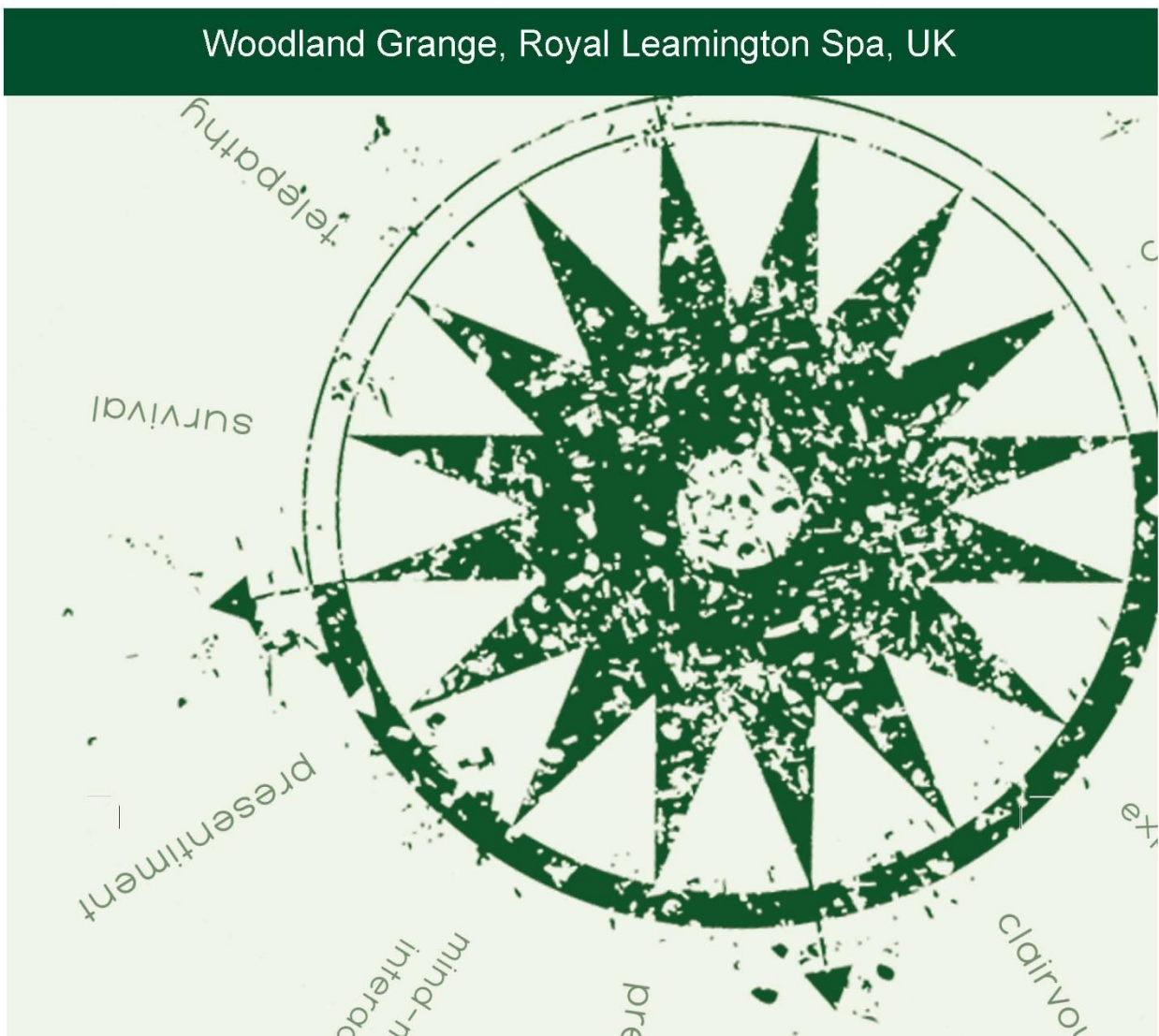


Book of Abstracts



46th SPR International
Annual Conference

Woodland Grange, Royal Leamington Spa, UK



46th SPR International Annual Conference

10-12 November 2023

Programme

Programme Chairperson Adrian Parker

Friday 10 November

19.30 Welcome Drinks and Dinner

Saturday 11 November

Historical. Chairperson Callum Cooper

9.00 - 9.30 The King of Mediums: Franek Kluski, his Mediumship and the Survival Question. Michael Nahm PAGE 6

9.30 -10.00 Apparition and UFO/UAP: Hypothesis for their Common Underlying Mechanism. Simon Duan PAGE 6

10.00-10.30 'Who speaks from the dust?': Mediums in the Life and Work of Kathleen Raine. Eric McElroy PAGE 8

10.30.-11.00. BREAK

11:00-11.30. Can Thomas Aquinas' Views on Apparitions of the Dead Leave any Room for Psychical Research? Michael Potts PAGE 9

NDEs and ADEs. Chairperson Ann Winsper

11.30-12.00 An Update on Prolonged NDEs: "Being Alive When You are Cold and Dead". Annekatrin Puhle and Adrian Parker PAGE 10

12.00-12.30. Investigating After-Death Communication: An Analysis of Crisis Cases and a New German Sample. Sophie Morrison, Evelyn Elsaesser, Chris Roe, Callum Cooper & David Lorimer PAGE 11

12.30- 13.30 LUNCH

Invited Speaker: Edwin May

13:30 -14.00 Changes of Thermodynamic Entropy at a Physical Site Enhances the Quality of Psi for that Site. Edwin C. May, Laury Hawley & Sonali Bhatt Marwaha. PAGE 12

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- 15.30-16.00 Childhood Trauma and Paranormality: A Critical Review and Meta-analysis. Malcolm B. Schofield, Ian S. Baker, Paul Staples and David Sheffield PAGE 17
- 16.00-16.30 "They're not gonna want airy fairy stories": Childhood Anomalous Experiences and the Implications for Therapists Natalia Lavin and Rachel Evenden PAGE 18
- 16.30-17.00 Testing the theory of "first sight" using a retroactive priming task: Individual difference factors. Chris Roe, Deborah Patton, Matthew Hopkins, & David Vernon PAGE 20
- 17.00-18.00. **Panel Discussion:** "Ghosts and Poltergeists - Separate Entities or Potentially Elements of the Same Anomalous Power" Chaired by John Fraser with Alan Murdie, Annekatriin Puhle & Bernard Carr
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- 21.30. **Invited Address.** The Day Before the Paradigm-Shift by Terje Toftenes, New Paradigm Films, Oslo.

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- 9.30 -10.00 Spontaneous Case Committee Report Case 354: ADC? EMF, EVP (Ovilus). Aaron Lomas P23
- 10.00-10.30 Disappearing Vehicles and Reappearing People (or Go Home, Time, You're Drunk!) Ann R Winsper PAGE 24
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Chairperson Adrian Parker

Where Are we Heading: A "discordant farrago", or waiting for a "paradigm shift"?
Edwin C. May, Chris A. Roe, Ann Winsper

Introduction

It seems now inconceivable that the last SPR conference with physically present participants took place as long ago as 2019. This is of course a regrettable but an unavoidable consequence of the Covid years. Since the history of science shows that important and inspirational ideas often emerge from social interactions, I see it as an inspirational opportunity that such a conference is taking place this year. The hybrid conference combines the advantages of both direct social interaction and remote access for those who could not physically attend. The attractive location at Woodland Grange Hotel offers even a personal association by nature of its close proximity to Stratford-on-Avon when I consider that Shakespeare, because his extraordinarily modern insights into the nature of ghosts, can arguably be regarded the first psychical researcher.

The conference is unusually late in the year but that it is has come to fruition at all, given the practical difficulties in finding these dual facilities, is due to the perseverance and work of Peter Johnson. This was not an easy task to fulfill amongst the ever-growing demands on the role of SPR Secretary.

As was the case in Leicester, we again had 30 submissions for 20 slots which is hard on some of those making submissions and those selecting them, but a positive sign for the SPR. Adding to quality of the conference is the international slant provided by our invited speakers and several other contributors. Edwin May is now legendary in this field and one of the few who succeeded in making this field his profession. His contributions are based on hands-on experience of seeing psi-events in action and he will give us a physicist's understanding of the phenomena. Terje Toftenes is a well-known award-winning Norwegian film producer whose documentaries relate to the nature of consciousness and was recently an invited speaker for the Parapsychological Association.

You will find the presentations fall conveniently and naturally under the headings of Historical aspects, Experimental & Theoretical aspects, NDEs & ADEs, Spontaneous Cases, more Experimental contributions, and Mediumship. We round off the conference with a panel discussion, taking up Terje's paradigm change theme versus my friend Jim Alcock's perception of a "discordant farrago".

Finally, I wish to give a big thank you to the members of the Conference Programme Committee who helped put together the conference and to John Fraser for the panel on poltergeists and apparitions.

Welcome and enjoy!

Adrian Parker
Programme Chair

The King of Mediums: Franek Kluski, his Mediumship and the Survival Question

Michael Nahm

Polish Medium Franek Kluski (1873-1943) is one of the best-known historical mediums for physical phenomena. This is largely due to the work of Gustave Geley, who published numerous photographs of hand forms of materialised “phantoms” that appeared at Kluski’s sittings. A much more extensive Polish book on Kluski’s mediumship published in 1926 by Norbert Okołowicz (1890-1943) is considerably less known. The author was a regular participant in Kluski’s séances for several years and he described phenomena that occurred through three different phases of Kluski’s mediumship during sittings held from 1919 to 1925. Hence, Okołowicz related much information and details about Kluski’s mediumship that are virtually unknown in the West. He even described several occurrences that were observed outside the context of sittings with Kluski, even in good light conditions.

In recent years, Zofia Weaver translated Okołowicz’s book into English. Along with Introductions written by Dr Weaver and me, a translated edition of this volume is now published as an output of a grant provided by the Survival Research Committee of the Society for Psychical Research. In this presentation, I first provide an overview on the phenomena that Okołowicz reported from Kluski’s mediumship. They included psychical influences on compass needles and galvanometers in full light, knocks on furniture and hitting of typewriter keys without touch in full light, lights floating around Kluski in the dark also outside of séances, eight different types of luminous phenomena occurring during séances including very peculiar luminous mists, strong physical phenomena and apports, materialisations of animals in the séance room, and virtually hundreds of different apparitions of human phantoms. Furthermore, I address controversies surrounding Kluski’s most famous mediumistic output, the production of paraffin gloves of such phantoms’ hands and feet.

Second, I discuss Kluski’s mediumship in a more general context, namely, the implications of ostensibly materialised apparitions in sittings for physical mediumship for survival. To this end, I introduce the seminal work of Emil Mattiesen (1875-1939), who devoted 308 pages of his monumental three-volume treatise on human survival after death to the question of the objectivity of apparitions. He distinguished two concepts of apparitions: autophanies and heterophanies. The first type concerns “self-apparitions”, i.e. apparitions generated by the appearing entities themselves. Autophanies would therefore provide evidence for survival. Heterophanies, on the other hand, would be generated externally by minds who are different from the manifested apparition. From the perspective of the hypothesis that is called living-agent psi, for example, all apparitions of the deceased must be regarded as heterophanies. One interesting argument of Mattiesen, who frequently referred to Kluski’s phenomena, runs like this: It must be considered to be very unlikely that the subconscious of living people such as the sitters in Kluski’s séances would have the capacity to create perfect apparitions or materialisations of animals. Hence, materialised animals would very likely represent autophanies. Furthermore, if apparitions of animals are best considered to be autophanies, this would lend strong evidence for the possibility that also at least some human apparitions represent autophanies as well.

Finally, I conclude this presentation with a few comments on the significance of apparitions for biology.

Apparition and UFO/UAP: Hypothesis for their Common Underlying Mechanism

Simon Duan PhD, Metacomputics Labs
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There has been growing interest and acceptance of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) or unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP) by Governments and mainstream media in recent years.

"UFOs exist and everyone must get used to this fact," headlined the prestigious US daily newspaper Washington Post in May 2019.

"Some of these uncharacterized UAP appear to have demonstrated unusual flight characteristics or performance capabilities, and require further analysis", stated the Pentagon's "2022 Annual Report on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena".

Having obtained reliable data on hundreds of incidents from multiple sensors and sources, Pentagon has now officially recognised UFOs as a factual phenomenon.

Serious scientific analysis of data gathered by the US Navy and Air Force has revealed that UFOs can travel up to 20 times the speed of sound, move zigzag, go and swim underwater, drop 80 000 feet within a few seconds, and appear and disappear suddenly.

There appear to be considerable phenomenological overlaps between UAP and apparition. In cases of apparition, ghostly entities or phenomena can also appear and disappear suddenly, exhibiting unusual, mysterious, or supernatural behaviour.

It is suggested that the apparition studied by parapsychology and UAP being investigated officially might share the same fundamental principle and operate by the same mechanism. The knowledge gained from researching one field should be transferable to the other. The formal recognition and acceptance of UFO/UAP will also benefit apparition phenomena being taken seriously by mainstream scientific community.

As UFOs defy the known laws of physics and astronomy, it has been very difficult for scientists to explain the phenomena using materialist science. Similarly, apparitions are not easily explained by natural or normal means based on the existing materialist paradigm. It has become evident that a new post-materialism paradigm is needed in order to account for both of these domains of study.

It is hypothesised that UAP and apparition are nonphysical in nature and originated from parallel universes. According to the Platonic computation model, the creation is a multiverse consisting of multiple parallel universes. Each universe is rendered by the Platonic computer operating at a given clock speed and vibrating at a given frequency. The physical universe is rendered using a "physics engine" in the Platonic computer, whereas other parallel universes would operate on different rulesets and algorithms, and thus may not obey the laws of physics.

There are two scenarios when UAP/apparition are perceived, one is that UFOs/nonphysical entities alter their vibration frequency from their default frequency to that of the physical universe; the other is that some humans happen to tune in to the default frequency of the UFOs/nonphysical entities of the parallel universe. The latter scenario also explains the phenomenon of time abnormally experienced by "abductees".

Carl Jung had a perspective on UFOs that he explored in his writings. Jung saw UFOs and related phenomena as manifestations of the collective unconscious. He saw these phenomena as important for understanding the human psyche and the significance of symbolic experiences in personal and cultural contexts. It is argued that Jung's view is consistent with the interpretation based on the Platonic computer model.

About the speaker

Dr Simon Duan is the founder and CEO of Metacomputics Labs researching a post-materialism paradigm that unifies consciousness, mind and matter. He has developed the hypothesis known as “Platonic computation”. The Platonic computer that renders the cosmos is made by, of, with and from Consciousness. Further details on www.metacomputics.com

Metacomputics Labs is also developing new post-materialism technologies to help people transcend The Matrix, reprogram the rendering engine, and better control mundane reality. These technologies are being applied to spiritual and personal development, innovative healing and healthcare practice, metaverse and artificial intelligence.

Dr Duan came from China to the UK to study in the 1980s. After receiving a PhD in Materials Science from Cambridge University, he worked for many years in research and development, technology commercialisation and management consultancy in both the UK and China.

Dr Duan has long-standing interests in paranormal research and has been closely involved in the Chinese Psi research community for over 20 years. He is a past vice president of the Chinese parapsychology association.

‘Who speaks from the dust?’: Mediums in the Life and Work of Kathleen Raine

Eric McElroy

The poet and scholar Kathleen Raine (1908-2003) held a public stance toward mediumship that may be described as one of soft agnosticism. Raine’s private writings, however, reveal a complex and far more sympathetic position toward telepathy, divination, and the possibility of life after death than has previously been appreciated. In the early 1960s, Raine began visiting several mediums across London. These visits were prompted by the casual suggestion of a recently widowed friend, although Raine’s intersection with mediumship was, in many ways, a logical extension of her scholarly and personal interest in Neoplatonism, the Kabbalah, and Theosophy. Like those esoteric traditions, Raine suspected that the scientific study of mediums had been deliberately dismissed by academe. Raine’s private investigation of mediumship thus constituted in part a personal effort to test the discipline’s claims for herself.

Raine reflected sceptically on her initial encounters with mediums in private writings, supplementing her personal experience by reading widely in contemporary literature on psychical studies and by corresponding with committee members from both the Society for Psychical Research and the College of Psychic Studies. Following the death of her friend Gavin Maxwell in 1969, Raine’s interest in mediumship gained new purpose as she sought explanations to quell her sense of guilt in having contributed, or so Raine feared, through necromancy to Maxwell’s premature death. Over the next six years, she conducted numerous sessions with the renowned medium Ena Twigg (1918-1984). Raine scrupulously documented these sessions, transcribing from tape-recordings her conversations with the spirits of dead relatives, friends, and lovers. Her commentary on these transcripts includes reflections on the practice of mediumship, on the possibility of life after death, and on the peculiar relationship between mediums and the spirits with whom they converse. Raine’s commentary also reveals her struggle to objectively gauge the truth of mediumistic experience, chronicling attempts to verify the accuracy of Twigg’s communications through the solicitation of automatic writing from a blind third party. Throughout, Raine strove to present her experience of mediumship in a scholarly light, although the intensely personal subject matter in these sessions made it, by Raine’s own admission, exceedingly difficult to discern what

was true and what she merely wished to be true. This ambiguity haunted Raine and inspired some of the finest poetry of her later decades.

While Raine hoped to one day reveal her writings about mediums to the public, and to that end prepared a preliminary manuscript, they remained unpublished. This paper is therefore the first to chronicle and critically address Raine's experience of mediumship. Through extensive archival research, it documents Raine's interactions with mediums and reviews Raine's idiosyncratic methodology, contextualizing her at-times contradictory statements on the subject. Setting the verity of Raine's episodes to one side, this paper concludes by briefly demonstrating the undeniable effect of these sessions on Raine's personal and creative lives. In doing so, it raises questions about the intimate relationship between mediums and their sitters as well as about the peculiar correspondence between mediumship and creativity, thus filling a substantial gap in our understanding of one of the most significant and controversial figures in twentieth-century British letters.

Can Thomas Aquinas' Views on Apparitions of the Dead Leave Any Room for Psychical Research?

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Thomas Aquinas' acceptance of a primarily Aristotelian conception of cognition and of the powers of the discarnate human soul force him to hold that psi abilities (with the odd exception of precognition) are supernatural abilities that God must directly supply. Although he believes that some apparitions of the dead are genuine, he holds they are supernatural, not natural, events. That is, when they occur, God must give permission for the dead to appear and give them the power either (1) to telepathically project themselves in dreams or (2) to materialize in some way and appear to the living directly through a material or quasi-material bodily form God supplies. This approach excludes scientific study of putative apparitions of the dead since science methodologically rules out supernatural (here, phenomena involving God's primary causality) causes. A key issue is: Can Aquinas' views on apparitions be reconciled with the goals of psychical research? In its current form they cannot and require modification to allow for apparitions of the dead to be natural phenomena. Human souls, including discarnates, are themselves natural objects for Aquinas, and he already accepts precognition as natural—why not other psi abilities? If they are natural, they are subject to secondary causes (the laws of nature) like any other natural phenomena. As for the discarnate's physical presence being the cause of an apparition, Aquinas could have referenced Tertullian, Solomon ibn Gabirol, and Bonaventure, all who believed that the soul is either made of fine material (like fire or air, a view held by Tertullian) or composed of form and "spiritual matter" (ibn Gabirol, Bonaventure). Psychical research also offers resources both for a telepathic approach (Edmund Gurney, and G. N. M. Tyrell, if his view is modified to include genuine apparitions of the dead) and for the apparition being a material or quasi-material object (Frederick Meyers, C. D. Broad at times, and G. R. S. Mead). The concluding section answers objections that contemporary Thomists might propose including (1) the proposal ignores good theological reasons Aquinas gives for considering apparitions of the dead to be supernatural phenomena, and (2) the objection that the proposal assumes a form of positivism, that science is the only reliable source of knowledge. The first objection is answered using Thomist theologians' own assumptions—an apparition of the dead can be in part natural due to natural powers being expressed and partly supernatural in that God restrains those natural powers until God has a reason not to do so. The second is answered by denying that the proposal implies

any form of positivism and is compatible with other disciplines, including the Humanities, providing knowledge of the world.

An Update on Prolonged NDEs: “Being Alive When You are Cold and Dead”

Annekatriin Puhle and Adrian Parker

A major impasse in current research on Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), which are currently being reframed as “Recalled Experiences of Death” (REDs) is that the medication given at cardiac arrests severely reduces memory recall of experiences during surgical operations. A review of current research in this field reveals the enigma that veridical perceptions are often reported during these REDs and cognitive activity is beyond what might be expected from brain devoid of brain stem reflexes and cortical activity. Yet it can still be argued that some subcortical areas are responsible for the experiences reported and thus the claims of ESP are illusory. It is proposed here that a means of resolving some of the basic issues, is to focus on cases of resuscitation with prolonged accidental hypothermia due to drowning, snow avalanches and similar events. In these cases, brain activity is literally frozen and according to conventional neuropsychological belief, then REDs would not occur. *We do not know if they do.*

Interventions in Norway pioneered the use of gradual re-warming of the brain prior to the re-starting of the heart with the record of recovery from cardiac arrest being nearly 7 hours. Much credit in accelerating this advance is due to the case of Anna Bågenholm who, while skiing in Norway, became wedged in an ice hole and suffered severe and prolonged hypothermia (anal temperature 13.7°C). She was subject to more than 2 hours of cardiac arrest, her body temperature was gradually raised successively in units of ten degrees. Bågenholm survived without any major sequelae. The case received much media attention and a detailed report on the case was published in *The Lancet* (Gilbert, Busund, Nilsen, 2000). The favourable result pioneered resuscitation practice and led to the much-improved success rate in the treatment of accidental hypothermia as shown by Norwegian follow-up studies (Hilmo, Naesheim & Gilbert 2014). This has been extended to the treatment of cases due to drowning with hypothermia, cardiac arrest and asphyxiation. Further publicized cases have been recorded in Denmark where seven children recovered from a boating accident (Wanscher et al, 2012) and on the Swedish-Norwegian border concerning three children in a similar boating accident (Carlsen et al, 2017). The record for surviving lengthy cardiac arrest is now given as seven hours.

The dictum became “You are not dead until you are warm and dead” - which we rephrase in the title here as “being alive when you are cold and dead”. Similar interventions have been used successfully also in mountainous and lake areas in Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Austria. Medical induced hypothermia is moreover an accepted procedure in interventions where treatment CPR is applied but the treatment of arrests is delayed.

Given accident rates, it is expected that there are now at least several hundred cases during the last twenty years in the regions mentioned. It is however not customary in medical post-operational assessment to ask or to report patient experiences. However, the project is aided by some authoritative guidelines and recommendations for dealing with this issue of patients’ experiences were recently (2022) published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. These guidelines will be followed in this project. The project aims to collect any such cases and to spread information in accordance with these guidelines. Cases will primarily be obtained through internet interest groups and journalistic

contacts in the above countries mentioned. Where possible medical records would be requested in deference to the usual ethical requirements. Any resulting cases will be analyzed with the conventional scale used for REDs and compared to those obtained in cases of cardiac arrest hypothermia.

Investigating After-Death Communication: an Analysis of Crisis Cases and a New German Language Sample¹

Sophie Morrison,^b Evelyn Elsaesser,^a Chris A. Roe,^b Callum E. Cooper,^b & David Lorimer^c

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A spontaneous After-Death Communication (ADC) occurs when someone unexpectedly perceives a deceased person. This may be through the senses of sight, hearing, smell, or touch, but experiencers might simply “feel the presence” of the deceased person or have an impression of having received a contact or a communication, for example during sleep. The deceased person is perceived in a manner that is typically interpreted by experiencers as indicative of the continued survival of some aspect of that person. We have reported on ADCs at previous SPR events, noting that they are quite common, especially among those who have suffered a bereavement, and have been reported in different cultures and times. We have reported on the phenomenology and impact of such experiences, noting that they are typically regarded as positive events that have helped the experiencer come to terms with their loss. Patterns identified in case collections may reflect features of the sampling strategy rather than characteristics of the phenomenon itself. It is important then, to attempt to replicate those patterns with new samples, particularly where the new samples may be distinct in some way. To this end, we have created a German-language version of our ADC survey, and will compare findings from this sample of 235 completed responses with those found in the 991 cases from the English, Spanish and French versions of the survey.

Of particular interest to the SPR is the question of whether spontaneous ADC cases can provide robust and valid evidence that addresses the issue of whether some aspect of personality does, indeed, survive bodily death. Of course, the vast majority of experiencers are convinced of the authenticity of their experience, but ADCs are by nature intrinsically subjective, and therefore susceptible to explanation in terms of misperception and misrecall, or as a psychological response to a deep emotional need. There are, however, some types of ADCs that are more resistant to explanation in such terms and are therefore more evidential with respect to the survival hypothesis. These include a) contacts during which previously unknown information is perceived (such as the unexpected passing of the perceived deceased person); b) contacts witnessed simultaneously by more than one person; and c) contacts that occur when the experiencer is not in bereavement (e.g., perception of unknown deceased persons) so that a psychodynamic explanation is implausible. This presentation will focus on new ‘crisis’ cases that occurred around the time of the perceived person’s death, which may involve previously unknown information such as the fact of the person’s demise and the mode of their passing and will attempt to draw a conclusion regarding the degree to which it supports the survival hypothesis.

¹ We should like to acknowledge the kind support of the SPR’s Survival Committee, the Bial Foundation (169/2020), and a foundation that does not wish to be named publicly for their support, which has enabled us to conduct this research project.

Additional information about the ADC project can be found at www.adcrp.org or in the following publications.

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Changes of Thermodynamic Entropy at a Physical Site Enhances the Quality of Psi for that Site

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Entropy is a measure of chaos—the more uncertain the situation, the greater the entropy. For example, in water-based ice, the molecules are all ordered into a crystal lattice; however, in water-based steam, the molecules are randomly chaotic. Thus, the entropy of steam is much larger than it is for ice.

I.M. Kogan (1968)¹ may have provided the first relationship between psi and changes of entropy. To test this notion, we conducted a Foundation BIAL-supported study using remote viewing (RV) against a pre-defined set of 22 natural sites in the San Francisco Bay area. Each site was assigned a single spot that a participant must stand during the feedback phase of a trial and the direction to focus the participant’s attention.

Three experienced participants were chosen to contribute 24 sessions each for a total of 72 sessions for the study.

All 22 sites were pre-consensus-coded into a fuzzy set according to a universal set of elements shown in Table

1. The metric for coding was the degree to which each element in Table 1 “characterized” the site.

Table 1. Universal Set of Elements for the Natural Bay Area Sites.

Buildings	Land/Water Interface	Roads/Paths
Bridges	Congested	Isolated
Repeat Motif	Prominent	Vegetation
Man-made	Natural	Geometry
	Towers	

The hypothesis under test is that a fast increase of thermodynamic entropy at a remote site improves the quality of RV at that site.

A single session was conducted as follows. LH served as an 'outbound' experimenter and randomly chose one of the 22 sites (with replacement) as the target site. On a counterbalanced schedule for each participant either three liters of liquid nitrogen (LN) would be poured into a container containing 2000 half-inch aluminum balls which create a sharp increase of thermodynamic entropy at that site, or nothing would be poured at the site.

Differing from traditional natural-site RV in which the participant used the outbound experimenter as a beacon on which to focus attention, the focus was changed to access and describe the first thing you see when you remove your blindfold.

The monitor (EM) and participant were blind to the target location and LN/no-LN condition for all sessions. EM secured the RV'ed response by coding the response using the USE in Table 1. The metric used to code the response was the degree to which each element in the USE was contained in the response. After the data were placed in a Microsoft Access database, an automatic text was sent to LH so she could return the target number of the feedback site and leave the site. Three concepts were computed for each session: Accuracy—the fraction of the site that was described correctly, Reliability—the fraction of the response that was correct, and the Figure of Merit (FoM)—the product of the two.

Wearing a high-quality blindfold, the participant was driven to the site by EM, led to the preselected spot, faced in the predefined direction, following which the blindfold was removed to see the feedback. In this study, we conducted 72 sessions, for 36 of which three liters of liquid nitrogen (LN) was dispensed in about eight seconds at the intended target site. The LN pours were counter balanced, but randomly determined, in units of six trials.

The results of a non-parametric Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which measures the statistical difference between the complete two distributions—one with a LN pour and one without— and not just their means ($z = 1.28$, $p = .103$, $ES = 0.211 \pm 0.167$).

Post-hoc, we examined the same analysis for both the first and second half of the study. The non-parametric Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for the first half was significant ($z = 2.21$, $p = .014$, $ES = 0.520 \pm 0.236$) supporting the primary hypothesis. However, the same analysis for the second half was not significant ($z = -1.586$, $p = .945$, $ES = -0.376 \pm 0.236$).

During the second half of the study, two participants were faced with circumstances (death in family and major surgery) that required a change in session protocol for the last 18 sessions.

- RV sessions were conducted at the participants' home outside of California, maintaining the same time as for the earlier sessions.
- The tasking and protocol was identical to the sessions for a site visit described above.
- Feedback, however, was different.
- On receiving the SMS from LH saying she was leaving the site, EM blindfolded the participant and the two relaxed for 30-45 minutes.
- Then EM "escorted" the blindfolded participant a few feet in the room; aimed them at a wall. Then held an 8 × 10 inch, high quality photograph that was taken from the designated spot and direction directly in front of the participant's eyes.
- The participant then removed the blindfold.

If the tasking mattered and the participants did describe the first thing they saw upon the removal of the mask, then this aspect of the modified protocol may not have mattered. Fortunately, this supposition was empirically testable.

We used the same analysis metric for these 18 sessions as for the 54 sessions in which site feedback was given. We combined the effect sizes for P1 and P2 where both received site feedback = 0.1414; similarly, we combined the effect sizes for photo feedback = 0.1573. A Student's t-test results were $t(46) = -0.053$,

$p = .521$. This strongly suggests that feedback at the physical site was statistically equivalent to feedback from a site photograph.

Fortunately, this modification of the protocol appeared not to have an impact on the study outcome. During the Star Gate Program, the team conducted seven formal experiments (i.e., 229 trials) to estimate the correlation between psi and the change of entropy. The correlation was 0.211 with a 95% confidence interval of [0.084, 0.223] and a $p = 6.4 \times 10^{-4}$.

It seems quite likely that Professor I.M. Kogan's idea of relating psi to changes of entropy was correct.

Parapsychology & Cyberpsychology

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Introduction: The world wide web allows for the pool of human knowledge to be accessed remotely for maximum dissemination of information and for researchers across the world to share ideas and collaborate (Berners-Lee et al, 1994). This has presented both opportunities and challenges for parapsychology including the application of digital technologies in research design; recruitment of study participants; promoting work more broadly e.g., via professional website or social media profiles; disseminating and discussing developments in psychical research. However, there is a dearth of literature in examining how parapsychology intersects with *cyberpsychology*: the study of how humans and computers interact. How both research disciplines interrelate, in the context of science communication, and current and future technological and societal implications, has been scarcely examined.

Cyberpsychology has been defined as the discipline for understanding the psychological processes related to all aspects of technology related to human behaviour online (Ancis, 2020; Attrill-Smith et al, 2019). It overlaps with several disciplines including Human Computer Interaction (Sinha, Shahi, & Shankar, 2010) and widens the application of existing psychological theoretical frameworks (e.g., social identity theory as in Liao et al, 2020). Cyberspace continues to evolve including the evolution of social media, AI (Artificial Intelligence) and digital technologies that in turn inhabit *and* shape *cyberspace* (Bryant, 2001; Fourkas, 2004; Gálik & Tolnaiová, 2020). Cyberspace has permeated all aspects of our lives, including education (Mace, 2020), and in how rapidly developing technologies including augmented realities (e.g., metaverse) potentially shape future research practices (Dwivedi et al, 2022).

A pressing issue is the presentation of parapsychology online. It is referred to as a pseudoscience on Wikipedia and a challenge to scientific orthodoxy (Martin, 2021; Murphy-Morgan, McLuhan & Cooper, 2021; Weiler, 2020). Boyd (2010) investigated the role of 'networked publics' as communities that are shaped or reconfigured by technologies who themselves reconfigure information available. This includes the means to consume, participate in, and generate information (Taddicken & Krämer, 2021). No more so than on social media, which encompasses diverse and rapidly evolving platforms where audiences are no longer passive recipients but the active generators of content (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Taddicken & Krämer, 2021). How parapsychology is discussed on social media and how the affordances of specific platforms facilitate discussion is arguably critical (e.g., YouTube study by Murphy-Morgan, Cooper & Smith, 2022).

Parapsychology has engaged with novel technologies in current and previous research (e.g., Psi and PK testing; flotation tanks to create environments potentially conducive for psi), and in examining how technology can mediate anomalous experiences (e.g., Rogo & Bayless, 1979; Cooper, 2014). The internet has in turn served as a powerful vehicle for parapsychological research design and execution (e.g.,

surveys, dissemination of research findings on web sites and social media), notwithstanding the pitfalls of online polarisation, censorship, and the continuing pseudoscience demarcation problem. The application of existing theoretical frameworks which serve cyberpsychologists are arguably of increasing importance to parapsychologists in understanding how their work is disseminated and discussed. Further developments in online technologies may also present opportunities to explore shared interests, including exploration of self through both real and imagined environments, transpersonal or anomalous experiences, and implications of evolving AI technologies.

Method: In this paper, we explore some of the areas in which parapsychology potentially intersects with cyberpsychology. Potential shared concerns and scope for overlap in future theoretical and empirical developments are discussed.

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Researching the Researchers: An exploration into the experiences and beliefs of investigators of paranormal phenomenon

Urszula Wolski

Paranormal phenomena are very much a part of society, that is evident by the number of studies and research that has been carried out over the years across different disciplines, but predominantly within psychology and parapsychology. Very little has been carried out from a sociological perspective, for as stated by Castro, Burrows and Woofitt (2013), paranormal experiences are not something that sociologists concern themselves with, and if they do, the focus tends to be on social and cultural factors (Irwin, 2009).

Moreover, there is little empirical research that exists that looks at the researchers themselves and their own experiences and beliefs whilst carrying out their investigations. Some researchers may write about their experiences as part of their investigations, but this is a largely reflexive account, rather than based on empirical research.

From a social world theory perspective, the aim of research was to explore in-depth the community of paranormal investigators, those actively investigating over a set period of time.

Using a mixed methods approach, comprising of a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the aim of research was to:

- Explore the experiences of investigators of paranormal phenomena and their reasons for doing so. For example, was this the result of their own experiences that they have had, such as early childhood experiences.
 - o What they make of such experiences
- To provide a 'voice' to those interested and who experience such phenomena. Research has shown that for some, such experiences are common, that to them the paranormal is 'normal' (Greeley, 1991, cited in Murray and Wooffitt, 2010).

The questionnaire was distributed through different social media channels to researchers actively investigating any type of paranormal phenomena. Semi-structured interviews were then carried out with those who had expressed an interest after completing the questionnaire, and this was to obtain a more in-depth understanding of researcher's experiences. Finally, the researcher joined in several formal investigations as a participant observer, to fully understand, experience, and document the process and what is involved.

Key findings from the research will be presented at the conference.

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Childhood Trauma and Paranormality: A Critical Review and Meta-Analysis

Malcolm B. Schofield, Ian S. Baker, Paul Staples and David Sheffield

The link between childhood trauma and paranormality, both paranormal belief and experience, has formed the central part of many models of paranormality. A small but significant body of work has supported this link, often including a role for other variables, such as fantasy proneness and dissociation. This finding is generally seen as evidence of the Psychodynamic Functions Hypothesis that states that paranormality fills a need in an individual. This has meant the majority of models that have set out to explain paranormal belief and experience have included childhood trauma as a leading cause. However, there are considerable issues with how childhood trauma is being defined, and the lack of longitudinal studies in the area is problematic. While other variables have been considered, the causal direction has always been assumed as having childhood trauma at the beginning, without looking at the influence other variables might have on childhood trauma. For example, the relationship between fantasy proneness and childhood trauma.

This paper critically reviews the literature linking paranormality and childhood trauma. It examines how papers define trauma, other variables they consider and other methodological implications, including assumptions about causality. After searching relevant databases, nine papers met the inclusion criteria and were reviewed. The review found evidence for childhood trauma having a relationship with different aspects of the paranormal, both belief and experience. The papers identified were then explored, the different variables identified were examined, and the effect sizes were used for the meta-analysis. The

variables that were seen to be important throughout a high amount of the studies were fantasy proneness and dissociation. Further issues, such as the measures used, are discussed. The meta-analysis of eight papers revealed a small to medium effect of reasonable consistency.

This review concluded that the papers did provide evidence of childhood trauma playing a role in the formation of aspects of paranormality. There are several issues with the research, such as how childhood trauma is defined and its severity. Furthermore, issues surrounding the validity of childhood trauma measures and whether the different scales being used across the studies were all measuring the same thing. Ethical issues are unpacked regarding retrospective research as it may bring up past traumatic memories that the participant would relive, causing further trauma. Also, if a person is particularly fantasy-prone, this does raise the issue of false memories, and when prompted by a survey looking at childhood trauma, the items on the scale might prime a participant into gaining and reporting a memory of childhood trauma that never happened. It is also suggested that while the causal link between dissociation and childhood trauma might be more straightforward directionally, this relationship may be more clinical in nature, potentially leading to paranormal experience rather than just the belief.

Methodological issues are further discussed regarding how trauma is measured and the retrospective design of all the reviewed studies. The review concludes that it is plausible that the more fantasy-prone people could be misremembering childhood trauma. Therefore, fantasy proneness may be the cause of both paranormality and reports of childhood trauma and explain the modest relationship between them.

“They’re not gonna want airy fairy stories”: Childhood Anomalous Experiences and the Implications for Therapists

Natalia Lavin and Rachel Evenden, University of Northampton

Research concerning anomalous experiences in therapeutic settings is a sparse yet growing area of research, but the inclusion of childhood experiences is often overlooked. In many cases participants are commonly researched from a medical perspective and are frequently pathologised (Castelnovo et al., 2015; Baethge, 2002). This is also often the case with children and young people (Koren et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2018). Psychological and clinical interest in anomalous phenomena can be noted in the works of Jung on the topic on synchronicity (Jung, 1952). More recently though, research exploring anomalous experiences in therapeutic settings has been conducted with respect to adult clients (Parra & Corbetta, 2013; Roxburgh & Evenden, 2016; Kramer, 2012). This presentation focuses on a study that sought to understand the outcomes of childhood anomalous experiences and the role counsellors play in assisting young people presenting with them. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2022) following interviews with four participants revealed three superordinate themes from the data (i) Transformative Features; (ii) Role of Adults, and (iii) Stigma. The findings highlight that young people experience both positive and negative outcomes in relation to their anomalous experiences and that young people emphasise the importance of adult understanding in relation to discussions surrounding anomalous experiences. Findings also align with existing research in adults with regards to the stigma experiences face (Keen et al., 2013) as this is still a relevant matter for young people according to the present research. The findings highlight a need for practitioners working with young people to develop an understanding of these experiences and the impacts they can have on children as a means to benefit their service users. This presentation will discuss the findings in greater depth and look at the practical

applications of these findings. The possibility of further research into this area will also be considered and discussed. The results of this study will begin to assist professionals who provide care and support for young people and children in mental health care as well as informing researchers in the field of parapsychology.

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Testing the theory of 'First Sight' using A Retroactive priming task: Individual difference factors

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Bem (2011) created a stir in the scientific community when he published a suite of experiments showing precognition-like experiences under controlled laboratory conditions. Such experiences are common among the general population (Roe, 2019b), but are typically dismissed by the scientific mainstream on the grounds that they are incompatible with the generally accepted model of reality, where consciousness is purely a product of brain activity and has capacities that are severely constrained in space and time. Yet research in parapsychology suggests that under some circumstances, people may be able to transcend those usual constraints so that, for example, their current decisions and behaviour can be shown to be affected by information that lies in the future and has not yet been determined. Bem's work is particularly interesting in suggesting that this material might be available unconsciously, influencing the choices that people make, allowing them to capitalise on opportunities and avoid dangers, but not giving rise to overt 'psychic' experiences.

Bem's experimental findings were surprisingly consistent, and despite some high-profile failures to replicate them, the general pattern from this database is that the effects can be reproduced in the laboratory to the same extent as other, more mundane, psychological effects (Bem, Tressoldi, Rabeyron, & Duggan, 2016; see Roe 2022a, 2022b for general introductions). However, the experiments described by Bem (2011) represent an assortment of designs that seem to reflect practical expediency rather than any overarching theoretical perspective. Similarly, despite some honourable exceptions (e.g., Savva, Roe & Smith, 2005, Vernon, 2017) the majority of replication attempts have consisted of straight reproductions of those original experiments, intended to confirm basic effects rather than test particular hypotheses. This paradigm therefore seems an ideal candidate for more theory-led research that could explore the implications of this work for our understanding of consciousness per se.

One of the most interesting features of a recent meta-analysis of these studies (Bem et al., 2016) was the classification of experiment types in terms of Kahneman's (2011) dual-mode theory of cognition, which identifies two systems of thinking: 'fast' and 'slow'. System 1 involves fast, automatic, frequent, emotional, stereotypic, unconscious processes and utilises parallel processing, whereas System 2 is a slow, effortful, logical, calculating, conscious, and linear process. Bem et al. (2016) found overall that 'feeling the future' experiments that involved slow processes (such as memory recall tasks) did not deviate significantly from chance expectation whereas those that involved fast processes (such as priming tasks) were significantly higher and showed a much greater degree of consistency across studies. Such a finding is consistent with Carpenter's (2012) First Sight Theory (FST).

FST represents a model of consciousness that incorporates psi phenomena as a fundamental feature of its modus operandi. It not only attempts to account for observations concerning conventional processes of memory and perception, but also the patterns of performance observed in research on ESP. It makes a series of explicit, testable hypotheses about who should perform well within the fast-thinking type of experiment and under what circumstances (for more detail, see Roe 2019a, 2019b).

The current project comprises a series of planned experiments that will test these various predictions using one of Bem's fast-thinking precognition tasks. The focus in experiment 1 is on personality and

individual difference variables that might moderate performance on the precognition task. Following collection of this information the protocol includes a bespoke signal detection task to ensure that the primes remain subliminal for all participants prior to completing Bem's retroactive priming task. In this presentation we will introduce the first experiment and present a preliminary analysis of our findings.

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Contamination of investigations

Case Purity & Investigator Objectivity vs. Clients' & Investigators' Search for Answers

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The first full investigation the SPR carried out at scale was the investigation of Ballachin House (B-House) which set new standards through use of floor plans, technology, and experiments. Views differed on scientific methodology and its application, resulting in disputes. These were not just between sceptics and believers, but between individuals and groups demanding a free hand and control over premises and environment. Anything less than this was regarded as introducing contamination into the investigation which strained relationships between the various groups of investigators and the client of the investigation who owned the building (1). At the heart of these disputes lay fundamental differences

in philosophy and approach between the empirical methods of ghost hunters, and the academic theory based and laboratory led methods of psychical researchers.

These cultural and methodological divisions between ghost hunters and psychical researchers continued through the interwar years leading to the development of combined hunter/researchers such as Harry Price (2) and his investigation of Borley Rectory and the development of his Blue Book as a guide to investigators (3). Despite this, Price's work was subject to considerable revision and criticism in relation to contamination, error and worse (4). Later practical guides were published by experienced hunter/researchers which sought to minimise contamination through the introduction of good investigatory practice (5,6,7,8,9).

The rise of the paranormal TV, internet and reality show inspired ghost hunter and the culture of modern gadget-based investigation has challenged these traditional models (10) despite the impact of the SPR's new guidelines for investigators and equipment. The modern social media savvy paranormal TV inspired paranormal groups who undertake many of today's investigations often do so within the context of their own profile of what a haunting, or poltergeist phenomena look like on the ground in relation to their previously determined venue investigation profile, and their shared experience of their investigation (11). This can lead to the creation of new narratives and myths about the results of the investigation and the paranormal activity to be found within a venue subject to investigation, including phenomena that 'follow' certain investigators (12). This in turn can change the dynamics between the investigators, the venue owners or managers and the clients who called in the paranormal group in the first place.

This paper sets out some of the common areas for discussion and debate around the issue of contamination within investigations, and advocates for a more collaborative approach between clients and investigators in the internet age through an assessment of the needs, wants and desires of clients' and investigators' perspectives and agendas.

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Spontaneous Case Committee report case 354: ADC? EMF, EVP (Ovilus) and Video.

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From joining the Spontaneous Case Committee (SCC) earlier this year it was a privilege to take on my first case given to me to investigate a case involving what appeared to be a recent after death communication (ADC) with the percipient's deceased father-in-law called Roger. Within this case various media was provided through means of video recorded evidence based on the ADC's with the percipients and their experience. Videos using the Xbox Kinect device shown a stick man like figure appearing and interacting with certain people and objects in the room with certain words coming through the EVP device (Ovilus 3) sometimes coinciding with the nature of the circumstance.

From this started my initial review on how they have interpreted these interactions as paranormal, and that they were in some form of contact with their deceased relative Roger through various means using a EMF detector, EVP device (Ovilus 3) and through a visual recorded system (Xbox Kinect Device) picking up stick man like figures in different environments. The first process was through analysing the videos by carefully noting down each interaction by each second and this was done by slowing down the videos using the settings application on the video itself (via YouTube). From this I noted down each interaction from the EMF, EVP and Kinect device produced was made concluding that the EMF and EVP devices seem to influence their readings (EMF more so) regarding this case to be an issue with the technology then based on some form of paranormal effect.

Looking at the Kinect device based on previous analysis from the use of such technologies (Parsons, 2021; Ashford, 2021; Biddle, 2017) it would seem plausible that the stick man figures in this case are also more than likely to be produced by some form of technological pareidolia which will be shown in more detail within the presentation.

This will hopefully promote a stronger viewpoint on how such technologies should be approached with caution, especially to those who are new to the field of paranormal/psychical research.

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Disappearing Vehicles and Reappearing People (or Go Home, Time, You're Drunk!)

Ann R Winsper

Whilst investigating the time slip phenomenon, I have come across two apparent subcategories – disappearing cars and reappearing people. Disappearing cars have been described on multiple occasions (for example see McCue, 2002), and the phenomenon seems to be quite widespread. Typically, people describe seeing a car either approaching from the front or overtaking from the rear, which then vanishes, frequently whilst in the percipient's blind spot but sometimes in full sight. The people phenomenon usually involves a percipient noticing a distinctive person, usually easily distinguishable by features such as clothing. The percipient continues on their way, only to see the same person again in a place they cannot have reached in the time that has passed since they were first seen.

There have been theories advanced as to why these unusual events occur, ranging from simple misperception, through recordings of previous events, to ghostly manifestations. However, due to three events that were witnessed firsthand, there may be another explanation.

The first event was witnessed by me and another person, where a distinctive cyclist appeared to have travelled an impossible distance in the time available. The second event involved a recording device that recorded 20 minutes of sound, even though the recorder was only switched on for 5 minutes. And the third event involved a person apparently running around one corner of a building then immediately appearing at the opposite corner, a feat which would be impossible under normal circumstances.

The last case is the most intriguing, as the person who apparently jumped in time and space describes nothing out of the ordinary and as far as they were concerned the journey around the building took the expected length of time, it was only the witnesses who were taken aback at the instantaneous reappearance.

These unusual events suggest that there might actually be something strange happening with time itself. We know that time moves forward, we don't currently have any evidence that it can jump either backward or forwards. Could it be wormholes in spacetime? Theoretically these could exist, a wormhole would be unstable and collapse under its own gravity in a short period of time, but this might support the argument as these events are short and localised. However, we would expect if a person travelled through a wormhole, they would not recall the time spent within it, and our last witness describes nothing out of the ordinary happening. Physics describes how time dilation exists, but this is on a massive scale and only occurs under high speeds or stronger gravity, and people or vehicles do not generally travel near the speed of light, and stronger gravity would be instantly noticed, not just by the percipient!

However, there is still an argument that rather than ghostly happenings, something strange is actually happening with time itself – we have a multitude of witness reports, and where corroboration is possible between witness and the apparent anomalous person, nothing unusual has happened to the anomalous person. A sceptic might say this points to simple misperception, but having been involved in a number of cases, with multiple witnesses I would suggest that it is not so simple.

The concept of a multiverse might allow for these strange time anomalies, but of course there is no proof that a multiverse can exist except theoretically, and if there is an infinite number of universes, how are people slipping between them without noticing? Any explanation seems fraught with problems, and if we cannot prove ghosts, multiverses, wormholes, or even misperception, maybe we just have to accept that time is playing some very interesting tricks on us.

The Importance of Training for SPR Members Engaged in Spontaneous Case Investigation

Steven T Parsons

It has been suggested that there are approximately 12,000 individuals in the UK who regularly engage in visiting haunted locations for the purpose of conducting some type of an investigation of the reported phenomena.

Many in this paranormal community spend varying amounts of their leisure time pursuing this interest, often reporting the result of their endeavour to be highly successful.

Reasons why people are drawn to visit haunted houses are wide ranging, but it is clear that a significant number of the participants believe that the phenomena they are seeking is genuine and so presumably, they are looking for some validation for their beliefs. A smaller number are seeking answers to questions relating to the phenomena - Is it real? What causes it? And What does it represent? An even smaller number of participants question the reality of the various reported phenomena and want to demonstrate that such things are only the products of misperception, misunderstanding, hoax and wishful thinking.

This diversity of intention is reflected in the diversity of methods that are employed and also in the technology that is being used. For those engaged in the search for ghosts (and related phenomena) it is common to see methods inspired by Edwardian séances room or derived from experiments conducted in the psi labs. It is also common to see novel methods that are slavishly copied directly from media portrayals of the subject in ghost hunting television shows and by their social media peers. Sadly, the majority of these methods have more in common with pseudoscience and performance art than being representative of productive scientific experimentation. Nevertheless, these methods are presented as being meaningful and invariably successful, providing more proof in a single visit than has been produced by this society in its 140 years existence. This is the current state of spontaneous case investigations.

There can be no question that otherwise ordinary individuals experience unusual phenomena which they interpret as being ghostly or as representing some kind of related phenomena i.e., poltergeists and demons. These undoubtedly genuine experiences require examination and suitable explanation wherever that is possible.

This can only be achieved by the adoption of a rigorous and methodical approach. This necessity was identified as long ago as 1848 by Catherine Crowe in *The Night Side of Nature* and was one of the aims of those who established the Society in 1882. Investigating reports of apparitions and other impressions observed by more than two persons independently of each other.

We need to be asking the right questions and going about looking for answers in the right way. Out of necessity, they must attempt conduct their enquiries outside the highly controlled research laboratory and in the chaos of homes and workplaces under a vast assortment of prevailing conditions.

The spontaneous case investigator needs to acquire knowledge drawn from the disciplines of physics, engineering, medicine, psychology, sociology and numerous others.

But how does one acquire this knowledge. Some are fortunate and have qualifications or occupations that lend some degree of knowledge that can be usefully applied in spontaneous case research. But for the majority, the most common means of furthering their knowledge and necessary skills is realised by simply getting out and investigating, learning from their peers as they go. This approach often results in those seeking to develop their investigative skills learning the importance of psychic protection or how to call upon the deceased to perform acts of proof or asking them to communicate via some electronic ghost communication device.

Other prospective investigators may undertake one of the numerous courses which are available, online and in-person. Here again, with so much choice the courses that are offered all too often contain poor information and misleading guidance.

The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP) was established in 1981 and, from the start, set up a training course and an accreditation scheme for their investigators. This has produced many competent and highly skilled investigators, and the course has undergone revisions to ensure that it remains relevant. Auditing the investigations is also a key part of ensuring that investigators follow their guidance and training protocols.

Meanwhile, our own Society has continued to rely upon those who conduct investigations on its behalf to do so with no such training. Investigators are often those who express an interest in a report that the society has received. Whatever skills or experience they may have is rarely, if ever questioned or assessed. There have been attempts in recent years to provide training and guidance for members who wish to undertake spontaneous case investigations but to date none of these have resulted in the society establishing a core of knowledgeable and experienced field investigators similar to that which ASSAP has been successfully doing for the past forty years.

This Society once held the position as the nation's go-to organisation for anyone wishing to report a haunted house or a troublesome poltergeist. Times have changed and the Society must respond.

The Society should establish a similar training programme for those members whose interests lie in this direction with proper accreditation of those who it dispatches to examine received reports. As an interim, the Society might consider a liaison with ASSAP, placing Society members onto their existing training programme.

We reasonably expect that those who work in the psi labs of academic institutes will be appropriately qualified and have a high degree of expertise and that their work is subject to the scrutiny of their peers and the approval of an ethics committee. Similar requirements, properly modified to suit the very different conditions under which spontaneous case investigators are required to conduct their enquiries, should logically extend to those within the society who regularly visit haunted houses and who interact with members of the public.

The Phenomenology of Anomalous Experiences Reported During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Project Update*

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Anomalous experiences can be stated as being “distinct from our ordinary state of awareness” and “something that is rare or deviates from the norm,” (Holt *et al*, 2012) and includes phenomena such as apparitional experiences, out-of-body experiences (OBEs), extra-sensory experiences (ESP) and near-death experiences (NDEs). They are relatively common (Bentall & Slade, 1985) and many of these experiences or phenomena have been linked to various psychological states. Previous studies were found to show individuals to have paranormal or anomalous experiences within ‘times of fear and anxiety’ (Piaget, 1972, cited in French & Stone, 2014, p.79), ‘unimaginable threats’ (Markle, 2010), social stress and deprivation (McClenon, 1994), ‘concurrent stress to cause hallucinations’ (Bentall, 2014, cited in Cardena *et al*, 2014, p.114), ‘sensory deprivation or overload (Evans, 2002), hallucinations experienced during major depression (Lattuada *et al*, 1999) and “a sense of vulnerability and perceived loss of personal control and an emotional state of some degree of anxiety or helplessness” (Irwin, 2009, p.111). With an invisible threat spreading globally, a high mortality rate and isolation periods causing families to be separated, the psychological aspects of stress, anxiety, depression and sensory deprivation were at an all-time high. This led me to start researching into the Covid-19 pandemic and if an increase of anomalous experiences were to be reported based on the psychological aspects found in the previous studies.

The conclusion from last year’s conference was that this project should be able to collect as much data as possible based on anomalous experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic whilst trying to find any patterns within the psychological aspects that could be causing these experiences to happen. Since then, most of the research for this project has been conducting an historical approach first and foremost to see how each pandemic and global catastrophe has been approached in psychical research as well as religious and spiritual influence that involved a high global mortality rate as well as cases involving isolation or not being able to see certain individuals during times of crisis. From the psychological aspects as previously referenced there does seem relevance to the state of mind for those who go through these events (being that of pandemics, war, etc.) to experience some form of anomalous experiences. From the first recorded cases from ancient Greece with the Athenian Plague (Furtado, 2021), to times of war (Carrington, 1918) there has been many recorded cases of individuals experiencing an anomalous effect through these highly stressful periods and reflecting back onto their religious or spiritual beliefs as some form of coping mechanism.

In this presentation, I shall discuss the background literature which has been researched thus far and present the current methodological and ethical considerations for the intended first phase of data collection. Very much similar to the work of *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886) and *Census of Hallucinations* (Sidgwick *et al*, 1894) the intended first phase will be conducted by gathering as many anomalous experiences as possible nationwide through a top-down filter questionnaire.

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Paranormal Perception in Sleep Paralysis Experiences: An Exploratory Analysis

Sheila Pryce Brooks

Introduction

Sleep paralysis (SP) is a phenomenon reported worldwide that occurs during the sleep state. Adler (2011) describes it as the 'waking consciousness', a state in which individuals believe they are awake. It is during this state that SP takes place, often accompanied by one or more of the following symptoms: sensing, feeling, or seeing an evil presence; an overwhelming sense of dread; difficulty breathing; pressure on the chest; and feelings of suffocation. Some individuals feel that death is imminent. Currently, there are no treatments to permanently eliminate SP, and its causes remain elusive. The aim of this paper is to present research findings which show that that SP is far more diverse than conventionally believed. It builds upon the work of Dr. David Hufford (1982), who explored its physiological basis and cultural interpretations. The findings in this paper shines a light on the range of paranormal phenomena associated with SP, which are often overlooked in academic, medical, and social contexts.

Materials and Methods

This research is a segment of a PhD thesis being conducted at the University of York, focusing on the spiritual aspect of SP. In July 2023, 29 participants, each having experienced a minimum of 5 SP episodes, participated in one-to-one, semi-structured, open-ended online Zoom interviews. Participants were sourced from social media, university poster displays, and referrals. Interviews varied in length from 45 minutes to 3 hours and were subsequently thematically coded. Themes such as 'extra sensory abilities' and 'different types of entities perceived' emerged. The data within each theme was then analysed. All interviews were conducted by the author.

Results

The following is a list of categories experienced during SP, together with additional summary information:

- Participants described the ability to leave their physical body and have out of body experiences (OBEs). Their movements included floating, flying and instantaneous movement with thought. They were able to move through walls, ceilings and travel outside. Participants were also able to fly above the planet and discussed seeing other planets. Some participants were taken through tunnels or vertically through the outer atmosphere.

- Some participants shared out-of-body experiences with friends or family members who validated the experience.
- Extra sensory abilities emerged, as participants had clairvoyant experiences whilst awake and were able to recount information that was communicated during SP episodes. Receiving downloaded information was discussed, as was experiencing telepathic communication. They met with loved ones who had passed away and knew future events. They were able to touch objects and feel impressions left by the person who had owned it and participants were able to sense the departure of "souls" from dying individuals
- Past and alternate lives were experienced, and they recalled experiencing that they were someone else and yet themselves.
- Living out mundane days such as shopping or washing the dishes with false awakenings was experienced.
- They saw death as something not to be feared. SP gave them a window into understanding what lay beyond death.
- The accounts revealed a structured hierarchical social organisation among the entities encountered, with roles ranging from inducing fear to offering empathy and "pure love".
- Despite the terrifying nature of the experiences, participants were left feeling gifted with abilities that were being viewed as superpowers. Some participants considered it to be the next evolutionary stage for humankind.

Conclusions

The SP experience can no longer be defined as a singular state of physical paralysis with terrifying hallucinatory visions that take place whilst sleeping. The data shows it to be a phenomenon that encompasses a broad range of paranormal and metaphysical experiences affecting both sleep and wakefulness. There is also scope to suggest that SP experiencers are accessing different states and forms of consciousness. Further research is needed to investigate these findings further.

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Mediumship Events and Wellbeing

Valerie Harkness

In this talk, I propose to present more findings* from a research project on mediumship events (with particular emphasis on contacts with departed loved ones and a sense of community/connectedness) and wellbeing.

In 2022, I devised a simple questionnaire (mixed design) which was administered by the Arthur Conan Doyle Centre and sent out to those attending the Saturday mediumship demos. A total of 59 people responded. The main research question was to know the extent to which those events were associated with their participants' well-being and to identify precise contributing factor(s). More subsidiary questions included an overview of obstacles to the positive impact of mediumship events.

After life contacts and/or beliefs in life after death are often not taken into account in psychotherapy settings. Yet, recent studies have yielded interesting findings on the health benefits of contacts with the dead, eg, increased sense of agency, resilience and a more positive outlook.

I recently looked more closely at the psychology of wellbeing, and on the strength of my research and my personal experience, I have explored the benefits of mediumship events on their participants' sense of well-being. What exactly contributes to making people feel better after an event? What can improve things further?

*I presented the main findings of the study at the 2022 SPR conference. I propose this year to summarise the findings and elaborate on the interrelated questions of wellbeing and connectedness (with others and with departed loved ones).

The Experience Of Developing As A Spiritualist Medium: Preliminary Results of a Qualitative Study

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Anomalous experiences are common in the Western population (e.g. Castro et al., 2014; Roe, 2019; Schmied Knittel & Schetsche, 2012), and there is evidence that they can be challenging on multiple levels (e.g. Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995), causing reactions including fear and anxiety, and that they can be detrimental to psychological wellbeing (e.g., Roe, 2020). Data from the few centres that offer help with anomalous experiences show that a significant number of experiencers seek help with regard to their experiences (e.g. Belz & Fach, 2012; Kramer, 1993; Zahradnik & Von Lucadou, 2012), but sources of help are not obvious, and some, such as counselling or medically based help, may actually be detrimental to psychological wellbeing (Evenden et al., 2013 Roxburgh & Evenden, 2016a, 2016b; Taylor, 2005). Spiritualist mediums are a subsection of the population who have ongoing anomalous experiences, yet Roxburgh's study of Spiritualist mediums showed them to have relatively good psychological wellbeing (Roxburgh & Roe, 2011). Although, as part of mediumship practice, these experiences are both sought and controlled, there is evidence that Spiritualist mediums are likely to have had anomalous experiences prior to their mediumship development, and that these were sometimes challenging to their psychological wellbeing (Wilde et al., 2019). There have been few studies of the development of

Spiritualist mediumship (Everist, 2015; Roberts, 2015), and this project seeks to investigate the process through a mixed-methods study, combining ethnographic, quantitative and qualitative elements. Preliminary results of the quantitative element of the project were presented at the Society for Psychical Research Conference last year; this presentation will focus on the qualitative element. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven novice Spiritualist mediums, at intervals of approximately four months. The focus of the interviews was the mediumship unfoldment experiences of each interviewee, looking not just at potential changes in mediumship abilities, but also in their relationship to mediumship and Spiritualism, aiming to identify and explore what is important to them about their experience of mediumship development. The interviews are being analysed using Longitudinal Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (LIPA -- McCoy, 2017; Smith et al., 2022) which has an idiographic, experiential focus specifically suited to this study, and uses an inductive and reflexive process of close textual analysis to generate themes that encapsulate the experiences of the interviewees. In line with the LIPA process, the three interviews for each participant are analysed before conducting a comparative analysis looking for elements of congruence and dissonance between the different experiences of each individual. In this talk I will present an analysis of the interviews with one participant to illustrate the ways in which perceptions and practices with respect to mediumistic experiences might be affected by exposure to formal training as a novice medium.

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Pathways to mediumship: Clients' experience of mediumship in contemporary Britain

Chris A Roe, Callum E Cooper, Glenn Hitchman & Ewen Maclean

Mediumship involves the purported mediation of communication between spirits of the deceased and living human beings, serving as a bridge between these realms. Practitioners, commonly known as "mediums", "spirit mediums" or "psychic mediums" engage in a complex array of cultural practices (Luke & Hunter, 2014). Mediumship is closely intertwined with various religious and cultural belief systems, such as Shamanism, Spiritism, and New Age groups. However, in contemporary Britain, the dominant cultural framework through which most people encounter mediumship services is Spiritualism. Contrary to the notion that Spiritualism as a religion did not survive post-World War 2, Bartolini, MacKian, & Pile (2018) argue that it has not only endured but has also emerged as a vibrant and inventive religion, closely attuned to wider changes in spirituality and the development of post-secular society.

While mediumship has been a topic of interest in the social sciences, with notable figures like William James attempting to provide evidence for the authenticity of spirit communications, relatively less attention has been devoted to understanding the motivations of clients seeking mediumship experiences and the profound personal impacts these encounters can have. Despite being dismissed as "trivial" by researchers, messages received from mediums can significantly influence recipients, challenging their preconceived notions about life after death and their individual spiritual experiences, often leading to transformative changes in various aspects of their lives.

The primary objective of this research is to delve into the motivations and experiences of individuals who actively seek mediumship services. Previous ethnographic research conducted by Walliss (2001) and Walter (2006, 2008), as well as survey research by Beischel (2014), has shed light on the initial entry points for many participants, often driven by the loss of a close loved one, and the subsequent impact mediumship experiences can have on their grieving process. Additionally, studies by Evenden, Cooper, & Mitchell (2013) have revealed the potential positive effects of mediumship on the well-being of mourners. Recent work by Wortman (2022) and Burke (2022) has further contextualized mediumship

experiences within the broader framework of the mourning process. However, the existing understanding of client / medium motivations is limited, and research by Roe, Cooper, Hitchman, and Maclean (2021) suggests the need for a comprehensive exploration of the diverse needs, expectations, and impacts on clients' lives.

Over the course of the past three years, our research project has employed a mixed methods approach, combining a national survey, ethnographic investigations conducted within a local spiritualist church, and in-depth interviews with a diverse range of clients. This comprehensive methodology aims to provide a deeper understanding of the modern client experience with mediumship and its far-reaching effects on various aspects of their lives. In this presentation, we will share the findings of our research, shedding light on the intricate dynamics between mediumship, client motivations, and personal transformations.

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A perfect solution? Sensory isolation in floatation tanks as a method of promoting psi phenomena²

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In 1969, psychonaut, psychoanalyst, medical doctor, engineer and all-round scientific polymath Dr John Lilly was invited to address the room as a key-note speaker at the Parapsychological Association

² We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Bial Foundation (186/20) and the Perrott-Warrick Fund, who have enabled us to conduct this research project.

Convention, in New York. In his after-dinner speech, Lilly referred to his research with (and development of) the floatation tank: a purpose-built container in which a single person may effortlessly float upon a buoyant MgSO_4 (Epsom salt) water solution and in so doing, bring about deep calm and meditative states of consciousness (Lilly, 1969, 1972, 1977). Lilly also termed this invention the 'isolation tank' as it was designed purposefully to isolate the person inside from their environment - by restricting all environmental sensory input. He suggested that the contents of consciousness, the resulting imagery experienced whilst in a float tank, may be susceptible to *extra-sensory influence* (Lilly, 1969). In the floatation tank, a deep sense of relaxation is quickly achieved and as all sensory input from the outer-world environment is absent from experience, it leaves the floater with only experience of their inner-world - or 'inperience', as Lilly (1972, 1977) would say. For some, a further dissolution of Self is experienced (yet without the years of training in a spiritual discipline), as the floater lies partially submerged and entirely supported by the warm body-temperature buoyant water. In a manner of speaking, the floater is suspended from the physical world and focused on the psychical. As such, what remains are the mental impressions and a subtle embodied, felt sense of knowing (we might generally call intuition) which become more noticeable to the floater.

Subsequently, a recent pilot study to test this idea (Cooper, Saunders & Hitchman, 2020) funded by the SPR, found some promising results. Cooper et al. (2020) experimented with a Ganzfeld-like setup of a sender-receiver psi task using the experimenters themselves in situ: Saunders as sender (in a university room in Northampton), and Cooper as receiver (in a floatation tank in a commercial float centre in Nottingham). Over each of 12 trials, containing a 45-minute float session, Cooper (the floater) relaxed and observed his mental and somatic experiences. He then wrote and drew his experiences post-float and these written mentations were ranked for similarity against potential target and decoy targets, in the form of dynamic video clips, one of which was indeed the clip 'sent' by Saunders during the float session. The notes and drawings were also considered by an independent judge comparing mentations to the same target-decoy pools. Although no statistically significant results were found with this small sample of trials, Cooper and the independent judge noted instances of striking similarity. Furthermore, there were instances of embodied (felt, bodily) sensation such as a 'jolt' coinciding with his mental impressions that may have cued his attention to potential target clips, interestingly, including decoys. The overall findings are suggestive of floatation as a supportive tool and technique in parapsychology. The team at University of Northampton are now further investigating floatation as a means of inducing altered states of consciousness, potentially conducive to psi-phenomena. Comparable to Ganzfeld as a technique in promoting an altered state of consciousness considered to be psi conducive (Endersby, 2023; Roe, 2009), floatation arguably takes the process of sensory isolation even further with the addition of weightlessness and loss of tactility.

Following the 'recipe for success' (Bem & Honorton, 1994; Storm, Tressoldi & Di Risio, 2010; Baptista, Derakhshani & Tressoldi, 2015) for psi, we are further considering the particular experiential dimensions of the Highly Sensitive Person ('HSP') and their heightened awareness of intuitive feelings and sensory impressions (Aron, 1997). Furthermore, Irwin, Schofield and Baker (2015) established high sensitivity as a predictor of those who report anomalous experiences (including prior psi experience). In terms of floatation, we consider the HSP's propensity to respond more deeply to floatation tank experience itself and, in reporting more non-ordinary and mystical states than their less sensitive counterparts (Kjellgren, Lindahl and Norlander, 2009). As such, sensitivity and floatation may be a further refined 'recipe' for success and offer us a new paradigm of parapsychology.

Our pilot studies have been conducted at University of Northampton using a Zen Float Co tent (tank) purchased with funding resources and set up on campus. We will share the positive and suggestive outcomes of these, and how they have helped refine a method that will be implemented at the new facility at Broughton Sanctuary, Yorkshire. At this new facility, the floatation setup is amid a country estate that is both a wellness and rewilding project and provides ideal set and setting for the study.

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Retroactive priming of a compound remote associates task (CRAT) using pre-selected participants.

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The aim of this study was to look at the anomalous processing of information by examining if what happens in the *future* can affect the present. Specifically, whether people selected based on their prior performance would perform better at measures of insight and creativity when primed *after* completing the task. This is known as *retroactive priming*. For example, Vernon (2015) utilised a modified repetition priming paradigm, with repeated exposure to the target occurring *after* the test and found that participants were more accurate in responding to material they were primed with in the future. A similar pattern was found when participants practised recalling images in the future (Vernon, 2018). However, attempts to extend this research by focusing on such retroactive effects using emotive images (Vernon, 2017) and those with high levels of belief in psi failed to produce any effects (Vernon, 2017). Such negative findings are consistent with the attempts of others to elicit precognitive-based effects (see, e.g., Galak, LeBouf, Nelson, & Simmons, 2012; Ritchie, Wiseman, & French, 2012). Nevertheless, one possibility for the inconsistent pattern of data across the studies may be the reliance on opportunity sampling. For instance, in the above studies, the participants taking part were simply those available at the time who were willing to participate. It may be that pre-selecting participants based on prior

performance, demonstrating retroactive priming effects, would lead to more robust findings. This study aimed to examine if pre-selecting participants based on prior performance, demonstrating retroactive priming effects, would lead to more robust findings.

The compound remote associates task (CRAT) was chosen as the task as the literature suggests that psi-type performance may rely on intuitive thinking processes. This study tested whether retroactively priming pre-selected participants by having them repeatedly complete a CRAT *after* they have initially completed it, helps them solve the task more accurately compared to items not repeated in the future. Participants (N=73) initially took part in an online screening study and provided information on demographics, belief in psi, measured using the Belief in the Supernatural Scale (BitSS) and information on thinking styles, measured using the Rational Experience Inventory and the Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT), out of which N=11 were selected and tested in the main study. Screening study: Analysis of *retroactive priming* showed no difference between *primed* and *unprimed*; further analysis showed significant positive correlations between *Retroactive Priming* and *Rational Engagement* and *Rational Ability*. Main Study: Analysis of *retroactive priming* showed no difference between *primed* and *unprimed* scores on the CRAT. Analysis of *standard priming* showed no difference between *primed* and *unprimed* scores on the CRAT. Analysis of potential correlations showed only negative correlations between *religious belief*, *experiential ability* and *standard priming*.

The original aim was to screen participants and selectively recruit those that exhibited some evidence of retroactive priming (i.e., recall more images that they *would* be shown again in the future) and then test them again using a typical creativity-based task (i.e., the CRAT). Unfortunately, due to several issues, only eleven participants were selectively recruited. Unsurprisingly, given the low N, there was no evidence of either retroactive priming or standard implicit priming. Reasons for this will be discussed, along with other issues that face psi researchers when recruiting participants.

Two Field Studies of ‘the Sense of Being Stared At’

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The ‘sense of being stared at’ can be defined as the purported ability of one being able to sense when another in the local environment is staring at the back of one’s head (or the back of the body in general), without the aid of any known sensory cues, especially visual stimuli to detect the stare (i.e., cues in the peripheral vision; see Sheldrake, 1994, 2003). It is also known by the term *scopaesthesia*, deriving from the Greek words for *looking* and *knowing* (Carpenter, 2005).

As a requirement of a 3rd year BSc (Hons) Psychology programmes, students undertake an empirical dissertation project into a subject of their choice. Two students (Chambers and Unick-Wagg) decided to focus on ‘the sense of being stared at’ within a field study design. The studies took place at the University of Northampton’s Waterside Campus, offering various suitable vantage points for staring at people as they walked from point to point on campus. Both students used the campus bridge in their observational producer. The bridge is a newly formed structure connecting campus directly with access to the park and town, crossing over the canal system and at a length of 180 metres.

Similar to the few prior field studies on staring detection that have been conducted (Cooper, 2021), Chambers and Unick-Wagg set a target of 100 participants each (the starees) for their preliminary studies. Two basic hypotheses were set from previous literature, firstly proposing that a field-based design will show a significant outcome for a staring effect, and secondly, that females will perform better than males. Researchers would work in pairs, one staring at a randomly selected staree from a high up point in the Learning Hub building as the staree entered the bridge, walked the 180 metres and then exited. The second researcher, following mobile phone contact with the starrer would then approach the staree, explain they'd just been involved in a study and have them answer a few basic questions. The main question being: 'did you feel you were being stared at during your walk across the bridge?'. Conductions included staring and no-staring trials, which could result in 4 possible outcomes (staring: right and wrong; no staring: right or wrong).

Using a chi square goodness of fit test, the Unick-Wagg study was independently significant ($p = .0164$) but the Chambers study was not ($p = .68916$). The combined studies were also not significant ($p = .1573$). However, the hit rate of the combined studies was at 55%, which is comparable to the effect size described in Sheldrake (2005). There was also no significant statistical difference between male and female staring detection in the studies, separately or combined (Chi-square with Yates correction = 0.3367, p -value = .56174.) One possible confounding variable was a strong response bias in the non-staring condition that influenced the overall outcome in both studies.

Given so few field studies have been conducted (Cooper, 2021) and with relatively small sample sizes compared to the typical laboratory study approaches (Sheldrake, 2003), the first recommendation made is that of comparable large-scale sampling to assess the overall outcomes. This paper will discuss some of the strengths and weakness of the field study design, and further recommendations for progression of ecological approaches to staring detection.

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