope and silently looked at the picture for 2 minutes, while N'kisi, in another room, on another floor, was filmed. In many of the trials he said words corresponding to the image Aimee was looking at. This effect was highly significant statistically, and the data can be seen in details here: http://www.sheldrake.org/Articles&Papers/papers/animals/parrot_telepathy_abs.html

There is much potential for further research on animal telepathy. And if domestic animals are telepathic with their human owners, then it seems very likely that animals are telepathic with each other, and that this may play an important part in the wild. Some naturalists have already suggested that the coordination of flocks of birds and herds of animals may involve something like telepathy, as may communication between members of a pack of wolves.

The Sense of Direction

Homing pigeons can find their way back to their loft over hundreds of miles of unfamiliar terrain. Migrating European swallows travel thousands of miles to their feeding grounds in Africa, and in the spring return to their native place, even to the very same building where they nested before. Some dogs, cats, horses and other domesticated animals also have a good sense of direction and can make their way home from unfamiliar places many miles away.

Most research on animal navigation has been carried out with homing pigeons, and this research over many decades has served only to deepen the problem of understanding their direction-finding ability. Navigation is goal-directed, and implies that the animals know where their home is even when they are in an unfamiliar place, and have to cross unfamiliar terrain.

Pigeons do not know their way home by remembering the twists and turns of the outward journey, because birds taken in closed vans by devious routes find their way home perfectly well, as do birds that have been anaesthetized on the outward journey, or transported in rotating drums. They do not navigate by the sun, because pigeons can home on cloudy days and can even be trained to navigate at night. However, they may use the sun as a simple compass to keep their bearings. Although they use landmarks in familiar terrain, they can home from unfamiliar places hundreds of kilometers from their home, where no familiar landmarks are visible. They cannot smell their home from hundreds of miles away, especially when it is downwind, although smell may play a part in their homing ability when they are close to familiar territory. Pigeons deprived of their sense of smell by researchers were still able to find their homes.

Some biologists hope that the homing of pigeons might turn out to be explicable in terms of a magnetic sense. But even if pigeons have a compass-sense, this could not explain their ability to navigate. If you were taken blindfold to an unknown destination and given a compass, you would know where north was, but not the direction of your home.

The failure of conventional attempts to explain pigeon homing and many other kinds of animal navigation implies the existence of a sense of direction as yet unrecognized by institutional science. This could have major implications for the understanding of animal migrations, and would shed light on the human sense of direction, much better developed in traditional peoples, such as the bushmen of the Kalahari or Polynesian navigators, than in modern urban people.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Premonitions

Very little research has been done on animal premonitions, even in the case of earthquakes and tsunamis where such warnings could prove every useful.

Some forewarnings might be explicable in terms of physical clues, such as electrical changes before earthquakes and storms. Other premonitions are more mysterious, as in the case of animals that anticipated air raids during the Second World War long before they could have heard enemy planes approaching, or animals that become agitated before unforeseeable accidents. Here precognition or presentiment may be involved, implying either an influence passing backwards in time, or a blurring of the distinction between future, present and past.

All three types of perceptiveness—telepathy, the sense of direction and premonitions—seem better developed in non-human species like dogs than they are in people. We have much to learn from our companion animals about animal nature, and about our own.

Rupert Sheldrake, Ph.D. is the Director of the Perrott-Warrick Project, funded from Trinity College, Cambridge. He was a Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, and a Research Fellow of the Royal Society. He is currently a Fellow of the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Petaluma, California, and lives in London. Much of his research on unexplained powers of animals and of people is summarized in his books *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home, and Other Unexplained Powers of Animals*, and *The Sense of Being Stared At, and Other Aspects of the Extended Mind*. His web site is www.sheldrake.org.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Reflections on Psi and Sheldrake's Morphogenetic Fields

by Mark A. Schroll, Ph.D.

All my life (since my first psi experience at age six in 1964) I have sought to both personally and professionally understand the mystery of psi. In addition to my depth of inquiry into understanding the *modus operandi* of psi, the psychological or personality orientation of people who claim to experience psi has also been of interest to me. I will in future articles provide a more detailed account of my 1964 psi experience, its assessment and significance; whereas the focus of the present article is a reflection on the conceptual pathways and theoretical insights that have contributed to my overall understanding of psi.

Sheldrake's Morphogenetic Fields: A Concept That Is Still on the Fringes of Psi Research

Over the last three months I have been reflecting on the work of Rupert Sheldrake and Charles T. Tart. I first became aware of Sheldrake's work during a two-day conference on "Science and Mysticism: Exploring the New Realities," September 29-30, 1984, held at the Harvard Science Center, Harvard University. Aside from Sheldrake this conference included David Bohm, Huston Smith, and Renee` Weber. Three months after this conference I wrote to Tart asking if he felt there was any relationship between his concept of mind/life, and what Sheldrake was calling *morphogenetic fields* or *M-fields*? Tart replied to my letter on February 14, 1985, saying:

The conceptual framework sketched out in my *States of Consciousness* (1975) book also dovetails nicely with the emergent interactionist approach, although I didn't get specific about some aspects of it in that book. At the time I wrote it I didn't think the scientific community was ready to think about all aspects of consciousness. Yes, Sheldrake's ideas do fit in. His morphogenetic fields are a biologically sound way of talking about psi influences, and this terminology got attention where resistance might have automatically excluded material that talked about psi (Tart, 1985, February 14).

In addition to asking Tart about Sheldrake's ideas, I was also reminded of a marginal note I made (after reading Tart's paper) "Transpersonal Realities or Neurophysiological Illusions? Toward an Empirically Testable Dualism" (Tart, 1981), that prompted me to define consciousness as:

The immediacy of the continually emerging effort to establish an awareness of the reciprocal interaction taking place between the person, the environment, and the fundamental unifying principle bonding this relationship together at any given moment [which is always now--an endless process of unfolding and enfolding] (Schroll 2001) (Schroll: 57, 2005).

The "person" and "environment" are fairly self-evident terms that do not require (I hope) any additional definition, yet what is it that I mean by the "fundamental unifying principle?"

In a letter to Sheldrake dated February 8, 1989, I wrote:

Thank you for your kind letter of encouragement of my article, "Scientific Controversies Shaping the Worldview of the 21st Century," dated Nov. 8, 1988. I completed my review of your book *The Presence of the Past* (1988), and found particularly interesting your concept of morphic fields (pp. 106-114, 173, 181, 201, 205, 236, and 302), as it reminded me of a similar "flash of insight" I had one afternoon in the spring of 1981, after hearing a lecture

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

on the mind/body problem [by Dirk W. Mosig]. More specifically, my thoughts were directed to the process of perception, which I came to see as an act of forming together larger and larger patterns of associated “fields of meaning.” These “fields of meaning” constitute the center of our field of consciousness, whose integration forms the identity and continuity of our self-structure.

These “fields of meaning” can also be represented as “fields of information,” whose nested hierarchical configuration make up the whole of reality. The predicament we face as a human species is, of course, the difficulty of becoming consciousness and remaining conscious of these various fields of meaning. Undoubtedly if we could remain “fully conscious” of reality, all of us would be living the life of the sage or mystic.

Ram Dass reminded us about this in his talk, “Promises and Pitfalls of the Spiritual Path,” (1988), that neuroses are an inescapable aspect of human existence. However, depending on the degree to which the person develops their ability to integrate the various hierarchical configurations of these nested fields of meaning, we can learn to become more conscious of how they manifest themselves in our behavior. All this helps and contributes to beginning the process of freeing ourselves from becoming attached to our daily self-deceptions, as we learn to become aware of how neuroses become part of life's drama--thereby teaching us how to let go as they pass through our field of consciousness.

Moreover by employing your concept of morphic fields, in conjunction with [David] Bohm's physics, the existence (if you will)—of “chreodes of meaningful habitualized patterns of behavior” are more easily postulated—than when discussing this process merely in terms of the person learning to become increasingly more conscious by tuning into the collective unconscious (memory) of the species as a whole (Schroll, 1989, February 8).

A similar line of thought was raised in a conversation between Bohm and Renee Weber:

Bohm: It's also very subtle levels of being, within the implicate order, which may not even be located in the body, in the sense that it may be affected, rather as Sheldrake is suggesting, by fields which are not local.

Weber: These fields affect us and we affect them; it's a mutual interpretation and exchange.

Bohm: Yes.

Weber: Are you proposing something like a *meaning field*?

Bohm: Yes, that's exactly it. You could say (and Sheldrake seems to agree with this) that the morphogenetic field or a field of active meaning--meaning in the signasomatic and somasignificant sense [is representative of this way of knowing]" (Bohm & Weber: 444, 1987).

Today, 21 years after I wrote these thoughts to Sheldrake, and 25 years since Tart and I first commented on the contribution of M-fields to our understanding of psi, the use of this concept is still rare. This includes the recent “Clever Beasts and Faithful Pets: A Critical Review of Animal Psi Research” by Diane Dutton and Carl Williams (2009). Instead of mentioning and discussing Sheldrake's concept of M-fields, they talk around it or give us partial clues like saying in their abstract: “. . . we argue that the evidence suggests that animal psi may function as an expression of relationship or 'resonance' between individuals” (Dutton & Williams: 43, 2009). Moreover Dutton and Williams fail to repeat even this partial reference to Sheldrake's conceptual framework with their use

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

of the word “resonance” in the body of their paper, referring instead to: “. . . the interpretive framework underlying much of this work is a model of psi as the anomalous transfer of information not obtainable by normal sensory means” (Dutton & Williams: 51, 2009).

It would have been my suggestion in the preparation of this article that after referring to “resonance” in their abstract there should have been a reference note that included a brief discussion and definition of Sheldrake's concept of M-fields and morphic resonance.¹ We should be thankful at least that references to “nonlocal information” are starting to appear: “Radin (2002) has suggested that the ability of animals to track their owners' whereabouts may be due to a psi-mediated ability to process nonlocal orientation information” (Dutton & Williams: 61, 2009).

Likewise there is a glimmer of hope that Sheldrake's ideas too are finding increased acceptance, which is indicated by David Luke's review of Ornella Corazza's book *Near-Death Experiences: Exploring the Mind-Body Connection* (2008). Luke points out:

. . . in a rather zen manner, the definitions of concepts such as “dependent origination,” *basho* (literally “place”) and the “logic of place” became too minimalist and abstract, leaving me feeling somewhat disoriented. . . . Nevertheless, the connection to fields of consciousness brought me back to familiar ground once again when Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields were discussed” (Luke: 176, 2009).

I would also welcome seeing more of Ornella Corazza's work on NDE's and the use of Sheldrake's work to explain them, as Luke points out: “I get the feeling that this slim book has been rather too heavily edited and that the missing pieces of the jigsaw probably remain on the publisher's editing desk” (Luke: 180, 2009). We can only hope that as more scholars like Corazza and Luke continue to refer to Sheldrake's ideas, consciousness studies will begin to embrace this much needed conceptual language.

Note

For a brief discussion of Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields or M-fields concept see (Schroll, 2009). On the other hand, Sheldrake's concept of morphic resonance can be understood as follows:

Sheldrake proposes that M-fields are built up like habits; that is, M-fields are built up through a repetition of form. Such repetition can be built up at the physical-chemical level, affecting the structural development of atoms, genes, cells, etc. M-fields can also be built up through the repetition of behavior, demonstrated by the maze learning ability of McDougall's and Agar's rats (Agar, et al, 1954). Once an M-field is built up through repetition, all forms of similar origin can “tune in” to this field through the process of morphic resonance. Morphic resonance works on the same basis as physical resonance. This invariant translation of an energy field into a physical system is the model Sheldrake uses to explain morphic resonance. [It needs to be pointed out, however, that M-fields and morphic resonance's *modus operandi* is producing its influence at a level of reality that is different from the use of signal transmission associated with the electromagnetic spectrum. The briefest and yet most conceptually clear way of summing up the concept of M-fields and morphic resonance is this]. . . . Besides referring to M-fields as “habits”, Sheldrake has called M-fields a kind of memory – a sort of species specific memory transcending the limitations of space-and-time and in fact operating non-locally according to the non-locality principle” (Schroll: 248, 1987). (See also Schroll, in press, for a more detailed discussion of M-fields and nonlocality).

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

References

- Agar, W. E., Drummond, F. H., Tiegs, O.W. and Gunson, M. M. (1954). Fourth (final) report on a test of McDougall's Lamarckian experiment on the training of rats. *Journal of Experimental Biology*, 31, 307-321.
- Bohm, D. & Weber, R. (1987). Meaning as Being in the Implicate Order Philosophy of David Bohm: A Conversation. In *Quantum Implications: Essays in Honor of David Bohm*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 436-450, 1987.
- Dutton, D. & Williams, C. (2009). Clever Beasts and Faithful Pets: A Critical Review of Animals Psi Research. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 73, Spring/Fall, 43-68.
- Luke, D. (2009). Review of *Near-Death Experiences: Exploring the Mind-Body Connection* (2008) by Ornella Corazza. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 73 (Spring/Fall), 175-180.
- Radin, D. (2002). A dog that seems to know when the owner is coming home: Effect of environmental variables. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 16, 579-582.
- Ram Dass (1988, October 10). Promises and pitfalls of the spiritual path. Keynote presentation at the 1988 International Transpersonal Psychology conference, El Rancho Tropicana Hotel, Santa Rosa, California.
- Schroll, M. A. (1987). Scientific controversies shaping the worldview of the 21st century. In *Reports of the 11th International Wittgenstein-Symposium: Recent Developments in Epistemology and Philosophy of Science*. P. Weingartner & G. Schurz (Eds.), Pp. 244-252. Vienna: Holder-Pichler-Tempsky.
- Schroll, M. A. (2001, December 2). Theory vs. application: The positive and negative implications. Invited presentation Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Washington, DC.
- Schroll, M. A. (2005). Toward a physical theory of the source of religion. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 16 (1), 56-69.
- Schroll, M. A. (2009). Editorial overview: A glimpse of science history and its consequences on psi research. [Rhine Online](#), 1 (4), 2-3.
- Schroll, M. A. (In press/2010). The physics of psi: An interview with Stanley Krippner. *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 14 (1).
- Sheldrake, R. (1988). *The presence of the past: Morphic resonance and the habits of nature*. New York: Times Books/Random House.
- Tart, C. T. (1975). *States of consciousness*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, Inc.
- Tart, C. T. (1981). Transpersonal realities or neurophysiological illusions?: Toward an empirically testable dualism. *The Metaphors of Consciousness*. R. S. Valle & R. von Eckartsberg (eds.), New York: Plenum Press, pp. 199-222.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

A Sociological Perspective on ‘Becoming’ a Spirit Medium in Britain

by Hannah Gilbert, PhD

Introduction

Psychical research and parapsychology have accumulated an impressive body of research into Western spirit mediumship. Since 1848, when the Fox sisters' earliest demonstrations spawned a quick succession of spirit mediums, a number of researchers have sought to use the latest scientific techniques in order to evaluate whether such phenomena provided evidence for life after death. There was, from the offset, a recognizable split between supporters and debunkers, a dichotomy which still resonates in the contemporary field of mediumship research. For some, experiments seemed unable to prove how mediums were able to provide such phenomena unless they were what they claimed to be. For others, fraud was prevalent, and numerous reports detail the various mundane methods employed in public demonstrations and smaller sized séances. In the pursuit of acceptable proof, mediums have been tried and tested time and time again, in the field as well as in the controlled settings of a laboratory (see Cerullo, 1982; Gauld, 1982). Some may argue that we should be done with mediumship, that the debunkers have effectively done their work. But spirit mediumship persists. If anything, recent times have seen a notable rise in both the frequency and consumption of spirit communication. Spirit mediumship is obviously an attractive enterprise, for it offers us a chance to reconnect with those we have loved and lost, and proposes a promise of evidence for post-mortem survival.

From the search for proof to accounts of experience

The ongoing prevalence of spirit mediumship surely begs its consideration as an important and necessary topic of research. Indeed, psychical researchers and parapsychologists are still investigating mediumship, and they make convincing cases as to why such research is so important. More recently, however, there is emerging a new crop of researchers who come from a somewhat different perspective: the agnostic social scientist. The research agenda here is often less concerned with whether or not mediumship is something we can objectively validate one way or the other, and more focused on the social dynamics of spirit mediumship both as individual spiritual experiences, and as a social performance that is meaningful to its public consumers, and a society within which it operates more generally. A number of researchers, often using an historical approach, have investigated the relationship between spirit mediumship and society, focusing on areas such as bereavement, class, gender and politics (e.g. Barrow, 1986; Bourke, 2007; Carroll, 2000; Hazelgrove, 2000; McMullin, 2004; Owen, 1990).

In 2003, I started a PhD at the University of York in order to explore the ways in which contemporary British spirit mediums represent and experience their spirit contacts. I used three specific data sets: participant observations of public demonstrations; semi structured interviews with mediums; and medium autobiographies. These data sets were thought to compliment the social reality of spirit mediumship in everyday life: in the ways in which mediums present spirit contacts to their audiences, as well as through a discussion about such experiences with mediums in a one-on-one interview, or through readings of their autobiographies (Gilbert, 2008).

The main focus of this research was to explore spirit mediumship as a social phenomenon that is located both as a series of private experiences reported by a number of individuals, and the use of such experiences in public performances. Because of such, my interests were not concerned with whether or not mediums could scientifically prove that they were in contact with a real, interactive spirit world, but rather it treated the spirit world as

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

something that is sociological real and meaningful to these individuals and their audiences. As McClenon (1994) has argued:

“Sociologists and anthropologists are often unable to determine if their informants are lying or have reconstructed their memories of events... If observers *believe* that a particular event occurred, than that event is sociologically real. It affects those who believe in it.” (McClenon, 1994: xi)

The move away from issues concerning scientific validity may seem to ignore what many researchers could argue is of crucial concern to mediumship research, but there are weaknesses to an approach that focuses primarily on this question. Information about the characteristics and personalities of spirit mediums has, for a long time, been under examined. While researchers such as Fontana (2003) argue that accounts from similar individuals – i.e. individuals who ascribe to a particular religious framework – are likely to be heavily biased and potentially unreliable, their accounts are nevertheless indicative of the belief systems of particular social groups, and give insight into personal means of making sense of their experiences and the world around them. To treat accounts as ‘sociologically real’ does not necessarily infer that we must consider them uncritically, but it does encourage us to give attention to beliefs that are sociologically real and meaningful for people, and not discard them as unimportant or in some way contaminated because of personal bias. Particularly for mediums, an affiliation with particular religious or spiritual frameworks reflects a process of meaning making and experience: rarely, it seems, do mediums enter in to such affiliations without a succession of meaningful experiences that encourage them to question their notions of reality. There are a number of social processes and experiences that influence individuals who become mediums, and it these social processes and experiences, and their relevance, that is of interest to agnostic social scientists. Looking into individuals’ backgrounds and gathering data about their life experiences, is an important part of understanding spirit mediumship sociologically. If we consider the experiences surrounding spirit mediumship as sociologically real, then we may be able to gain insight into this phenomena as something that ‘affects those who believe in it’, who do not necessarily operate in accordance with scientific experiments but do so in a number of specific social and private situations

While my doctoral project (Gilbert, 2008) was rather modest in its sample size (I attended 10 demonstrations, interviewed 17 mediums, and analyzed five autobiographies), there emerged a number of interesting features about the biographical experiences of contemporary spirit mediums, the ways in which they account for their spiritual experiences, and the dynamics of their performances of spirit communication. In this article, I have chosen to focus on some of the biographical features of medium accounts, and will aim here to highlight some of the processes relevant to understanding how individuals become practicing spirit mediums. It is difficult – perhaps even impossible – to provide a categorization of mediumistic characteristics that would be applicable and representative of all practicing mediums. Spirit mediumship is experienced and practiced by a variety of different people, from all walks of life. Experiences of spirit can also be highly individualized, and the ways in which mediums actually experience their spirit contacts differs from medium to medium, although the most common means are seeing, hearing and/or sensing spirit, and via thought transmission (i.e. mediums state that they often receive fragmented images from spirit that they must make sense of for their recipients). It is important to note that some of the findings discussed here were not applicable to all of the mediums I interviewed. However, they were significant for the majority, and so I would argue constitute an insight into the social lives of many contemporary spirit mediums.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Becoming a medium: Reflection on rites of passage

It has been suggested elsewhere that a number of psychic or spiritual practitioners have had spiritual experiences since early childhood (Emmons, 2000; Emmons & Emmons, 2003; McClenon, 1994). While some of my informants stated that their mediumship had been facilitated by a spontaneous spiritual experience later in life, the majority told me that they had first experienced spirit at an early age, often as young as 4 or 5. These experiences often occurred unexpectedly, for example, one of my informants' first apparitional encounters involved seeing a figure appear and walk through a wall while he was alone in his bedroom. Early spiritual experiences generally occur when the experient is alone, and my informants who had had such experiences during their childhood often stated that it was initially unexpected. Experiences of spirit did not usually involve communication, rather, the experient was simply aware that they had seen, heard or sensed something unusual.

What was also typical about these early spiritual experiences is that they often became a source of concern for the experient. Many of the mediums I spoke to stated that they were well aware of social prejudices about such experiences, and understood that what they had experienced was not something typical of everyday life. In some cases, informants would state that they distanced themselves from their experiences, as it made them question their mental health or was thought that it might jeopardize their respectability. In instances where they had reported their experiences to others, it was typical that such was met with a degree of discomfort, and that they were advised to keep such things to themselves (see also Emmons, 2000). In instances, however, where their reports were met with a more sympathetic response, it was still common for mediums to be unsure of what they had experienced. In all cases, the mediums I spoke to did not consider themselves to have genuine mediumistic abilities until later in life.

Most of the accounts I collected suggested that there is a significant gap between these early spirit experiences and the period whereby individuals come to accept that they have mediumistic abilities. This seems influenced, primarily, by their own acceptance, the active acceptance of others, and a developmental period – usually facilitated within a development class or group – where they learn how to harness communicative abilities with spirit contacts. Such development periods orientate towards a socialization of mediumship as performance, where fledgling mediums learn how to perform mediumship publically, and gain social approval as to the authenticity of their abilities.

The vast majority of mediums that I spoke to cited the relevance of an already established medium who recognized their as yet untapped potential. Often, they cited that this acknowledgement came unexpectedly. Typically, this acknowledgement came during a Spiritualist meeting or public demonstration of mediumship, during which time one of the established mediums would tell them that they themselves had mediumistic abilities that they should develop. It was not clear from the accounts what facilitated this interaction, but the accounts seemed to stress that this was important as they had not previously considered that they had mediumistic potential. Also, many mediums explained that their attendance at such Spiritualist activities was not motivated by their own curiosity about potentially having mediumistic abilities, again, they seemed to stress that they were not actually expecting or looking to be recognized as a potential medium. Most of the mediums I interviewed displayed an awareness of potential negative inferences that could be made about their identity as mediums, i.e. that they were predisposed to favoring paranormal explanations, were easily suggestible, etc. On the contrary, their accounts stressed that they had maintained a high level of criticism about mediumship, were well aware of other possible explanations for their experiences, but that it was the persistence of experiences that could not be

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

explained as anything other than evidence of spirit, that led them to accept they had mediumistic abilities (for a similar discussion regarding individuals reporting paranormal experiences see Wooffitt, 1992). A number of reasons were given as to why they had become involved in Spiritualist activities, and it was typical for mediums to cite that they were motivated by other concerns, for example, a family member had been recently bereaved and they were looking to support them, they were taken by friends, or that they were simply curious about seeing mediumship in action.

The significance of legitimating others seems extremely important to contemporary mediums (see also Emmons, 2000). Their accounts suggest an initial reluctance to accept their experiences at face value, though they prioritize experience as a key to knowledge. They are critical about accepting a belief in spirits until they feel they have exhausted all other potential explanations. Undergoing a developmental period seems important for mediums not simply because it enables them to hone their skills and learn how to perform spirit communication, but because it provides a social arena whereby others are able to provide their own experiential proof for the mediums' claims. My findings suggest that becoming a medium is as much about being recognized and legitimized by others as an authentic spirit communicator as it is in finding a role for their abilities. The experience of others is just as important as the mediums' own experience, particularly during the developmental period (see also Emmons, 2000). While the pursuit of authenticity from recipients seems an ongoing concern, – interaction between mediums and recipients needs positive affirmation from the recipient in order to be successful (see Wooffitt, 2006) – it is also crucial that they find support and validation from others who constitute a supportive community. The performance of mediumship is not a solitary interactive act, and it is surely significant that the vast majority of mediumship demonstrations are hinged upon audience participation. Mediumship, after all, generally orientates toward engaging others in a positive therapeutic interaction with their beloved dead. Mediumship performances operate in conjunction with others, and the actions and responses of the selected recipient and other audience members are important if such a demonstration is to work effectively (see Wooffitt, 2006). As Meintel (2007) states "...clairvoyance is a *social* experience. Apart from the fact that several people may perceive the same invisible phenomenon at the same time, there is the unspoken communion that is necessary in order to give clairvoyance to another." (Meintel, 2007: 155).

Conclusion

What the interview data seems to stress is that individuals are not born believing that they are mediums. While many may believe that some people are born with potential, this is different to becoming a medium, for individuals may have mediumistic potential or experiences and yet do not develop into mediums. The developmental period is important as a rite of initiation, both for the mediums' acceptance of their identity, and for their acceptance by others. Those who have early spiritual experiences seem to regard them as a source of uncertainty. This does not necessarily mean that they deny the existence of spirits, rather, that they do not come to the conclusion that these experiences mean that they have mediumistic abilities. Becoming a medium relates to being accepted and legitimized. This involves being recognized by someone who is already established as a spiritual practitioner, and ongoing experiential proof from others who are involved in the development of their mediumistic abilities, as well as selected recipients of spirit messages. It is after they have been recognized, and others have affirmed the authenticity of their messages from spirit, that mediums start to accept their identity as a spirit medium.

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

These issues are only a very small example of the kinds of findings an agnostic social scientific approach to the study of spirit mediumship may yield. Such approaches raise a number of important questions, and I sincerely hope that more researchers will become involved in this field of study: spirit mediumship is still an area ripe for research. Contemporary mediums have fascinating accounts, and should be sought more keenly as gatekeepers to the social world in which they operate. Research adopting an agnostic social scientific approach has suggested that using such an approach can provide new, perhaps unexpected, insights that may encourage a more holistic and detailed understanding regarding the phenomenon of spirit mediumship (e.g. Emmons & Emmons, 2003; Hunter, 2009; McMullin, 2004; Meintel, 2007).

References

- Barrow, L. (1986) *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910*. London: Routledge.
- Bourke, J (2007) “‘Rachel comforted’: Spiritualism and the ‘reconstruction of the body after death’ In M. Mitchell (ed) *Remember Me: Constructing Immortality. Beliefs on Immortality, Life, and Death*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 51-63
- Carroll, B.E. (2000) “A higher power to feel”: Spiritualism, grief, and Victorian manhood, *Men and Masculinities*, 3 (1): 3-29
- Cerullo, J.J. (1982) *The Secularization of the Soul: Psychical Research in Modern Britain*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Emmons, C.F. (2000) On becoming a spirit medium in a “rational society”, *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 12 (1-2): 71-82
- Emmons, C.F. & Emmons, P. (2003) *Guided by Spirit: A Journey into the Mind of the Medium*. New York, Lincoln and Shanghai: Writers Club Press.
- Fontana, D. (2003) *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Gauld, A. (1982) *Mediums and Survival: A Century of Investigations*. London: Paladin.
- Gilbert, H. (2008) *Speaking of Spirits: Representations and Experiences of the Spirit World in British Spirit Mediumship*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York.
- Hazelgrove, J. (2000) *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars*. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Hunter, J. (2009) *Talking with the Spirits: An Experiential Exploration of Contemporary Trance and Physical Mediumship*, unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Bristol.
- McClenon, J. (1994) *Wondrous Events: Foundations of Religious Belief*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- McMullin, S. (2004) *Anatomy of a Séance: A History of Spirit Communication in Canada*. McGill-Queen’s University Press

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Meintel, D. (2007) 'When the extraordinary hits home: Experiencing Spiritualism' In J.-G. A. Goulet & B. G. Miller (eds) *Extraordinary Anthropology: Transformations in the Field*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 124-157

Owen, A. (1990) *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Wooffitt, R. (1992) *Telling Tales of the Unexpected: The Organisation of Factual Discourse*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Wooffitt, R. (2006) *The Language of Mediums and Psychics: The Social Organisation of Everyday Miracles*. Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate

A Critical Look at the State of Paranormal Investigation - Setting the Higher Standard

By George Matthis, President, Paranormal Resource Alliance

I am frequently asked what I think about the new ghost hunting/paranormal reality shows that seemingly pop up every few months on network, cable or satellite television. My answer is always the same: they are a mixed blessing. While these shows have been a real boon for bringing more people “out of the closet” to talk about their personal experiences and providing new locations to investigate, they have also created another headache for the serious, ethical and professional investigation organization. Basically, the misconception by many is that if it can be done on television, then after watching a couple of episodes of the latest hit series, I can do it too! Proof of this phenomenon may easily be found on the Internet. A recent Internet search on North Carolina groups alone indicates over the last year, the number of organizations, groups and teams have more than doubled. MySpace, Facebook, MeetUp and other social networks are choked with these ghost hunter wannabe groups, most of whom will probably cause no problems as they understand and acknowledge their limitations and generally care about other people.

So who are these people and where do their true interests lie when it comes to ghost hunting? It is my observation as well as others in the field that “ghost hunters” can probably be identified as fitting within three categories: thrill seekers, serious investigators and serious researchers. Overlap seems to occur between each of these areas of interest, and many people I have talked to actually find themselves progressing through each category at some point in their “career”.



There is absolutely nothing wrong with filling the shoes of any of these categories, until one misrepresents themselves as something they are not. The thrill seeker who offers to help a distraught family and doesn't know where to turn for help may actually create a worse situation in the long run. As Loyd Auerbach states in his book *Ghost Hunting: How to Investigate the Paranormal*, “Do Your Best and Do Your Best to Do No Harm” □. This motto should be the mantra of all investigation groups.

Assuming one has decided which classification they are most comfortable operating within, we would hope they would also try to be civil and show some respect towards other colleagues in the field. Of course, as in any trade or profession it seems that there are always those that are envious of others and behave in a juvenile or malicious manner. Many other paranormal investigators have remarked about the blatant lack of respect and

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

professionalism between some groups and their members— those that behave as “paranormal terrorists” and attack other investigators or groups for motives only they understand. A recent blog by Dan Jungles, founder and lead investigator of the Will County Ghost Hunters Society (Chicago, Illinois) points out that there is a great deal of bitterness, jealousy and hatred in the paranormal field. He theorizes that when a group is successful in their endeavors and are recognized by the media or asked to make public presentations at venues such as libraries, members of those groups who do not present themselves in a professional and ethical manner lash out at those who have worked hard to gain visibility as respectable organizations. Jungles writes, “My suggestion to all those in the paranormal field, is simply worry about yourself. If people would spend even a fraction of the time and effort of researching and conducting investigations, as they do with worrying about what other people and individuals are doing they might just accomplish something. Be happy when other individuals and groups gather evidence. It proves exactly what you are trying to do yourselves.”²

Then there are those groups that believe they can only be successful by exaggerating their background or accomplishments. I know of one group whose founder uses the name of a fictional person who he believes tried to contact him from the other side. This ploy more than doubled the actual number of members in the group. Moreover this founder indicated the group was established about 10 years prior to the actual start-up date: all of which can be documented with various emails sent to colleagues. Honesty clearly takes a back seat in many situations such as these.

Many sites that were previously available for general investigation have been lost in recent years as a result of poor work ethic and lack of professionalism by untrained investigation teams, thrill seeking social based meetup groups and curious ghost hunters. The Civil War era Fort Fisher Historic Site in North Carolina, once an easy location to access for paranormal investigating, is now off limits for this type of activity; the Battleship North Carolina now only allows paranormal teams access to the public tour route. Concern for the loss of valuable artifacts and destruction of property are the reasons given for these actions. Many more important locations may be lost unless action is taken to educate and promote professionalism and ethics in our own field.

We live in a time where anyone who wants to declare they are a medium or psychic can charge a fee to conduct readings, some even over the phone – remember Ms. Cleo? - and who prey upon people who are distressed about deceased loved ones and desperately want to make contact with them. And for free, you too, can become an ordained minister from any one of the Internet-based theological seminaries! One even advertises that your new title could be Ordained Celtic Druid Minister, Shaman, or Psychic Minister so that you can provide spiritual counseling, readings or rely on divination in your pastoral counseling practice. In a 2008 article in the *New York Daily News*, three Brooklyn –based “ghost buster” types who learned their skills from two of the popular paranormal reality shows indicate they charge \$20 an hour to chase away unwanted spirits³. How long will it be before we see more unscrupulous paranormal investigation groups trying to charge for their questionable work?

What can we do to address these types of negative situations and put a more positive face on our passion for helping others, searching for answers about life after death, and even satisfying personal curiosity about hauntings, apparitions and poltergeists? One is to work together to promote the professionalism and ethics that serious paranormal investigators would like to see adopted by all groups and members alike.

In October of 2008 I sent mass emails to many paranormal organizations across the state of North Carolina and in some cases beyond, outlining the need for an association of investigation groups to tackle these issues. Many

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

groups were wary of an association, and no doubt feared this effort would be an attempt to control how groups operated. As many have now witnessed, the concern was unfounded. In early 2009, a meeting between paranormal investigation and research organizations from across the state and representatives from the Rhine Research Center was convened in Raleigh, North Carolina to lay the groundwork for what would become the Paranormal Resource Alliance, or PRA, for short.



One of the first results was the creation of a mission statement that reads "The member organizations of the Paranormal Resource Alliance have agreed to adhere to a professional code of ethics and standards in the scientifically based study of paranormal phenomena. We pride ourselves in sharing the necessary resources to provide thorough investigations to our members and the public."

Another objective was to develop a set of standards or principles that all serious, professional investigation organizations should agree to adhere to when conducting their business. The use of standards is not a new concept among professionals such as geologists, engineers, private investigators, home inspectors, even cosmetologists (hair dressers!). Certainly if these professionals can agree to and adopt standards, paranormal investigation organizations could do so as well! Subsequently, the PRA has approved and posted to its web site a set of principles which includes a code of conduct and two sets of guidelines that discuss report writing and investigation generalities.

Further activities to benefit member investigation organizations include the development of an evidence review evaluation and certification process. This process allows an organization to confidentially submit evidence to a five member panel of third party reviewers who rate and determine the overall strength of the evidence and award various levels of certification that the material demonstrates the presence of paranormal activity. Organizations can display this rating on their web site as documentation of their ability to collect valid evidence and further demonstrate their professionalism in the field.

Along similar lines, the PRA has also begun development of a peer reviewed data repository. Member organizations would have the ability to upload into this database various types of paranormal data, such as audio and photographic files, that can be shared in confidence with other investigators and researchers. This will be an invaluable tool for groups to use to obtain feedback from other groups, and to present data in various similar categories to those individuals who are conducting research on paranormal activity.

The PRA has lofty but achievable goals for the future. As our membership grows and we work together with our affiliate organizations that currently include the Rhine Research Center and the Windbridge Institute, we look towards developing a formal certification process for investigation organizations that isn't just a "piece of paper"

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

obtained on-line for \$50 ala the ordained minister approach. We see a process not unlike that used by other professional organizations, complete with continuing education opportunities and a professional conference that differs in content from the current crop of ghost hunting conferences. We also see ourselves in a role similar to a “better business bureau” for the paranormal investigation community – not as policing the field but offering advice and reaching out to those who may have strayed from the path of professional service.

If you belong to or know of a paranormal investigation organization that would like to network with other serious investigators, would like to provide security and peace of mind for those in need, and strive to be professional and adhere to a code of conduct, consider joining the PRA as we move towards the future. Together, cohesively, we can raise the standard of paranormal investigation, make this field more respectable, and try to gain acceptance by mainstream science.

Contact us at info@paranormal-resource-alliance.com, or visit our web page at www.paranormal-resource-alliance.com.

References

¹ Auerbach, Loyd - *Ghost Hunting: How to Investigate the Paranormal*. Ronin Publishing. 2003.

² Jungles, Dan. Will County Ghost Hunters Society. Ghost Hunters Blog. November 1, 2009.
<http://www.ghostpage.com/apps/blog/>

³ Stephanie Gaskill. *New York Daily News*. March 4, 2008.
http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/brooklyn/2008/03/04/2008-03-04_brooklynbased_paranormalists_will_clear.html

Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine

Volume 2 / Issue 1 - March 2010

Sports Superstars & Sixth Sense

By Chrisanne Gordon, M.D.

We all love our sports heroes! We marvel at their agility, stand in awe of their ability, and often stare in disbelief at the wonders of their moves, their neuromuscular genius, so to speak. Whenever I see Adrian Peterson break through the defensive line in a series of complex zigs and zags to the end zone, I ask, HOW did he know that path would open up? When LeBron James passes behind his back to a player who just "happens to land" exactly where and when the basketball arrives, I am puzzled. Did LeBron "sense" his teammate would be there? As I observed Misty May-Treanor and her beach volleyball teammate, Kerri Walsh, win the gold medal in the Beijing Olympics I kept wondering how they could not only "sense" each other's moves, but the moves of their opponents as well. Something strange, something intangible sets these superstars apart from the other super athletes in their respective sports. All elite athletes share a combination of superior peripheral vision, phenomenal hand-eye coordination, incredible reflexes, and super human stamina. But these TOP of the GAME athletes have something more.... something I call the "*Sports Superstar Sixth Sense*"; the inexplicable ability to "see" what will happen before it does; to see a play unfold or a teammate's move BEFORE it occurs. THAT ability, to see the future, perhaps by only a couple milliseconds before the rest, is what, I believe, allows us to have Super Stars among the elite athletes.

My theory began the first time I observed a TV commercial starring NBA basketball great, Bill Russell. What Bill Russell proclaimed remains with me to this day. The commercial aired a while back, and I may be paraphrasing him a bit. As I recall, Mr. Russell explained how he became the World's GREATEST NBA Defensive player of all times

"I made the rebound before the ball ever left their hands."

THAT, Mr. Russell, I totally believe. I believe you possessed that "Sports Sixth Sense" and you were NOT afraid to use it. I believe, you actually revealed your secret weapon to us; you anticipated the future; you trusted your instincts.

Of course, I cannot argue with the nay sayers and skeptics. I have no charts, no measurements; no graphs to prove my theory. But please just do me this one favor.... The next time you see David Beckham totally out maneuver his opponents and sail the ball just outside of reach of the goalie who moves ever so slightly to the right as Beckham shoots to the left.... just STOP. Watch it again on instant replay if you must, and then tell me, What do YOU think just happened ?

Chrisanne Gordon, MD, specializes in Rehabilitation Medicine and lives in Ohio, though she is engaged her in work across the US. She has a particular interest in the current US wounded veterans who are returning from the battlefields with TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Largely as an extension of her work with wounded brains, Dr. Gordon has developed a personal interest in the experiences of PreCognition which are sometimes reported by elite athletes of many sports. RRC is very pleased that she has chosen us as her partner to further explore this phenomenon among SuperStars, initially through a series of select interviews. We anticipate that extremely interesting and valuable stories will be told.