

N EQUALS 1

Single Case Studies in
Anomalistics

Gerhard Mayer (Ed.)



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FOREWORD

Stephen E. Braude

When I began my serious investigation of the paranormal, back in the mid-1970s, I assumed—relatively unreflectively, and apparently like many others—that the only hope for scientific authority and useful information in this domain rested on the feasibility of controlled and repeatable formal experiments. I even enshrined that naivete in my first book on parapsychology (Braude, 2002). But by the time that book appeared, several things had conspired to change my mind.

For one thing, I had begun studying the extensive literature on physical mediumship, which, as I've noted before (Braude, 1997), bowled me over. I began reading that material simply because I wanted to be better informed, expecting all the while that my inherited skepticism about it would be confirmed. But what I discovered was that the best cases were not only surprisingly clean and compelling, but that they also highlighted shortcomings of the reigning parapsychological theorizing, which accommodated (at best) only some of the formal experimental evidence. I also found that most of the self-identified parapsychologists who disparaged the semi- or non-experimental case material actually had never studied it with any care, if they'd even looked at it at all.

I also began personally investigating cases of ongoing apparent macro-PK, and I found that these cases were often richly informative to a degree that could only be an embarrassment to the staunch advocates of formal experimentation, which—both then and still today—struggles even to demonstrate (or at least convince others) that psi phenomena actually occur. Indeed, formal experiments have tended to be, not simply generally unconvincing, but also unilluminating. That is, thanks to the source of psi problem¹ and the difficulty *in principle* of designing a pure or unambiguous psi experiment,² they shed no light on which psi phenomena have actually occurred, much less what kind of endowment it is to have a psychic ability.

In my own investigations, two cases in particular have stood out for me. The first is that of Katie, the Gold Leaf Lady (Braude, 2007), a woman whose body would break out spontaneously and instantaneously with quantities of a thin, golden-colored foil that turned out to be brass. This case was not only unprecedented; it also could be appreci-

1 That is, the problem of sneaky or naughty psi.

2 See Braude, 2002.

ated fully only when considered in all its idiosyncratic psychological complexity. For example, it's relevant that Katie discovered her various (and considerable) psychic gifts only in the context of her difficult second marriage.³ And it's relevant that the golden foil appeared only after a carving set appeared in their house and her irritated husband complained, "What good is it if it isn't money?"

To understand what's going on here, one needs, first, to grasp the knotty psychogenesis of the phenomena, and to see the phenomena as an individualized response to strictly unrepeatable events swirling in the subject's life. And once we begin focusing on the crucial and more general question, "Why do psi phenomena take the sometimes puzzling forms encountered in everyday life?" we're forced to confront the real possibility that lab experiments are premature, and that we still have no idea what sort of natural phenomenon we've been trying to study experimentally—under conditions that are not simply strangulating but probably wholly inappropriate for eliciting the phenomena. Indeed, we know that people display a dazzling array of behaviors and character traits, which quite effectively help us both explain and predict human behavior.⁴ And we also know that it would be, not simply futile, but actually foolish, to try studying under laboratory conditions most of these interesting traits or capacities—for example, courage, sensuality, immaturity, charisma, naivete, snobbishness, callousness, gregariousness, greed, manipulativeness, generosity, the ability to manage a retail store, the ability to compose music, or the ability to make people feel comfortable enough to reveal matters of great intimacy.

We also know that most human abilities are situation-sensitive, including even seemingly elementary capacities. For example, our capacity to digest food, sleep, relax, function sexually, increase adrenalin flow, produce endorphins, and ward off infections will vary (sometimes dramatically) from one context to another. Consider also the situationally variable ability to make people laugh, write a philosophy essay exam, remain cheerful in the face of adversity, parallel park, act decisively, or recite a poem from memory. Or consider the skill of playing ice-hockey goaltender, walking a tightrope, or docking a space capsule. Even though we can still only speculate about the real nature and natural history of psychic functioning, the evidence so far certainly supports the assumption that the exercise and manifestations of psi will likewise vary from one context to another. Moreover, it can only fortify the belief that the phenomena can *only* be fully understood

3 It's interesting, for example, that although Katie was functionally illiterate—with only a first-grade education, when she was in a mediumistic trance, she would often write out quatrains in medieval French, ostensibly from Nostradamus.

4 See "In Defense of Folk Psychology" in Braude, 2014.

within a surrounding context of needs, interests, and real-life pressures, and that applying a straitjacket of formal experimental constraints is simply not the way to go.

Around the time I was studying Katie, I also investigated the case of a woman whose photographs showed anomalies of a sort familiar to many psi researchers. Some contained white clouded areas (where none existed in the original scene), and others were marred by white, squiggly, noodle-like streaks (needless to say, those were also not part of the scenes she photographed). This woman (let's call her S.S.) was married to a man diagnosed with bipolar disorder (formerly called "manic depression"). From what I could gather, he was a cruel and domineering husband, and S.S. may have experienced physical as well as psychological abuse. One photo S.S. showed me is particularly interesting. It's a portrait of her husband in which he's staring into the camera in anything but a friendly manner, and to the right of his face are some squiggly lines that seem to spell "HELP." The last three letters are quite clear; the "H" is somewhat more indefinite and is tilted to the left. Of course, there's no way to be certain, but the photo looks very much like a psychically mediated unconscious cry for help (either from S.S. or her husband instead). If so, it's another example of how paranormal physical phenomena may originate from the psychopathology of everyday life, and under conditions that can never be duplicated in the lab, much less controlled in a quest for repeatability.

The phenomena explored in this valuable book often seem to require positing unusual, and not well understood, human abilities (e.g., telepathic or psychokinetic). But then, for those cases at least, we would expect the utility of single case studies to parallel the utility of such studies for understanding more familiar human abilities—including some that are exceptional or rare and still not well understood. Indeed, single case studies are indispensable for the study of some of the most interesting features of human beings.

Consider savants and prodigies. Before we can make many useful generalizations about them, we need to examine instances in all their glorious variety. That's because savantism and prodigious talents take many forms and appear with (or under) idiosyncratic constraints. Even if they display some regularities, it would be a serious mistake to overlook their considerable—and illuminating—heterogeneity.

Consider: One impressive feature of the data is that the abilities or skills of savants are often highly circumscribed and idiosyncratic. And those limitations or boundaries are of two sorts. First, savants may be profoundly dysfunctional except for their musical, mathematical, artistic, or mnemonic abilities. For example, one well known musical savant suffers from cerebral palsy, but his almost constant spasticity disappears when he plays the piano. Another savant can read or write nothing except his name and is just barely able to care for himself; but he can repair virtually any mechanical device

presented to him. Others are similarly or more severely handicapped, yet they're able to draw, paint, or sculpt works of considerable sophistication and beauty.

The second sort of limitation found in savants exists within their special area of expertise. For example, calendar calculators tend to be accurate only within rather clear ranges of years, and those ranges differ from one savant to the next. Moreover, although calculators might be able to perform rapid and complex operations concerning dates or remember extremely long numbers, they might be unable to do simple addition or change a dollar bill. The famous calculating twins, George and Charles, amused themselves by exchanging 20 digit prime numbers, and they could factor nearly any number presented to them; but they couldn't count to 30 (Sacks, 1985). Another arithmetical prodigy's calculating speed increased if the number 27 was featured in the problem. Still another could rapidly solve complex algebraic problems in his head; but he seemed unable to comprehend even simple principles of geometry (Treffert, 1989).⁵

The study of memory affords another example of a domain that is enriched greatly through single-case studies. And that's not simply because we thereby learn about stunning idiosyncrasies in peoples' ability to remember. It can also discourage wrong-headed theoretical approaches to memory. One of the most persuasive routes for undermining mechanistic analyses of memory in terms of engrams or traces is to look carefully at single case studies of those with eidetic memory, as in A. R. Luria's impressive book, *The Mind of a Mnemonist*.⁶

Now of course, although savants, prodigies, and mnemonists count as anomalies, they're not anomalous in the sense of the phenomena discussed in this book. After all, no one doubts that the former phenomena are genuine; we simply accept them as rare. However, we can't plausibly accept the importance of single case studies in the more familiar cases while denying their likely utility for phenomena whose existence is more controversial.

It's hardly surprising, then, that what we learn from individual cases often reveals limitations on our ability to make useful generalizations about the phenomena in question. And this is obvious even for widespread and familiar human abilities. To take a relatively mundane example, consider musical ability. Musicians can usually play some instruments but not others. They might be able to compose but not conduct (or vice versa). They might master certain idioms but not others (e.g., Baroque but not late Romantic, jazz and pop but not classical, bebop but not swing or Dixieland). Singers might have a

5 For more on psi phenomena and the nature of abilities, see Braude, 2014, Chapter 6.

6 Luria, 1987. For more on the conceptual abominations of trace theories of memory, see "Memory Without a Trace" in Braude, 2014. Also, Bursen, 1978; Heil, 1978; Malcolm, 1977.

knack or the vocal equipment for Verdi but not Bach or Rossini, or Mozart but not Wagner, Monteverdi, Wolf, or Berio.

Similar observations apply even to more specific musical abilities. Consider the ability to compose music. That, too, can be expressed in many different ways. Many composers notate their compositions; others lack that ability. Some composers have absolute pitch, some only relative pitch, and some neither. Some compose directly onto paper, while others need a piano or some other instrument. Some work best with large forms; others don't. Some write especially well or idiomatically only for certain instruments; others don't have that limitation. Some have a keen ability to set words to music; others lack that sub-ability. Some are especially adept at harmony, rhythm, or instrumental color, and those specialties likewise take different forms and manifest in different degrees and combinations. But then there should be little temptation to think that compositional ability allows many useful generalizations. Indeed, single case studies are indispensable to the understanding of compositional ability. And there's no reason to think this case is unique; the same is obviously true, for example, in the case of athletic ability, or comedic ability.

What we do know is that people who possess a general ability may exhibit it in various ways and to varying degrees. The differences have to do with the subsidiary abilities or skills they possess and the manner in which they possess them. The moral here should be obvious: At our current (and still considerable) level of ignorance, we're in no position to say that psychic functioning is an exception to this rule. Moreover (as I noted earlier), for more familiar abilities, we can easily see whether it's appropriate to study them under formal laboratory conditions. That's how we know that the ability to play tennis can only be studied in real game-situations, when opponents are trying their hardest to win. And it's how we know that the lab is not the proper venue for studying the ability to achieve a penile erection, the ability to manipulate others through guilt, or the ability to mediate disputes.

Indeed, one of the things we know from studying real-life cases outside the lab is that the manifestation of psi seems as deeply idiosyncratic and variable as any other ability. And clearly, without some solid grounding, prior to experimentation, concerning what sort of human endowment is being investigated, psi researchers can't expect to know, say, whether we can reasonably hope to elicit the same or relatively similar phenomena under laboratory constraints, whether replicating an experiment with different subjects is even feasible, or whether it's feasible only if the same subject is re-tested, and then only under conditions as similar as possible to those in earlier successful experiments (assuming—probably implausibly, that this can even be determined with any confidence).

So I heartily applaud the authors of this volume for persisting in their examination of individual cases. The study of scientific anomalies needs researchers with skills

analogous to those of a biological naturalist. First and foremost, they must be good, careful observers. And if anomalies researchers are to be both conceptual and empirical pioneers, they must take a bold and pluralistic stand on the nature of science and repudiate the idea that only the methods of a few physical sciences yield genuine scientific understanding. As I've noted elsewhere,

... experimentation and experimental repeatability aren't essential to the scientific enterprise; rather, their success and utility vary greatly from one domain to the next. Experimentation is appropriate and essential in physics, chemistry, and microbiology, less so in astronomy, geology, and meteorology, and less so still in the behavioral sciences ... what we need from science is *systematicity*, some way of converting an otherwise motley and disorganized collection of observations into an orderly and intelligible whole. But ultimately the domain guides and limits our attempts to systematize and understand it. It's almost comically arrogant to think that Nature should conform to our favorite modes of investigation, or that we should dictate to Nature the forms in which we're willing to accept its secrets.⁷

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7 Braude, 2014: 175–176.

PART I

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH LOGIC, MODELS, AND PARTICULARITIES

Gerhard Mayer & Michael Schetsche

On Research Logic of Single Case Studies

In science, single case studies have a long tradition. To a certain degree, they were in existence at the very beginning of scientific research—long before methods of systematic comparison of observations had been developed. Case studies can be found in many academic disciplines: in history, psychology, medicine, cultural anthropology, sociology, education, etc. (Gerring, 2017). For decades, single case studies have been part of developmental and personality psychology, forensics, and even neuropsychology (Schreier, 2010). However, this investigation method is of particular significance in clinical psychology as well as in psychotherapy research: famous single case studies conducted by Sigmund Freud¹ and Alfred Adler, for example, have played a crucial role in the development of psychotherapy, and single case studies are still regarded as a decisive source of knowledge in some fields of clinical psychology (see, for example, Reinecker, 1999: *passim*).² During their formation, the social sciences adopted the concept and methodology of single case studies from casuistics in jurisprudence and medicine, and, in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, developed them further for their own purposes. In this regard, the works of Jean Piaget and Wilhelm Dilthey were programmatic (Kraimer, 1995: 463–464).

According to the dominant understanding at the end of the 20th century, single case studies are “investigations describing systematically significant coherences of characteristics [...] *in a single system* such as a person, group, or institution” (Lehmann & Vogel, 1984: 349; our emphasis).³ These studies are mainly characterized by the fact “that the

1 See Forrester (1996: 9–11) and Rosenwald (2007: 114) on the significance of case studies in Freud’s research.

2 However, the study by Perst & Baumann (1999) indicates that the relevance of single case studies for psychotherapy research has been overestimated due to some very prominent “reference figures”.

3 All translations of German quotations were carried out by us.

wholeness or naturalness of the research subject, respectively case, or system, is preserved. [...] Single case studies that meet this requirement always display a complex research design, related to the huge interpretive efforts made during the evaluation phase, and require considerable resources with regard to research economy” (Kraimer, 1995: 467; cf. Süßmann, 2007: 19, 21–22). Field-research-based single case studies have not only caused a furor in social sciences time and again with respect to methodology but have also had a decisive influence on the understanding of social coherences. For example, this applies to an Austrian field study by Lazarsfeld, Jahoda and Zeisel from 1933 that has become known outside sociology (Jahoda et al., 2002; “Mariantal: The sociology of an unemployed community”), or to the prototypic study from 1969 on participative community politics by Ellwein & Zimpel (1969; “Wertheim I. Fragen an eine Stadt” [Wertheim I. Questions to a city]).

Suggestions for the methodical planning and conduct of respective research studies are as diverse as the fields of application of single case studies in psychology and sociology. The model of research developed by Ursula Heiligenmann (1989: 180) proposes four necessary work stages with regard to field-research-based single case studies, which have been supplemented with two further stages (5 and 6) by Kraimer (1995): (1) Performing field studies to collect material, (2) processing the obtained information to create a case record, (3) analyzing and interpreting the case record, (4) making comparisons with related cases, (5) specification of the case structure, and (6) accumulation and pervasion of single case reconstructions. This sequential model, much adopted by social sciences, clearly demonstrates that single case studies have to be seen, with regard to their research logic, as a research program that goes *beyond* the investigation of a single case. “To the extent that the results of a single case investigation are potentially applicable to other cases it can acquire a theory-producing function.” (Lehmann & Vogel, 1984: 351; cf. Süßmann, 2007: 11–13). In other words, single case studies have a double function in gaining knowledge: firstly, they provide data for the specific single case that, secondly, can only be seen as exemplary or generalizable if the respective investigation is part of a *series of single case studies* that can be integrated in a framework of explanatory relationships by comparative operations, and are actually integrated. Gerring (2017) calls this the *dual nature of cases*.

Because social sciences are primarily interested in *generalizable* social coherences (in contrast to client-centered psychotherapy research, for instance), the main epistemological value of a single case study rests on subsequent comparisons with other cases. Therefore, the intrinsic value of a single study develops rather from a novel, prototypic, methodology of the respective “pioneering” study—typical examples are the above-mentioned “Mariantal” and “Wertheim” investigations. This particular assessment of

the scientific value of single case studies has to do with the fact that, in social sciences, the subjects of field research are assumed to exist in large numbers, independent of their size (this concerns small family groups as well as communities, or even national states).⁴ However, it is not always assumed that the same social regularities can be applied to all respective potential research subjects. The relevance of the theory-producing function of a sequence of methodically similar single case studies results from the fact that the comparison of several cases enables the researcher to distinguish the case-specific factors from the general factors explaining social structures and processes. As long as the detection of *generalized* regularities of social coexistence is the center stage of the research program, the specific single case study will only be part of a more comprehensive research process. However, a first single case study can thereby become very important for the development, and contouring, of a new research area, or a novel methodology.

The particular role of field-research-based single case studies in anomalistics can only be understood against this background. The *first* question in the assessment of conducted single case studies is whether a case is singled out of a great number of assumedly similar cases, and scrutinized in detail, merely due to reasons of research economy or whether it is actually a *singular* case where a comparative investigation is impossible, even with unlimited resources for research (precisely because the respective case has to be seen as structurally, or historically, unique). However, the question about the singularity or, in reverse, comparability of cases has far-reaching consequences: when is a case structurally incomparable with others? Can this even be determined without scrutinizing those potentially contrasting cases? A decision can be made either on the basis of theoretical considerations (if, for instance, a theory of history declares every historical situation unique, and with that, incomparable *per se*) or after a more or less empirical preliminary examination that takes a variety of *possibly* similar cases described in the literature into consideration.

It is not possible to imagine anomalistics research without single case studies. This applies not only for RSPK research,⁵ UFO investigations, crop circle research, and cryptozoology, but also for several other fields of investigation which cannot be considered within the scope of this book. Although one cannot equate single case studies with investigations of so-called spontaneous cases, there is a direct link between them: because

4 cf. Loer (2007) on the problem of social-geographical case studies.

5 RSPK is the abbreviation for **R**ecurrent **S**pontaneous **P**sychokinesis, which was introduced into parapsychology as a neutral and more general description of poltergeist disturbances (Thalbourne & Beloff, 2003: 106). See chapter "Introduction: Single Case Studies in Anomalistics" (Mayer & Schetsche, in part II of this volume), footnote 4, for a more detailed description.

extraordinary experiences and phenomena often occur spontaneously, they are excluded from a systematic investigation in a laboratory setting and, in many instances, render approaches that involve the study of single cases the only sensible methodological way (cf. Alvarado, 2002).

In single case studies in anomalistics, one often does not have to deal with an either/or categorization. Every anomalistic single case study has to be positioned on an assumed continuum between the poles of “incomparability of single cases” on the one side, and “economy-of-resources determined limitation of investigation cases” on the other. Accordingly, case studies have to be assessed post hoc with respect to gain of knowledge. With regard to the investigation of spontaneous cases, the decision of “single case study vs. comparative study design” will essentially depend on the nature of the investigated phenomena, or more precisely, on their prevalence. Representative surveys (Castro, Burrows & Wooffitt, 2014; Haraldsson & Houtkooper, 1991; for Germany: Schmied & Schetsche, 2003) show that numerous extraordinary experiences relevant for anomalistics (for example prophetic dreams, synchronistic events, or crisis telepathy) are prevalent in modern societies. Experiential reports (see e.g. Bauer & Schetsche, 2003) show clearly that we are dealing with very similar subjective experiences, or with experiences that can, at least, be interpreted and assessed on the basis of a limited number of collective interpretive patterns (and therefore are suggestive of being phenomenologically similar).⁶ Furthermore, the examination of retrospective reports of such individual experiences can be made with relatively little effort, and therefore it is, in such cases, methodologically hardly justified to give a single case study preference over a research design that compares at least a few cases.⁷ This applies irrespective of whether the reported events are “spontaneous cases” to the effect that their occurrence cannot (a) be predicted, or (b) be produced or reproduced systematically and under controlled conditions, neither by those concerned nor by external observers.⁸ We cannot *a priori* regard anomalistic phenomena such as crisis telepathy or near-death experiences as singular cases—just because they are *spontaneous cases*. According to the great number of reported experiences of this kind, serial investigations would be appropriate. This does

6 The analytical differentiation of phenomenological similarity of experiences and only the interpretations of such experiences resulting from supra-individual interpretive patterns is one of the epistemically most serious problems for anomalistic research of spontaneous cases (e.g. Mayer & Gründer, 2011).

7 cf. Gerring (2017: 37–55), with regard to the problem of the selection of cases.

8 This is occasionally the case because of research-ethical limitations (only think of crisis telepathy) but is especially due to the elusive character of the respective phenomena (cf. Batchelder, 1994; Mauskopf & McVaugh, 1980).

not change the fact that, in this field, single case studies with a specific aim can promise further gain of knowledge—this applies particularly to the clinical-therapeutic field in which the focus of research lies more on the individual patient and his psychosocial situation.

The situation is somewhat different with spontaneous events such as poltergeist phenomena or crop circles which are also reported relatively frequently, but are—as an experiential context—of such *complexity* (particularly due to the fact that they include more than one witness, and maybe a substantial amount of physical traces) that every serious, knowledge-producing, investigation of a specific case requires significant resources (Mayer & Schetsche, 2016). In this regard, it is understandable that a team of researchers can investigate just a small number of cases of that type in a given period of time. Additionally, as the complexity of the encountered situation increases, it becomes more and more difficult to find even a partial phenomenological similarity among the investigated cases. The more complex the cases under investigation are, the more elaborate the theoretical model has to be, in order for comparative studies to be possible at all.⁹ In this area, therefore, extensive single case studies beyond the clinical context are methodologically reasonable and legitimate. This applies, in particular, if they later become part of a larger sample of similar investigations that at least attempt to relate the *possibly* comparable cases to a larger context. Needless to say, an attempt at such comparative studies can fail because of the very nature of the research object; for instance, if the investigated cases are only comparable with regard to their appearance but, on closer examination, prove to be hugely disparate—as seems to be characteristic of the so-called UFO phenomena.

A specific kind of case must be distinguished from the above-mentioned varieties. These concern unique events that are so extraordinary, and deviate so far from the norm, that an investigator may have the opportunity to make a respective field study only once in his lifetime. Here, we are dealing with a single case study that is quasi imposed by the singularity of the phenomenon itself, and, therefore, the question of comparative studies does not arise at all. Such unique cases lead not only researchers in anomalistics¹⁰ to that

9 At this point, we explicitly oppose the idea of a purely phenomenological comparability that is free of theory. Someone who does not know which characteristics of a complex situation might be or theoretically have to be significant will not be able to perform meaningful comparisons. The fact that every inquiry in the field is, in the broadest sense, always theory based (or, more generally speaking, based on foreknowledge and presuppositions) is too readily overlooked, particularly in lay research.

10 Non-comparable unique cases of this kind are well known in political-science research—the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japanese cities at the end of the Second World War, for instance, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

endpoint of the above-mentioned continuum where all knowledge about the respective events or phenomena, their causes and consequences, can be, and has to be, gained only from that *singular* case. With regard to anomalistics, the “Tunguska event” in 1908¹¹ is an example, the cause of which has still not been determined beyond doubt, or the “red rain of Kerala”,¹² or also the extremely controversial case of the “Shroud of Turin”.^{13,14} With regard to other well known anomalistic single case studies, a certain uniqueness of the investigation results from a specific methodological approach or extensive use of resources on the spot rather than from a real lack of comparable cases. The “Chopper” poltergeist case and the case of the Bélmez faces could be cited as examples (see the detailed descriptions in Part III of this volume). With these latter examples, however, it also becomes clear how difficult it is to distinguish between a single case that is constituted, and also legitimized, by a specific methodological approach and another that is produced (as a “single case”) due to research-economic reasons alone.

Models and Methods

In RSPK investigations and other fields of empirical research in anomalistics, it is particularly apparent how strongly theoretical presuppositions and models shape the

- 11 Very different explanatory hypotheses have been developed during the last hundred years. Some of them (such as a comet impact event, or a swamp gas explosion) argue in favor of the existence of absolutely comparable events, if a broad enough time horizon is chosen, while others (such as a collision of the earth with a small black hole, let alone the explosion of an extraterrestrial spacecraft) suggest a truly unique catastrophe, even with respect to a larger time scale. Rubtsov (2009) provides an overview of competing explanatory hypotheses as well as current empirical findings on this case (see also footnote 34).
- 12 This concerns a reddish precipitation which fell sporadically in the Indian federal state Kerala during the period between July and September 2001, and apparently had extraordinary chemical and biological properties. An Indian research team examined the substance and came to the conclusion that it may have consisted of extraterrestrial organisms (Louis & Kumar, 2006; but see Gangappa & Hogg, 2013).
- 13 Although there are other ‘historical artefacts’ whose provenance and meaning is controversial—none of these controversies comes close to that surrounding this (alleged) shroud of Jesus, with regard to its scientific and religious brisance as well as its material particularities. Thus, it is hardly surprising that this shroud has been, and still is, the subject of a series of extremely elaborate multidisciplinary single case studies (see Fanti & Malfi, 2015; for an overview from a theological perspective cf. Kollmann, 2010).
- 14 Beyond anomalistics, the case of the Neolithic glacier mummy found in 1991 could be mentioned for comparison. Not without good reason, this has been characterized time and again as a “unique discovery”, thereby legitimizing repeated “unique single case studies” on the same object of investigation.

methodology, and how highly the chosen method depends on the respective ideas of the researcher about the (ontological) nature of the phenomena under investigation (e.g. Watt, 1994). This point is trivial as such, and seldom leads to considerable differences with research issues in conventional scientific areas, and especially in the natural sciences, so that at most controversies occur over methodological questions of detail. Therefore, this point is quite rarely considered. In anomalistics, there is essentially no lack of (serious) theories (May & Marwaha, 2015) but rather of a basal consensus in the modeling and understanding of extraordinary events and experiences (e.g. Edge & Morris, 1986: 312–314). Depending on ideological attitude, different research focuses are emphasized, most of which affect the research methodology (e.g. selection of measuring instruments, interpretation of collected data). The research methodology is often influenced by implicit or explicit theoretical, or perhaps empirically driven, presuppositions—if, for example, an assessment of the “genuineness” of the phenomena is made on the basis of a structural correlation, or accordance, with accustomed or cherished models. The detection of an “affective field” (Bender, 1964)¹⁵ or a dysfunctional family structure is then considered as a strong indicator of the possibility of genuine anomalies, whereas their lack gives rise to deep distrust. The same applies to the elusiveness of the phenomena: if, during an investigation of a poltergeist case, psi phenomena continue to occur after the arrival of the investigators, this is interpreted as an indication of fraud. With regard to the narrative structure of reports of exceptional experiences (ExE):¹⁶ if,

15 According to Bender, the term “affective field” means “the total sum of dynamic affective factors operating in a contact situation and the reciprocity of their effects” (Bender, 1964: 23; see also Roll, 2000). With regard to poltergeist cases, see Mischo (1983). William Roll (2004: 158–168) also suggested a “field theory” of psi which, however, has a slightly different focus, and is more oriented to physical field theories, in contrast to the psychological and social-psychological theory of Bender.

16 Belz & Fach (2015: 365) define ExE as follows: “ExE are experiences that—from the point of view of those affected by them—are so exceptional that they seem incompatible with their explanations of reality or with the worldview of their social environment as far as their quality, process, and origin are concerned. ExE can be understood as deviations from what might be referred to as ordinary experiences consistent with the reality-model that individuals develop to cope with their inner and outer world. ExE serves as an umbrella term for occurrences that are labeled as paranormal, psychic, spiritual, transcendental, supernatural, magic, etc.” Although useful and appropriate on the whole, this definition of ExE is not precise enough regarding their representing “deviations from [...] ordinary experiences consistent with the reality-model”. To explain the crucial point with an example: Experiences such as “speaking in tongues” or being “slain in the Spirit” can represent dramatic exceptional experiences for adherents of a charismatic evangelical church, although these experiences do not deviate from the reality-model of the experiencer, or from that of the worldview of their social environment. Thus, the deviations that characterize ExE do not necessarily concern the reality-model but primarily the realm of everyday experiences. However, ExE do not include mundane

for example, an account of a near-death experience does not display the typical and well known features (leaving the body, approaching a bright light, etc.) of such reports, it is likely to be interpreted as confabulation, or a conscious attempt to cheat.¹⁷ Although such models provide cognitive landmarks on the “swampy ontological ground” of anomalous phenomena which seem to be, as structures of rationality, reasonable criteria for the selection of research methodology (aims, measuring instruments, etc.), it must be noted that these are inevitably reductionist approaches,¹⁸ and one thereby runs the risk of narrowing the perspective too far and overlooking essential aspects—a risk which might be bigger in the field of anomalistics than in other research fields.

In many cases, it will therefore be useful to choose an explorative data-guided research strategy in the sense of qualitative and interpretative social research (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Schwartz-Shea, 2012). With such an approach, methods are provided which observe a principle of openness, and postpone decisions about the theoretical structure of the research object. Thus, the emergence of an inherent structure is facilitated (Hoffmann-Riem, 1980: 343). This general relinquishment of theoretical presuppositions about the research object and, therefore, the nature of the interviewees, is crucial when the research topic relates to heterodox worldviews.

In the following, some methodological particularities of the anomalistics research field will be described that are closely related to the associated ideological challenges and the scientific special status resulting from this concerning the relationship between model and method.

extraordinary experiences (sometimes used synonymously with “exceptional experiences”) such as celebrating a wedding, or the birth of one’s own child, or a bungee jump from a high bridge. The deviations regarding ExE are often, but not necessarily, directed to a religious, spiritual or otherworldly layer of reality. For an agnostic, or atheist, person the deviation from the reality-model might be central for assessing such an experience as ExE as referred to in the definition by Belz & Fach. The problem with this focus is that it mainly concerns the cognitive level and seems to be based on the assumption that peoples’ worldviews have to be coherent. However, most people can easily live with incoherent, contradictory worldviews or reality-models (e. g. Luhrmann, 1989: 337–344; Mayer, 2008: 32, footnote 24). In most cases, the exceptionality of ExE seems to be felt and assessed “on a gut level” as can be seen easily, and very clearly, with the example of natural mystical experiences.

17 In a talk about near-death experiences, for instance, a speaker stated with regard to the authenticity of such accounts: “If tens of thousands report the same story letter by letter, and then somebody comes and reports a different story of what he had experienced” then it is immediately clear that it must be invented (Christoph Konrad Kalka, September, 13th, 2003, DEGUFU-Jubiläumskongress, Bad Kreuznach).

18 It is inevitable because of the empirical underdetermination of theory in the sense of Quine (1951).

The existence of different models and scientific approaches to case studies in the phenomenal domain of anomalistics does not mean that the same methodological tools cannot be considered appropriate, and applied. Thus, for instance, the assessment of the likelihood that reported phenomena are produced by forgery is of relevance for the spiritualist-characterized research group of the Instituto Brasileiro de Pesquisas Psicofísicas (IBPP), which considers the existence of spirits an absolute matter of course (Playfair, 2011: 139–146), as well as for a group of pontifical investigators examining an allegedly religious miracle and skeptics trying to explore the alternative possibilities of “fraud” and “error of perception”. The affinity of field-research-based single case studies to criminalistics becomes evident with the almost always relevant question about fraud and false pretense: on a physical level, there is the search for physical traces, e. g. by using “ghost traps” and “ghost detectors”; on a psychological level, one deals with profiling (focus person), systemic perspectives, and depth-psychological interpretations of RSPK phenomena.¹⁹ In addition to the criminalistics aspect, perceptual physiology and psychology aspects also play an important role in many cases. It is, therefore, about the clarification of possible conventional explanations of the phenomena or experiences. This even applies to decidedly psychodiagnostic and psychohygienic investigative approaches, where the issue of the genuineness of the phenomena is not so much in focus because such explanations provide alternative interpretation frameworks that can be used therapeutically.

Methodological differences mainly result from the nature of the phenomena under investigation, the—often ideologically coined—choice of the preferred explanation model, as well as the main purpose of the examination. This will become clear with the description of several fields of investigation in the following chapters. However, we would like to mention a first example of how basic (theoretical or ideological) presuppositions influence the methodological approach: the American-style ghost hunting groups (Hill, 2017, and Mayer, 2013, for an overview). A traditional spiritualist belief often forms the basis of their activity, accompanied by the idea that ghosts or paranormal phenomena manifest themselves on a physical level; that is, that they have an effect on measuring instruments of any kind so that anomalies can be detected in measurement data. The more physical parameters that are measured, the more likely it is that some “anomalies” will be detected which can then be interpreted as an effect of the transcen-

19 No big surprise that the founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology (*Scuola positiva di diritto penale*) and inventor of the (nowadays no longer accepted) theory of anthropological criminology, Cesare Lombroso (1836–1909), also conducted investigations in the field of occult phenomena. As a skeptical criminal investigator, he had been invited to séances of the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino, and considered the experienced phenomena genuine (Lombroso, 1909, *passim*).

dent on the physical world. For this reason, these groups are extensively equipped with technical devices: video and audio recordings are made, and various physical parameters (geomagnetic field strength, temperature, air pressure, atmospheric humidity, noise, light) are measured at a supposedly haunted place. The collected data are then jointly analyzed and examined for conspicuous structures. This approach can be characterized as being positivistic and almost physicalistic: ghosts manifest themselves physically, and they are detectable physically with the respective measuring instruments. Accordingly, technical devices are indispensable tools for creating evidence: “The technology itself is celebrated, promoted, and sold on sites professing to lead the practice of ‘high-tech ghostbusting’. This latest version of techno-mysticism fuses a feeble-minded mysticism [...] with a fetishizing of the technology itself” (Potts, 2004: 221). However, if the basic assumptions of the physical manifestation of ghostly entities are rejected, the measured “evidence” of the paranormal quickly becomes evidence of the investigators’ faith in technology. In most cases, numerous alternative explanations for the identified anomalies in measurement data are available. Instead of making use of ghosts, it is then sufficient to move around in a—in a double sense—“normal” research area with fluctuating environmental factors. They can indeed possess explanatory value as we will see, for instance, in the section “Experimental RSPK investigations” in chapter “RSPK investigations” of this volume.

A technically oriented investigation approach with field-research-based single case studies, being of particular appeal to the ghost hunting groups, has been considered rather critically for decades by most researchers oriented to scientific parapsychology: on the one hand, the use of technical devices is methodologically assessed as rather problematic due to the many possibilities for (self-)delusion, and, on the other, the idea of physically measurable anomalies at specific locations (hauntings, place-bound anomalies; see chapter “RSPK investigations”) cannot be so easily integrated into the psychodynamic (animistic) models of RSPK events which are widely accepted in scientific parapsychology. This model development can be considered as part of an increasing psychologization of the paranormal or occult, which shows up in various fields of the extraordinary (right up to astrology and the more recent forms of Western magic). The main reason for this development is certainly the fact that such an approach is very compatible with the science-dominated worldview of the modern age. In this way, the area of the “occult” is demystified in several respects, and the paranormal is normalized and can thus be better integrated into the prevailing worldview. This is often considered an absolutely necessary condition of a scientific—in the strict sense—method of dealing with this field of topics.

In addition to the scientific-policy aspects, psychohygienic reasons for this development can also be identified: psychologizing places the human being in the center and

thereby “humanizes” the phenomena themselves. This gives the impression that one can control them, and deal with them, more easily, avoiding a potential ontological uncertainty. One could consider this as a personal intrapsychic dissociation for the purpose of anxiety reduction. No matter how far such an, again psychological, explanation of psychologizing reaches, it is apparent that the focus for the investigation of poltergeist cases has consequently shifted away from the reported phenomena to the experience reports “as a psychological fact, part of a variant of human life and behavior” (Streichardt, 1991: 674). The question about the genuineness of the reported paranormal phenomena and, by implication, their ontological nature accordingly fades into the background (cf. Mischo, 1983: 173); in contrast, psychodiagnostic approaches move to the center of the investigation methodology.²⁰

The unpublished manual “Idealtypisches Untersuchungsdesign für RSPK-Fälle” [Ideal-typical research design for RSPK cases], authored by the former IGPP staff member Rolf Streichardt, lists a whole series of psychological measuring instruments and tests which should be used in the investigation of the psychical factors and psychodynamics now assumed to be involved (1987: 7–9). He describes video cameras, photo equipment, and audio recording devices as indispensable technical aids for field investigations. The use of these technical devices primarily allows a thorough documentation of the process of examination (ibid.: 6) and thereby provides the possibility of a subsequent language- and behavior-analytical evaluation. In this regard, RSPK investigations are, in many aspects, akin to typical “normal-psychological” examinations of familial problem situations, and only minor methodological peculiarities can be seen, such as the determined search for an RSPK-triggering focus person, as well as the forensic exploration (fraudulent production of poltergeist phenomena, etc.). Paranormal phenomena are assessed on the basis of these psychological examinations with regard to their “symptomatic character and their ability to provide insights in conjunction with specific psycho- and sociodynamic constellations” (Mischo, 1983)—roughly comparable with a depth-psychological interpretation of psychosomatic symptoms. Thus, Mischo could conclude on the basis of his respective investigation of four poltergeist cases that person-related “poltergeist phenomena—genuine or spoofed—always indicates a failed problem-solving behavior of the individual and the group” (ibid.: 191).

This emphasis on the clinical perspective and the almost necessarily associated pathologization of the events and experiences due to a deficit model (cf. Schetsche, 2013) can, historically speaking, firstly be understood as a scientific reaction which counteracts the criminalization or religious stigmatization of the people concerned (cf. Mischo,

20 This does not apply to investigations by lay ghost hunting groups.

1983: 173) and thereby protects them from public restrictions or sanctions. This, however, leads in turn to secondary stigmatizations which can be described as a direct effect of pathologization (of the examined processes as well as those involved). Against this background, the counseling department of the IGPP aims to “normalize” RSPK phenomena as well as other ExE, i. e. to interpret them as an “everyday” part of the human experience of the world, as varieties of human experiences and perceptions that are not necessarily linked to pathological processes. In such a functionalistic understanding, paranormal phenomena, interpreted as externalizations of unconscious psychical tensions, are seen as possible strategies of overcoming reality which can be made redundant, and disappear, by therapeutic means.

The American sociologist James McClenon takes a slightly different approach. He, too, uses a functionalist model of psi phenomena and is accordingly guided by this in his research. In his studies, he methodologically follows the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the aim of which is to pursue a primarily object-related theory construction on the basis of the respectively encountered and empirically constructed social reality. In addition to participatory observation (for instance of healing rituals, or spiritualist séances) and survey data, content analysis of accounts of extraordinary experiences of non-scientific experiencers as well as anthropologists forms the basis of his theory construction (McClenon & Nooney, 2002). McClenon developed his *Ritual Healing Theory* with data from quite different fields of anomalistics obtained by this means (2002, 2005). The basic assumption is grounded on the data-based thesis of McClenon that extraordinary experiences display characteristics that are independent of culture, and constitute an anthropological universal. According to his theory, the human capability to dissociate, and to externalize the causes of paranormal phenomena, offers evolutionary advantages insofar as these two factors seem to favor the occurrence of such phenomena. In this regard, McClenon compares shamanic healing rituals with spiritualist séances (McClenon, 2004). Such experiences are conducive to the initiation and support of healing processes which are of existential importance, particularly in cultural environments without access to the possibilities of modern medicine and pharmacology. McClenon’s interest concerns not so much the ontological status of the phenomena and their implications for scientific understanding of the world, but rather the question of how paranormal beliefs develop, how universal they are, and what meaningful and evolutionary advantageous function they can have for human beings—beyond their function as problem symptoms. The focus on the experiential aspect of “paranormal” phenomena determines the methodological approach, namely choosing interviews and reports (also from participant observation) as the data basis, whereby the method of participant observation also incorporates the experiences of the investigators. The cross-cultural comparison of qualitative data enabled the development of his theory based on the specific quality of extraordinary

experiences, which in turn generated verifiable hypotheses (cf. e.g. Cooper & Thalbourne, 2005). This is an example of how the gathering of experiential reports in single case studies can lead to future analyses based on such data and the construction of theories about the nature and function of paranormal phenomena.

A significant cause for the reluctance of scientific parapsychologists towards phenomenon-related investigation strategies has not yet been mentioned: this kind of research has been stagnating for a long time. On the one hand, convincing evidence of paranormal phenomena has been obtained in laboratory research as well as in the living environment. This becomes evident to every open-minded person who is familiar with the huge amount of the respective scientific literature (e.g. Cardeña, 2018; Cardeña, Palmer, & Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015), but it does not convince skeptics or arouse interest in basic researchers oriented towards the scientific mainstream. The required body of evidence (easy replicability on the basis of a generally accepted and error-tolerant model in the sense of conventional mainstream science) cannot be provided. On a theoretical level, there are models that exactly predict such behavior, e.g. Lucadou's *Model of Pragmatic Information* (Lucadou, 2015) and the *General Quantum Theory* (Walach, Lucadou, & Römer, 2014); but nevertheless, such uncertainties and discontinuities on the empirical level remain too inconvenient to be included in mainstream research (cf. Mayer & Schetsche, 2016). Therefore, it seems reasonable with regard to research strategy to gain better knowledge about the phenomena by investigating the contexts and accompanying processes. Julie Milton conducted a survey study on the effects of "paranormal" experiences of members of the Society for Psychical Research and mentioned three reasons why research on spontaneous cases should be concerned not only with questions about the genuineness and nature of the reported phenomena, but also with the emotions, experiences, and views of the experiencers (Milton, 1992: 314–315):

- First, patterns in experiencers' thoughts, feelings or actions can lead researchers to form new theories about what is going on in some types of spontaneous case.
- Second, patterns in experiencers' assumptions about the paranormal can lead them to leave out what might be useful facts when they describe experiences of their own. Taking RSPK as an example again, those who allegedly experience events like this often assume that "spirits" are responsible. Researchers who suspect that the experiencer's own psychic powers might be directly responsible and might be expressing some kind of psychological problem have to ask about or observe the experiencer's emotional situation themselves; the experiencer will not volunteer this information if he or she thinks it is irrelevant. On the other hand, patterns in experiencers' accounts of similar types of case could provide useful clues about the true causes of the experience; the experiencer may be in a better position to form an accurate theory about what is going on than the researcher,

because he or she may have more information about the situation. Either way, it is useful for researchers to know about these patterns.

- Third, finding out how experiencers deal with an apparently paranormal experience can help researchers and others to find out how best to help people who have similar experiences to cope well. A seemingly paranormal experience is, for some people, a major life event, and we know relatively little about how people handle such an experience, or what factors influence whether they handle it well or badly, in terms of the effects upon their mental health. The accumulated wisdom of experiencers might help researchers to see what sort of support, guidance or information would be useful.

The first two points directly target the understanding of the phenomena, while the third one refers to psychohygienic issues. Sybo Schouten (1983) followed a similar purpose with his analysis of three different collections of spontaneous cases. Here, too, a more detailed knowledge about extraordinary experiences should contribute to the construction of models and hypotheses. Although these approaches do not tackle the investigation of the phenomena directly, choosing a detour via the individuals experiencing them, the epistemological interest is nevertheless largely directed towards the phenomena themselves. This distinguishes them from decidedly functionalist approaches of interpretation of extraordinary experiences.

In summary, we can state that both *phenomenon-related* and *person-related* approaches can be found in field-research-based anomalistics. The first is the main approach of amateur-scientific researchers, while the latter is more pronounced with academic-scientific investigation groups. The history of parapsychological research is characterized by the aim of gaining incontrovertible evidence for the paranormal quality of the examined phenomena—as well as its failure, at least with regard to a broad acceptance of the scientific community. Skepticism and sensibility to the nature, and limits, of “proof” (cf. Lehrer, 2010) is often lacking with amateur researchers (and not only them). However, the presented approaches and research strategies demonstrate that a person-related and experience-centered investigation methodology does not limit the findings to statements about the people involved but is absolutely able to provide the possibility of drawing (at least hypothetical) conclusions about the phenomena themselves, and, thereby, indirectly reintroduce reference to the phenomena into the research.

Academic Training – Amateur Research

Although the value of amateur research for gaining scientific knowledge has been largely considered as low,²¹ such a skeptical attitude, from a scientific point of view, is more

21 A useful counter-image is provided by the experience of academic astronomy with amateur

than appropriate especially in the field of RSPK research. This is mainly because this field of anomalistics (and not only this one) is characterized by an *absence* of elaborated theory construction, an assured ontology of the phenomena under investigation, and a firmly agreed methodology. However, one can put it the other way around: because frontier sciences are lacking these characteristics of conventional areas of science they are exactly this—frontier sciences. Due to this very set of problems, research in anomalistics in general, and especially RSPK research, requires a particularly comprehensive knowledge of epistemological, scientific-theoretical, and methodological problem areas, and an ability for enhanced (self-)reflection. As a rule, lay researchers do not possess this knowledge—even if they may have technical qualifications in some specific fields of investigation. In our opinion, this seems to be the reason that, in many cases, the results of on-site investigations are scarcely useful from a scientific point of view, even with considerable use of resources and great commitment of those involved. Lay researchers usually do not “invent” their own research methodology (at least, as long as the academic science represents the reference system) but use whatever falls into their hands and seems most appropriate, according to their understanding of the phenomena and of “scientificity”. The crucial problem is to what extent the rules of scientific methodology, modeling, and theory construction are known and reflected—and if such (self-)critical processes of reflection are taken into account during the investigations. In other words: this is not about specific expert or methodological knowledge, but the ability to deal with it in a reflexive and (self-)critical way. This problem becomes apparent when faced with the repeatedly encountered quasi-mechanical use of a once-learned investigation method, overemphasis on a technical-instrumental approach, and omission of necessary additional steps of data collection and validation. A further critical point is the evaluation and particularly the interpretation of the data. The lack of awareness of problems will regularly lead to biases and misinterpretations because, on the one hand, the limitations of the implicit models are not adequately considered and, on the other, typical perception errors and psychological mechanisms distorting judgment (overgeneralizations, wrong assessment of the statistical expectation of chance, autosuggestion) are not sufficiently taken into account. This applies not only for RSPK investigations but also for many other fields of anomalistics.²²

astronomy. This example demonstrates how reasonable and helpful the employment of interested and engaged lay researchers can be if the objects under investigation as well as the applied methodological means are meticulously predetermined. In such cases, amateur research can play an indispensable role as a provider of observational data for the scientific specialist community (e. g. Lankford, 1981; see also Hövelmann, 2005).

22 These are in no way trivial methodological problems. Stokes emphasizes this by writing on the problem of assessing spontaneous cases: “In general, any attempt to assess the actual

From a scientific perspective, the crucial question is: what is the quality of the data collected by lay researchers, i. e. how suitable are they for a re-analysis? Several aspects are of importance:

- consideration of the relevant content aspects,
- consideration of relevant methodological aspects,
- processing of the data,
- quality of the documentation (investigation report).

To clarify this by way of an example: among the investigation manuals used by lay researchers—this applies mainly to the fields of RSPK and UFO research—there are some which are quite useful and helpful. If lay research groups follow such reasonable manuals they are able to collect valuable data—similarly to amateur astronomers. Thus, for instance, the manual *Guide to the investigation of apparitions, hauntings, poltergeists and kindred phenomena* published by the Society for Psychical Research (Barrington, 1996) is indeed also directed to lay researchers. In addition to suggestions for the examination methodology, guidelines for investigation report writing are also presented, with the intention that such reports can be included in a database established by academic scientists and evaluated in a similar way to data collected by professional researchers.²³

Furthermore, the problem of lay research in anomalistics (cf. Schetsche, 2004; Mayer & Schetsche, 2006) becomes particularly virulent if the mass media significantly co-determine the framework conditions of a case under investigation. The relationship between the mass media and frontier-area research is traditionally highly ambivalent (cf. Hill, 2010; McClenon, 1984: 197–220). This applies particularly to field research in anomalistics because the interest of the mass media can make the situation worse for a scientific investigation, or even impede it, as we can see with the two examples of the “Chopper” case and the case of the “Bélmez faces” provided in this volume (both in Part III of this volume). Accordingly, a scientific investigation team will act carefully, if reporters and journalists are involved in any way (e. g. due to wishes of involved per-

probability that the evidence from spontaneous cases is due to chance coincidence, whether performed by the proponent of psi phenomena or the skeptic, is fraught with pitfalls. Such calculations rely on too many debatable and hidden assumptions, and the data are subject to too many distorting factors to allow any definitive assessment to be made. This is one of the reasons why parapsychologists have largely turned from the study of spontaneous cases to the study of psi processes in experimental situations, in which the probability that the results are due to chance can be more or less precisely calculated” (Stokes 1997: 63).

23 With the example of Egon Pfeiffer who is introduced in the chapter “RSPK investigations”, one can understand what a constructive cooperation between amateur research and academic science in the field of anomalistics can be like.

sons). For lay researchers, by contrast, the mass media—and today also the digital network media²⁴—are usually of positive importance in several regards: the mass media provide the possibility of self-representation for such actors, enhance their public visibility and, thereby, increase their alleged importance for the field, and furthermore, provide free advertising for their offered “service”.

Accordingly, many lay researchers are increasingly seeking contact with the mass media and enjoy the popularity which develops with public presentation of their activity.²⁵ However, with an increasing popularity of lay research in the field of anomalistics, these activities become critical. This is because the mass media attention to this kind of investigation leads to a distorted image of science in general, and of anomalistics research in particular, as well as of the people working in these fields. Thus, the expert status is completely redefined by the mass media: an expert in the field of frontier area research is no longer the technically and methodologically trained scientist but the lay researcher, with good connections to this journalist or that daily newspaper, who *plays* (in a double sense) himself into the fore. For example, this can be shown with a television program from the *Bayrischer Rundfunk* [Bavarian Broadcasting] on the famous Rosenheim poltergeist case in 1967 and 1968 (Bender, 1969), in which members of a newly founded ghost hunting group had been invited as “experts” to explain the occurrences.²⁶ The skeptically oriented psychologist and editor of the volume *Hauntings and Poltergeists*, James Houran, notes on this:

I used to regard ghost-hunters as harmless organizations, akin to folklorists and history buffs who reenact Civil War battles on weekends as a hobby. But, this view is naive. It seems that these individuals are being increasingly consulted (i. e., mistaken) by the popular media as parapsychologists. They are dangerous because they do not understand the psychology and parapsychology of these experiences, and the genuine authorities go unrecognized. It is no wonder why skeptics such as James Randi or Joe Nickell have little difficulty making paranormal interpretations of ghostly phenomena look silly in the popular media (Houran, 2001: 294).

Much the same applied in Germany to the field of UFO research, where a few individual lay researchers gained the status among the public of being the only “true experts”

24 See Hill (2017) and Mayer (2013) on the significance of the Internet for ghost hunting groups.

25 Most professional anomalistics researchers only very rarely view the successful “public relations work” of the lay researchers in an envious manner because they are too aware of the hindering quality of representatives of the mass media, particularly with complex single case investigations.

26 See <https://www.ghtb.de/news/n2009.html> [accessed: August 21, 2017; now no longer available]. It was broadcast live on July 2, 2009, as part of the series “on3-Südwild”.

for this type of phenomena for a period of several years, due to the power of the mass media (Mayer, 2008: 127–128; see also the chapter “UFO research” [Anton] in this volume).²⁷ This successful acquisition of status resulted not only from the offensive press work and self-assertive behavior of the respective lay researchers but especially because they provided the mass media system with exactly what it did not get from professional scientific experts: far too simplistic answers to wrongly asked questions. Together the so-called experts and the mass media built a self-running system for the generation of pseudo-news, in which supply and demand were optimally matched.

Concluding Remarks and Overview of the Volume

Compared with lay research, an unprejudiced and open-minded scientific investigation of anomalistic phenomena involves difficulties in several respects. The case studies presented in parts III and IV demonstrate, on the one hand, that “extraordinary” phenomena are accessible to “ordinary” scientific methodology; but, on the other hand, they also show quite plainly that only limited knowledge can be gained concerning the *ontological* status of the phenomena under investigation. The results of these as well as many other former investigations at the IGPP suggest the formulation of two theses that could generally be important for the scientific study (and the psychohygienic understanding) of extraordinary experiences and possible anomalies:

1. *On a phenomenological level, anomalies have hitherto been insufficiently scientifically determined.* The scientific analysis of complex spontaneous cases on a singular case basis is constantly in danger of only duplicating the lifeworldly way of dealing with extraordinary events. In lifeworldly as well as scientific attempts at explanation, one first tries—in the style of the fictional character Sherlock Holmes²⁸—to eliminate the obvious, and in this context, that always means the “natural” causes. If this is possible (largely, at least), the solution has to simply be in the improbable, the “supernatural” (or paranormal). This is merely a negative determination of an extraordinary event (it is exclusively defined by what it is not: namely “normal”), and is also reflected by the fact that the suggested paranormal explanations largely remain, and must remain, arbitrary. If the scientific argumentation follows the lifeworldly attempts at explanation made by those involved

27 The situation has now changed a little insofar as one prominent lay researcher, Werner Walter, died in 2016. This demonstrates again how much the development and conditions in the field of research into the frontier areas of science depends on single individuals—on the side of the skeptics as well as on the proponents (with regard to the success and failure of the academization of parapsychology see Lux & Paletschek, 2016).

28 The typical method of elimination by Holmes: when the impossible is eliminated and the improbable remains, the improbable must be the truth.

(witnesses or lay researchers) in this manner, the investigators cannot be reproached for this. The necessity of this approach is founded either in the nature of the phenomena under investigation (ontological problematic) or in the lack of positive knowledge in the frontier area sciences about their object of investigation (epistemic problematic). Apparently, frontier area sciences neither have an empirically proven taxonomy nor a typological decision heuristics in many of their fields that make use of the positive characteristics of a phenomenon for its determination—even when “apparitions” are photographically recorded as in the case of the photographic anomaly presented in chapter “A Remarkable Photographic Anomaly” (Mayer, Part IV of this volume). Thus, after an argumentative elimination of diverse “natural” (= conventional) explanations, one can only conclude: as a paranormal phenomenon, it could have been “anything”. It is understandable that this is not satisfactory because science is expected to possess methods of knowledge acquisition and evaluation that go beyond the possibilities of lifeworldly knowledge acquisition.

2. *By means of established research methodologies, it is possible to sufficiently reconstruct and interpretatively understand the psychosocial dynamics of extraordinary phenomena.* Beyond the question about the ontological status of the phenomena, we are able to comprehensively reconstruct the psychological circumstances as well as the social consequences of extraordinary phenomena by using established psychological and social-scientific methods, as can be seen with the presentations of spontaneous cases in this volume. With the results of these investigations, the contextual conditions of concrete phenomena as well as the reactions of the people involved and the social aftereffects—at least in part—become interpretable and understandable. This finding is not only encouraging with regard to future reconstructions of extraordinary experiences and anomalistic events by means of such “traditional” methods, but also indicates the possible importance of respective investigations. Furthermore, from a psychohygienic perspective, the IGPP investigation reports of the last decades provide intense (and sometimes also surprising) insights into motivational and character preconditions as well as the collective and individual coping strategies of those involved. This makes it conceivable that the findings of such comprehensive single case studies could facilitate the psychohygienic assessment of spontaneous reports beyond the concrete case, and thereby, decisions about possibly necessary therapeutic interventions. However, here again, the limited knowledge that can be gained concerning the ontological status of the phenomena under investigation must be emphasized. This is because even a very extensive reconstruction of the psychic preconditions and social processes of the “detection” of an assumedly paranormal phenomenon—as for instance with the case of the photographic anomaly (“A Remarkable ...” [Mayer])—is not equivalent to answering the question about its ontological status. The obvious (and in RSPK research well known) assumption that there is a connection between the involved individuals and the observed phenomena reveals neither some-

thing about the character of this connection nor the concrete conditional factors. As the example of the “photo case” indicates, such an assumption can be applied—without any discriminating power—to a *variety* of animistic and spiritualist explanation hypotheses. This demonstrates impressively the general status of scientific knowledge about anomalies, which strongly limits the explanatory power of single case studies.

With the investigation of the “Castle Hotel” case (“Becoming a Haunt Myth ...” [Mayer, Part IV of this volume]), the interdisciplinary investigation team was confronted with a very complex, and difficult to comprehend, *mélange* of alleged RSPK phenomena, individual problem situations, and specific psychosocial as well as communicative dynamics.²⁹ Advance conversations and on-site inspections, numerous interviews, and historical research brought to light once again the well known discrepancy of the possibility of an interpretive understanding of the psycho-social dimensions and/or parameters of the existing situation on the one side, and the impossibility of a valid explanation of the reported phenomena themselves on the other. Accordingly, the final report consists more of a person-focused than a phenomenon-centered reconstruction. This seems almost inevitable because, here again, the extraordinary phenomena—that are actually the center stage of anomalistics research—could only be investigated indirectly.³⁰ As so often, the alleged RSPK phenomena could not be physically documented but only retrospectively reconstructed from witness statements (cf. e. g. Stevenson, 1987).

However, one must generally ask the question whether such field-research-based single case studies in their *person-focused* version are worth the effort and should be conducted at all, or if this field should be entirely left to lay research groups as the chance of phenomenon-related scientific gain of knowledge is usually rather meagre. However, there are several arguments against such a (almost resigned) reaction which make an increased investigation effort appear promising in such cases.

At first, one should take a look at the strength of the method of single case studies: it is not the production of direct scientific evidence but of *documentation*—as the self-conception of anomalistics in general should not be mainly characterized by the desire to produce explanations, but to document anomalies as closely as possible according to scientific criteria (cf. Alvarado, 1996, 2002, and his chapter “The Place of Spontaneous

29 In a hotel with a “glorious past”, almost all staff members had extraordinary experiences over a long period which they partly interpreted as poltergeist phenomena and/or as a result of the presence of spiritual entities.

30 Several years after our investigation and after the hotel operation had ceased, two ghost hunting groups tried to directly “measure” paranormal phenomena in the “Castle Hotel” with all the common “ghost detectors” and ghost hunting devices, but without success.

Cases ...” of this volume; Watt, 1994). Such documentations get their intrinsic value precisely from the fact that the phenomena are not explainable with current scientific models, and often astonish all of the people involved. The importance and strength of single case studies are precisely in proceeding with the largest possible openness and keeping as free as possible from (heuristic) model assumptions (e. g. “functions” of RSPK phenomena, focus person, models of psi) in order to avoid only getting the results that one expects. Only such an open approach makes it possible to detect individual particularities that one might not necessarily understand but the accurate documentation of which can become very important for future data evaluation and theory construction, as well as provide valuable suggestions for experimental approaches to anomalistics research (Kelly & Tucker, 2015; Rhine, 1977, 1981; Stokes, 1997: 76–77; West, 1993).³¹ This may be possible with an accumulation of single case studies which, in the first instance, provide a variety of subjective evidence (see Alvarado, 2002: 118–121; Rhine, 1981: 245–257). However, there is a risk that comparisons only produce common narratives that say little about the “authentic” experiences. The comparison of singular cases has to be done on a very abstract level to prevent the loss of possibly important and interesting details which—with their strangeness—may be able to say more about the phenomena than the whole narrative.³²

A further reason is the contact to the “field”, i. e. to empirical evidence, which provides a stimulant and antidote against an “ivory tower of science” approach to the phenomena, as well as the hope of encountering a “big case”. The first of these reduces the danger of no longer perceiving the realm of experience of the “extraordinary” in its existentially special status and dealing with it as an exchangeable research subject among many others. The latter forms a driving force for anomalistics research in general which should not be underestimated: the search for empirical “hard evidence” for, in general terms, substantial “weaving flaws” in the network of the currently accepted scientific models of the world. As can be seen with the “Chopper” poltergeist case (“The Authority Strikes Back” [Mayer])—this search continued to concern Hans Bender towards the end of his life with the same intenseness as it had during his research decades earlier. Due to the extensive documentation, the “Rosenheim” poltergeist case, which was investigated by him and his team, is even today an internationally known and often quoted outstanding example of a well researched anomalistic

31 Kelly and Tucker argue that the “conditions under which psi is most likely to occur [...] are more likely to be identified under natural, and not artificial, circumstances” (2015: 66).

32 See Mayer & Gründer (2011) on the relationship between extraordinary experiences as singular experiences and the problem of their transfer into communicable experiences—often with the aid of common narratives.

event, which, for many, represents proof, or highly subjective evidence at least, for an exceptional extraordinary event. The value of such well documented “big” cases for the reputation of anomalistics research can hardly be overestimated.³³

The fact that expensive investigations of such cases do not automatically provide physical explanations of the events should not be taken as an impediment—as the well made and hardly disputable documentations of anomalistic events and experiences³⁴ already legitimates the existence of a research field for “border areas of science” in addition to classic scientific disciplines. The fact that these boarder, or frontier, sciences with their empirical investigations (be it single case studies, comparative studies, or experiments) have not been able to establish a verifiable theoretical structure in many cases does not invalidate their status as empirically based science at all, but only indicates the existence of, in addition to quasi “constant”, easily predictable, and often technically useable natural forces in our world, exceptional specific events or similar recurrent phenomena with a rather “fluid” character, which have (hitherto) defied classic detection methods and generally accepted explanation models. If such phenomena did not exist, scientific anomalistics would, indeed, be completely dispensable.

With this volume, these above-mentioned issues will be addressed in various ways. The first part concerning general considerations includes a reprint of an article by the American psychologist Carlos Alvarado, “The Place of Spontaneous Cases in Parapsychology”, which was published in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* in 1996. Although written more than twenty years ago, this important paper is still timely and topical. In accordance with the title, it focusses on the field of parapsychology, but the conclusions presented are applicable to other research fields. Alvarado considers the relationship between laboratory and field research, discussing their strengths and weaknesses. He clearly advocates a pluralistic approach to the study of psi phenomena (see also Mayer & Schetsche, 2016, on this issue).

33 However, historical cases of such a convincing quality often enter the area of legends and anecdotes with increasing temporal distance (such as the levitations of D.D. Home for instance) and thereby lose their impact on science.

34 The general survey of the Tunguska event by the Russian researcher Vladimir Rubtsov (2009) can be considered as exemplary: the author provides a highly knowledgeable summary of the most important empirical findings about the phenomenon from the previous hundred years, critically reports the existing theoretical modeling of the event—and finally comes to the conclusion that none of the hitherto suggested explanations can be brought into accordance with the empirical findings. His conclusion can be considered as almost programmatic for the investigation of anomalistic events: despite a plethora of observational data (gathered with numerous expeditions) it remains unclear to date what actually happened in that outlying part of Siberia.

Part II is dedicated to the description of different fields of anomalistics in which single case studies play a crucial role, and the discussion of specific methodological issues. However, it is clear that this description provides an overview and is far from exhaustive. One highly significant field of case investigations in anomalistics that is not considered, among others, is the field of reincarnation research or, more precisely, of cases of reincarnation type (CORT).³⁵ The first two chapters provide an image of the field of RSPK investigations, considering methodological aspects as well as a description of different approaches and agents. With regard to the latter, the focus is directed on, and the examples are mostly taken from, the situation in Germany.³⁶ Furthermore, two brief glances at cryptozoology and crop circle research as very different areas of anomalistics are provided. In the third chapter, the sociologist Andreas Anton gives an overview of single case studies in UFO research.

In Part III, four historical case studies are presented. These cases are largely unknown among English-speaking audiences because detailed descriptions only exist in German, if at all. First, Michael Nahm reconstructs the investigation of the largely neglected “prison spook case” performed by the German physician, author, and pioneer of psychological research, Justinus Kerner, in 1835 and early 1836. This concerned remarkable haunting phenomena that were regularly witnessed by about 50 people of different social strata. Its significance is also due to its occurrence in a well controlled environmental situation (prison), and also in the private home of witnesses including Kerner himself. Nahm shows that awareness of several methodological issues and problems was already present at this time, as were the typical reactions of critics and the public we know so well from today. The second case is based on historical research carried out by Gerd Hövelmann, who sadly died much too soon, together with Carlos Alvarado and Massimo Biondi. He put a lot of effort into the case of the recurrent apparitions of Emélie Sagée. I am very glad that his partner, Friederike Schriever, was able to finish this piece of work and provide it for this volume. The last two chapters in Part III, both written by myself, concern investigations of historical cases in which the founder of the IGPP, Hans Bender, was involved. He encountered specific (methodological) problems with both investiga-

35 This research field has its own methodological issues and strategies. Basic work has been done by Ian Stevenson (e.g. 1987). A good overview on this field is provided by Mills & Tucker (2014). Other significant fields are, for instance, near-death experiences (e.g. Greyson, 2014; Schmied-Knittel, 2015) and so-called “terminal lucidity” cases (Nahm, Greyson, Kelly & Haraldsson, 2012).

36 Beside the fact that this seems natural for a German author it might also fill an information gap for an English-speaking audience. There are only a few publications available in English that discuss the more recent developments in German parapsychological research.

tions that make them worth considering in this volume. The famous case of the Bélmez faces is often mentioned in books on RSPK or haunting occurrences, but there is little reliable scientific literature on the case. This chapter provides a historical reconstruction of the case and its investigations based on rich archival material. Furthermore, the precarious relationships among an alleged RSPK case, the public sphere, skeptics, and the mass media are mentioned explicitly. The presentation of the so-called “Chopper” poltergeist case focuses on the social reactions towards an alleged RSPK case that attracted great public attention. These made a thorough investigation and a final assessment of the case (mixed case or pure fraudulent activity) impossible. A process of “rational gravity” (McLuhan, 2010) took place that finally suppressed every potential paranormal aspect of the case (we will encounter this process again in the chapter “The ‘Amnéville RSPK Case’” written by Renaud Evrard).

The assessment of evidence in historical cases is often difficult because we mainly have to rely on witness reports and research documentation that may not meet contemporary research criteria. Nevertheless, such cases can provide impressive and strongly convincing “stories” and, furthermore, valuable suggestions concerning methodological issues. However, even in contemporary case studies, to which Part IV is dedicated, an accurate and well grounded assessment is sometimes difficult or not possible at all. This is due to the nature, or character, of the phenomena under investigation, as can be seen in the case studies presented here. The first two deal with “extras” on photographs, i. e. with occurrences that are first assumed to probably be anomalies, or depictions of anomalies. While the first case, “A remarkable photographic anomaly” (Mayer), remained unsolved despite a thorough and expensive investigation, the examination of the second one led to a highly plausible conventional explanation (Mayer & Kornmeier). Nevertheless, it is a very interesting case, which deserves to be used as an example, because it emphasizes the susceptibility of human perception to error in response to several framework conditions. In addition to neurophysiological properties, we were able to detect a direct priming effect by mass media coverage. But despite the high plausibility of the proposed explanation, absolute certainty could not be provided. Likewise, there is no absolute certainty that the preceding case involved a true anomaly. With the third presented case (Mayer), an estimation of the ontological nature of the reported phenomena is even more difficult. However, it is a good example of the reconstruction of spooky (RSPK-like) phenomena in a tradition-rich hotel in the deep Black Forest in Germany. And not only that: it also demonstrates how sociological and psychological conditions can foster the creation of the myth of a haunted house. A further contribution from Manuela von Lucadou and Sarah Pohl deals with methods of investigating and counseling in the context of a typical poltergeist case. The individuals involved sought help at the Parapsychologische Beratungsstelle in Freiburg (see chapter “RSPK Investigations”). The provided case report

shows the typical procedure that is applied in such cases by professional counselors and therapists who follow an ideologically neutral way of counseling and intervention. It presents the process from the initial contact to on-site explorations and interviews, the analysis of the involved “systems” of individuals (systemic embedding: family, peer group, etc.), and the formation of hypotheses as well as possible interventions. In the last chapter of the volume, the French psychologist Renaud Evrard focuses on sociological and sociopsychological aspects with his report of the (attempted) investigation of the Amnéville poltergeist case. This exhibits a temporal dynamic that is characteristic of such cases which receive a lot of public attention and media coverage. The four phases of RSPK cases postulated by Lucadou (1995, 2015) are clearly present in this case and led to social suppression and the natural and social elusiveness of the RSPK phenomena.

Having said all this, we hope that the present volume will fulfill the following aims: Contribute to a better understanding of the role of single case studies in the scientific research process in general, and provide practical information that can be used in future investigations in the field of anomalistics.

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THE PLACE OF SPONTANEOUS CASES IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY^{1,2}

Carlos S. Alvarado

Over the years there have been various discussions about the importance of spontaneous cases in parapsychology made by Ian Stevenson (1987a, b), Rhea White (1990, 1992), and Stephen Braude (1997) (see also Alvarado, 1987a; Biondi, 1987a, b; Gauld, 1993; Hearne, 1985; Stokes, 2017a, 2017b; Watt, 1994). In this article I will present my views about the place of spontaneous cases in parapsychology.

Parapsychology today, in the terminology of Abraham Maslow (1954), is to some extent a means-centered science as opposed to a problem-centered one. That is, many parapsychologists base their research on preferences for a particular method—the experiment—instead of focusing their efforts on a particular problem that can then be studied in a variety of ways. Such reliance on what is almost a single approach to the study of psi begs several questions. What are the implications of the creation and/or the acquisition of knowledge from the predominant experimental perspective in the field today? What are the limitations of such an approach? What is the price we pay when we so single-mindedly define the experiment as the royal road to legitimation in parapsychology? Or, stated in a different way, what are the advantages of spontaneous cases in the study of psi phenomena? These questions will guide my thoughts in this paper.

My sympathies are clearly with a more pluralistic approach than the one prevalent in the field at the moment. Briefly stated, I agree with what Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) say in *Essentials of Behavioral Research*: “Given the limitations of any particular strategy of inquiry, more than one approach to understanding is a logical necessity” (p. 137). This

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- 1 This is a more complete and revised version of the 1995 presidential address to the Parapsychological Association given at its 38th annual convention held in August in Durham, North Carolina. It was written while I enjoyed the financial support of the Parapsychology Foundation, the Society for Psychical Research, and the Perrott-Warrick Fund. I am grateful to Nancy L. Zingrone for useful editorial suggestions that considerably improved this paper. Useful suggestions were also obtained from William Braud, Gertrude Schmeidler, and Rhea White. Eberhard Bauer, Piero Cassoli, Enrico Marabini, and Alejandro Parra helped me to obtain references published in Germany, Italy, and in Argentina.
 - 2 This slightly revised article was firstly published 1996 in *The Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 90, 1–34. We thank Patrice Keane and the JASPR for generously providing us the copyright permission.

means that I do not take the position of Braude (1986) and White (1990) who seek to dispense with the experimental method. Instead I prefer a more clear balance between approaches to the study of psi phenomena. Like most of you, I believe that there is much to be gained by controlled observations, both experimental and quasi-experimental. Repeatable and carefully measured results obtained through experiments are a basic part of science, and an approach that is of basic importance in parapsychology as well.

The point is not to throw away the experimental legacy of our field. It is essential to continue this work, to extend it, and to improve on it. But at the same time we need to recognize that the current emphasis on the experimental method as the single most important generator of parapsychological knowledge is problematic. Our methodology is in desperate need of expansion, a point argued recently by William Braud (1994a). The royal road to knowledge is not the experiment alone, but rather a combination of approaches designed to converge in meaningful ways. I would like to expand my point by focusing on previous research trends in our field and by delineating some of the limiting consequences for a human science that depends so much on experiments. My discussion will touch on such conventional approaches to spontaneous case studies as case collections, surveys, and field studies. I will not touch in detail but want to acknowledge the variety of methodologies recently listed by White (1992) as well as recent defenses of the value of exploring our own psi experiences (e. g., Braud, 1994b). In addition, and as pointed out by J. B. Rhine (1955) 40 years ago, the issue is not limited to a contrast of experimental and spontaneous case approaches. There are gradations between these categories that complicate the distinctions when issues such as induced experiences are considered. Consequently, I am simplifying the debate for the sake of argument.

The Decline of Spontaneous Cases

With the rise of the Rhinean paradigm there was a clear decline in spontaneous case research in Anglo-American parapsychology. Nancy Zingrone (1988) charted this trend in her quantitative study of American parapsychological journals. This is also evident in presentations at Parapsychological Association conventions and in research reports published in journals. For example, reports of cases similar to the famous Cheltenham ghost (Morton, 1892), the Chaffin Will case ("Case," 1927), the Wilmot case (Sidgwick, 1891), and the Karin poltergeist case (Wijk, 1905) are much less frequent now. So are case collection studies similar to *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886), the latter work of Camille Flammarion (1900), and the work of Ernesto Bozzano (1923), and Walter Franklin Prince (1928), among others.

Although we have to be careful about generalizations made outside the English-speaking world, it is safe to say that the impact of J. B. Rhine's work was such that by the 1940s and 1950s the methodological emphasis of the field had turned from spontaneous cases and mediumistic studies to that of ESP and PK experiments. This change is clearly articulated in such books as Amadou's *La Parapsychologie* (1954), Pratt, Rhine, Smith, Stuart, & Greenwood's *Extrasensory Perception After Sixty Years* (1940), Carington's *Telepathy* (1945), and Soal & Bateman's *Modern Experiments in Telepathy* (1954). Although the research conducted in Europe maintained its own unique "flavor," there were also several examples of interest in the new experimental quantitative and forced-choice procedures that carried the prestige of America and the stamp of objectivity.

Among these were studies conducted by Urban (1949) in Germany, Zorab (1957) in Holland, Perot (1965) in France, and Buscaroli (1954) in Italy. In Latin America, perhaps the best example is the work of Fernández (1953).

The new experimental parapsychology also brought a very critical attitude towards spontaneous cases.³ Ehrenwald wrote in 1947: "Contemporary psychological research justly prides itself with having outgrown the stage when it relied chiefly on anecdotal accounts" (p. 60). Both J. B. and Louisa Rhine described the change from case studies to experiment as the natural evolution of a scientific discipline from an underdeveloped period to a more sophisticated one (J. B. Rhine, 1937; L. E. Rhine, 1977). There is some merit in this perspective in terms of some of the advantages of laboratory studies, but this view of the history of science in general and of the history of parapsychology in particular is a biased one, which takes as its model the development of the physical sciences while ignoring the particular complexities, needs, and problems of the social and behavioral sciences.

Two influential papers that damaged spontaneous case research as a methodology were those of D. J. West and J. B. Rhine, both published in 1948. In the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*, West argued that the testimony involved in some reports of spontaneous phenomena was unreliable due to problems of memory and other issues. In *Journal of Parapsychology*, Rhine contended that cases could never provide evidence for psi and that they were important only in terms of providing ideas to guide experimental research. This viewpoint was articulated by both J. B. and Louisa Rhine in many publications (e. g., J. B. Rhine, 1955; L. E. Rhine, 1967) and was the underlying assumption for L. E. Rhine's case collection research (e. g., 1951, 1953). Later criticisms appeared in the books of Flew (1953), Amadou (1954), Rao (2017), and Thouless (1972), as well

3 Criticism of the value of spontaneous cases are not new. Some older examples include Innes (1887) and Podmore (1898).

as in a variety of articles (e.g., Giroladini, 1987; Hövelmann & Krippner, 1986). The fact that these viewpoints have been strongly questioned by Stevenson (1971) and Braude (1997), and that there has been much writing from other authors defending spontaneous case research (e.g., Alvarado, 1987a; Hearne, 1985; Murphy, 1953; Tyrrell, 1946) does not change the fact that many writers in the field have labelled spontaneous case research as methodologically inferior to experimental research. The consequences are clear: something labelled as flawed and inferior has low prestige and few followers. As a consequence, little research on spontaneous cases has been conducted in recent decades.

The issue of the value of spontaneous cases as evidence of a psi process is not a black and white one. Certainly there are plenty of problems, but what worries me is the narrow-mindedness of those who argue that the approach is of little value or useless. The utility of all that we do, including gathering experimental evidence, is relative, a matter of degree. Evidence for an ESP or a PK process may have higher validity and reliability in some experimental contexts, but that does not mean that spontaneous cases are never evidential. As Whately Carington pointed out in his book *Telepathy* (1945), the issue is not one of absolute proof. Carington goes on to draw an analogy with ethnology and history, in which sources of errors not present in an experiment do exist but which still allow researchers to reach a certain degree of consensus knowledge of some reliability, within certain constraints. We may add to this the work conducted today in some areas of psychiatry, psychology, as well as in the fields of sociology and anthropology (Peters-Golder, 2012; Prendersgast & Jackman, 2019; Rolls, 2015). If other human sciences can use case studies as generators of useful knowledge, why should parapsychology be different?

Some may argue that case studies are too loose and imprecise to bring any significant knowledge to the field. But this is easily turned around—as I will argue later—when we consider the disadvantages and limitations of the tightness and precision of experiments. In fact, it is precisely such characteristics of case studies that increases their value as a research approach.

Others may argue that our phenomena are not credible and that the field is under constant attack and this is reason enough to adhere solely to an experimental methodology. But I would argue that we are too obsessed with one method and with issues of credibility, much more so than the social and behavioral sciences I have mentioned, which gather the bulk of their data from research done using non-experimental methodologies. To allow political fears to force us to narrow our thinking about our own subject is to narrow our conception of science, to adopt a position that is limiting in the extreme.⁴

4 In addition, spontaneous experiences are valuable even if we do not pay attention to evidential

Many writers have asserted that evidence is a matter of degree and that methodological pluralism is a desirable stance. Such statements, however, do not reflect the actual practice of our field. This is apparent from the low number of spontaneous case research papers that get published every year. In addition, like earlier writings (e.g., J. B. Rhine, 1948; L. E. Rhine, 1967; Thouless, 1972) that characterized spontaneous cases as hypothesis-generators, parts of the interest in spontaneous ESP experiences focused on their value as a correlate of test performance in laboratory experiments such as the Ganzfeld. Charles Honorton (1993) clearly articulated this argument when he said that spontaneous experiences are “likely to provide better predictors of laboratory success than many of the other kind of predictors that we have used up until now” (pp. 330–331). Thus, while important for experimentation, this perspective devalues spontaneous cases by casting them as nothing more than adjuncts to the experimental method.

Another indication of the low status of spontaneous case research is the way in which some of our textbooks describe it. In many of these books the authors do not question the capacity of experiments to create knowledge, whereas they systematically question the case approach. Rhine and Pratt’s *Parapsychology: Frontier Science of the Mind* (1957), and Louisa Rhine’s *Psi: What Is It?* (1975) are examples of this uncritical attitude towards experimentation coupled with hypercritical attitudes towards case research. Other books such as Rao’s *The Elements of Parapsychology* (2017), Edge, Morris, Palmer and Rush’s (1986) *Foundations of Parapsychology* and Broughton’s (1991) *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science* similarly devote space to criticize the case approach without bothering to examine the experimental approach in the same way. Overall, this situation says much about the attitudes of some of our researchers towards spontaneous phenomena. Unfortunately, the criticisms they give us are one-sided. Instead, what we need are discussions that qualify all methods equally.

The Limits of the Experiment

It is well known that the investigation of spontaneous cases suffers from a variety of problems such as the difficulty in assessing chance, memory problems of the experiencers, misidentification, fraud, and other issues. But there are many problems discussed in the literature that limit the validity of experimentally-produced knowledge as well. Issues such as the context in which the individual is tested, the implicit demands of the experimental procedures and instructions, pressure to perform, the experimenter’s personality

or paranormal explanatory models. They can be studied as human experiences important for reasons other than paranormality and as opportunities to test for conventional hypotheses.

and interpersonal skills, and the artificiality of the situation are some of the more obvious ones (Klein et al., 2012; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969; Weber & Cook, 1972). These are seldom discussed in our literature in the same detail that the flaws of spontaneous cases are discussed.

Another indicator of this attitude are differential reactions to criticisms. In his well-known paper published in *Advances in Parapsychological Research*, Akers (1984) argued that modern experimental psi studies contain many actual and potential methodological problems as well as suffer from poor reporting standards. However, few researchers in the field seem willing to argue that such problems prove that the experimental method is flawed or that it should be abandoned altogether. But this is exactly how many have argued for years about spontaneous case research.

Not only should we recognize that a number of problems plague the experimental method, but we should also admit that its advantages are relative. Martin Orne (1971) has remarked that “laboratory observations are not of necessity better data—they are only data which are better controlled in a very clear sense but inevitably less controlled in yet another sense” (p. 260). Examples of what is rarely controlled in experimentation are the dynamics between subjects, experimenters and assistants, subject’s anxieties at being tested or in reaction to the laboratory environment, and the unspoken motivations and needs of the subject and experimenter. Regarding the latter, Richard Broughton (1993) has written that “experimental parapsychologists have done little more than pay lip service to psi’s need-serving character” (p. 23). This is clearly seen in the demands we put on our experimental subjects who are asked to do tasks that, at best, are not relevant to their psychology, needs, or motivations, and at worse, are perceived as meaningless. I do not mean to say that experimentalists in our field have been completely unaware of these issues or that they have not taken steps to improve the situation. There is, in fact, a considerable history in experimental parapsychology of attempts to bring experimental tasks closer to everyday situations.

For example, there is a modern experimental but qualitative tradition that developed during the 1940s and the 1950s partly as a reaction to Rhine’s statistically-oriented approach. This approach, involving qualitative psychological and medical analyses, was considered by many to tap into “real-life” aspects of psi. Much of this work has been done outside of English-speaking parapsychology. Among these are Piero Cassoli’s and Enrico Marabini’s (1954) free-response work as well as that of Hans Bender (1957). In addition, there is Orlando Canavesio’s (1947) EEG and medical studies of psychics and Rene Warcollier’s continuation of his life-long free-response work (e.g., Warcollier & Kherumian, 1954).

Other examples of attempts to make the experiment more natural within the quantitative forced-choice research tradition include Fisk's (1951) use of home testing, Ratté's (1961) use of competition tasks, Anderson's (1966) use of fantasy in ESP testing, Beloff's (1969) use of people in love as ESP subjects, and Johnson's (1973) testing of nonintentional ESP in the context of academic test taking. The latter approach, involving tests without the participant's knowledge that they are in an ESP study has become an important area of research (Palmer, 2015).

Other strategies have focused on providing more naturalistic targets than playing or Zener cards. These efforts include theatrical dramatizations of situations related to the targets (Cassoli & Marabini, 1954), the use of multisensory aids to telepathic transmission (Krippner, Ullman, & Honorton, 1971), the use of pictures (Braud & Braud, 1973), the use of geographical locations in remote-viewing tests (Dunne & Bisaha, 1979), and the use of emotions as targets (Schouten, 1980). The reawakening of interest in free-response tests that started in the 1960s and continues to this day has brought us closer to naturalistic situations (Storm, Tressoldi, & Di Risio, 2010). This includes the ESP work done with dreams (Storm et al., 2017), partial sensory deprivation (Honorton, Berger, Varvoglis, Quant, Derr, Schecter, & Ferrari, 1990), and OBEs (Tart, 1968). An important chapter of this period of experimental research was Rex Stanford's PMIR model, the only research program designed to test assumptions directly relevant to naturally occurring psi in daily life (for a review and recent developments, see Stanford, 1990).

These, and many other methodological innovations, have changed our field. They have created a new experimental parapsychology more sensitive to the participants' psychology. Another kind of sensitivity that has occurred in recent decades is reflected in attempts made by experimenters to relate to subjects as human beings and to make them feel welcome and as comfortable as possible within the constraints of the laboratory. The interest of experimenters in the psychodynamics of human interaction is generally not reflected in research reports, and to a great extent, has to be experienced in order to be understood. But there are studies that have considered some of these variables explicitly. Bononcini and Rosa (1987) have investigated the group dynamics of clinical contexts, as has Carpenter (1988) as part of the ESP testing situation. In addition, Patric Giesler in his field experiments (1985a, b) took the cultural context into consideration. Giesler's sensitivity to the context, needs, and beliefs of his subjects stands without precedent in the experimental psi literature.

However, it is one thing to talk about ecologically valid experiments in the sense of social and psychological sensitivity, and it is another to talk about the perennial problem of generalizing experimental results outside of the experimental context. No matter how sensitive our experiments are we are still dealing with conditions that mimic the "real

world,” that are artificial no matter how much we change the laboratory or measure the psychology of our participants. Granted this, what is the effect of these conditions on our findings? How valid is experimentally-acquired knowledge under these considerations? Can experimental findings be generalized to other contexts? Although these issues have long been discussed in psychology by experimental researchers, they have not been resolved by any means.

I do not argue that experimental research is of no value because its evidence cannot be generalized to the outside world in anything but a limited way. But one has a right to ask if experimental findings are ever valid outside of the testing situation in which they were produced. I would ask this same question of those who simulate tornadoes in the laboratory and those who study the behavior of caged animals. This is precisely the crux of the issue when one deals with the knowledge claims that most of experimental psychology and parapsychology present. If psi experimental results cannot be generalized beyond the confines of the experiment, we are certainly dealing with a sad and limited science indeed.

Considerations of this sort are not new in parapsychology. Old discussions of the table levitation studies of W.J. Crawford (1916) by Bozzano (1926/1991) and by Sudre (1956/1960) have argued that the mechanical characteristics of PK “discovered” by Crawford were the creation of his own ideas and methods. Others, such as Pierre Lebedzinski (1924), have argued that the phenomena of spirit controls and communications are shaped by the way they are studied and by the assumptions and beliefs behind those involved in their study. Can we fault the experimental method used in ESP and PK research in this way?

Although there is evidence of experimenter effects in psi testing (Palmer & Millar, 2015), we do not know for sure if the actual features of psi in the experimental situation have been affected as well. Nonetheless I would argue that discussions of so-called psi-effects should be viewed cautiously before one announces them as evidence of the nature or characteristics of psi, as has been done in the past (e.g., Rhine & Pratt, 1957). I am referring here to position effects, displacement, psi-missing, consistent missing, differential and preferential effects, and the more recent concept of signatures. Although one may speculate on how some of these “effects” may express themselves in real-life situations (e.g., L.E. Rhine, 1965), I think we should seriously consider the idea that these findings may say more about the context and situation of testing than about the nature of psi. This may be particularly the case for decline, position, and differential effects in which the effects in question may be reactions to the monotony and constraints of the experimental conditions. In summary, to quote Rex Stanford (1990) from a slightly different context, “the deliberateness and self-conscious ego-involvement of typical laboratory tasks might distort research outcomes in various ways” (p. 54).

The Advantages of Spontaneous Cases

A unique advantage of spontaneous case studies is that they allow us to see if experimental findings can also be found outside of the experimental context. This approach may be valuable in helping us decide if what some take to be intrinsic characteristics of psi are merely findings related to the context of experimental testing. By varying the context of occurrence we may be in a position to approach psi from convergent perspectives. When I propose this I do not mean to use spontaneous cases as an auxiliary to the experimental method but to approach spontaneous case research as a valuable tool in its own right, a tool capable of providing useful knowledge about psi phenomena. For example, both Tyrrell (1946) and Ehrenwald (1947a) criticized Rhine's reliance on card-guessing as a basis from which to speculate on the similarities of ESP to perception. They argued that the variety of forms of expression in spontaneous experiences showed a different picture, one more complex than the one gleaned from Rhine's writings.

A comparison of findings from poltergeist research to those of experimental PK is another illustration of this issue. Studies of spontaneous movement of objects have suggested that in some cases the movements attenuate with distance (e.g., Roll, Burdick & Joines, 1973). This does not appear to be the case if only PK findings from the laboratory are considered.

Similarly, we may question the validity and generalizability of other findings about psi in the experimental context. Several ESP studies that have focused on such psychological variables as belief in ESP, extraversion and introversion, and other personality variables (Cardena & Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015; Rao, 2017) may not be telling us much about ESP itself; rather, they concern the ability subjects have to perform in an artificial situation. For example, forced-choice tests conducted to determine whether or not psychotic patients exhibit ESP (e.g., Zorab, 1957; for a review, see Rogo, 1982a) do not show much evidence of psychic functioning, a finding that has led some to conclude that ESP is a normal ability, or at least, one unrelated to mental illness (e.g., Rhine & Pratt, 1957). But does it make sense to test schizophrenics using forced-choice tests that require attention and interest in the task that are not characteristic of psychotic patients (Rogo, 1982a)? In contrast, the clinical but evidentially problematic and ambiguous observations of psychiatrists such as Jan Ehrenwald (1947b) suggest that ESP functioning in psychotics may interact with the syndrome in question and with the needs of the individual, even if the evidence is weak (Evrard, 2011). To suppose that such phenomena will transfer to an irrelevant and extremely artificial forced-choice testing situation or even to any experimental situation shows a lack of sensitivity to the dynamics of both psychopathology and

psi phenomena. Similar problems exist with experimental research that has attempted to study psi performance in relation to neuroticism and to other psychological variables. Similarly, the same may be said of attempts to make generalizations about the distribution of psi among different cultures, such as Foster's (1943) experiments with Native Americans and Rose's work (1951) with the aboriginal peoples of Australia in which both researchers took forced-choice testing methods to the places where these people live. The lack of cultural relativity displayed in the use of Western testing approaches has been criticized by many, including Pobers (1956) and Giesler (1984).

These examples are not recent ones. But we may extend the point to experimental situations in which personality and cognitive variable questionnaires are administered (Cardena & Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015).

To complement experimental studies of psi and mental health we may follow psychiatry's example. Psychiatry has long been known for its use of non-experimental methods to complement laboratory and clinical trial findings. For example, the case collection studies of multiple personality patients (e.g., Ross, Miller, Reagor, Bjornson, Fraser & Anderson, 1990) and the survey studies of the distribution of dissociative phenomena among the general public (e.g., Ray, June, Turaj & Lundy, 1992) have been essential to increasing our understanding of certain psychopathologies as well as assessing the distribution of experiences with possible relationship to psychiatric concerns in nonclinical populations. There are always evidential problems with case collections and survey studies, of course, but these problems can be handled with care and common sense. We could take a similar approach to the relationship between psi and mental health or between psi and adjustment problems. The literature already has examples of case studies that show possibilities for research. William Roll's (1970) poltergeist studies are an example, as are the cases studied by Hyslop (1909) and by McHarg (1973), in which the psi components of apparent hallucinatory experiences are considered. I hope that this approach will develop into the acquisition of a large number of cases as well as extend to more single case studies.

In regard to anthropological issues, spontaneous case research also provides us with opportunities to learn from cases about the cultural and psychological correlates of psi. For example, Stevenson's (1983) comparison of American and Indian reincarnation-type cases provides cultural insight as do McClenon's (1994) studies with Chinese, Japanese, and American students. Piero Cassoli (1955) in Italy has conducted single case studies as has Patric Giesler (1982) in Brazil. The methods used in these studies are more sensitive to cultural and social dynamics than the experiments above mentioned. In addition, Cassoli's study underscores the importance of religious beliefs and the family context in understanding aspects of a case of religious visions, healing, and a crying crucifix

(more about this later). Giesler's paper uses symbolic anthropology, which allows him to explore issues of meaning and social context in a poltergeist case that occurred in a ritualistic context. The investigation of deeper issues of this sort are practically impossible to study in the laboratory.

The point here is that experimental results can only draw half of the picture. In some cases non-experimental approaches constitute a methodology that is superior to experimental ones because we can document the richer context of social and psychological variables in which the phenomena are reported to occur. The deeper insights we gain are well worth the loss of strict precision and control over some of the relevant variables. We can also discuss the limits of the experimental method in terms of the phenomena it is not suited to investigate, among which are telepathic impressions, apparitions, reincarnation-type cases, deathbed visions, nonrecurrent PK, poltergeists, and near-death experiences. As Tyrrell said in 1946: "The truth is that we can apply the orthodox method of science to a corner of the psychical field, but not to the whole" (p. 232).

In some cases, such as the Maher and Hansen (1992) study of a haunting, semi-experimental conditions can be achieved. But overemphasis on experiment as the royal road to knowledge means that in practical terms, many of the fundamental phenomena of parapsychology remain unexplored, forgotten, or neglected because they cannot be constrained to the method. It is likely that is why these manifestations have been ignored in recent years. Instead of attempting to study the phenomena that puzzle people and that are so important to their beliefs, we have chosen to develop a parapsychology limited only to that which is easier to handle, that which mirrors the so-called respectability and exactness of physics and experimental psychology. We have labelled such approaches as rigorous and cost-effective. But, in fact, we are paying a high price for our preference for experimentation. The bulk of our research, confined as it is to experiments, cannot tell people much about their experiences. We are utterly ignorant about basic knowledge of the phenomena that we should be able to explain, or at least understand better (on this issue, see White, 1985).

Of course the goal of many who conduct experiments is precisely this general level of understanding. I do not deny the value of this. But perhaps Karlis Osis (1985) described the situation accurately when he wrote: "We must keep our scope small in order to make experiments manageable [...]. Unfortunately, habituating to a small scope also tends to narrow our thinking so that, like a spot-light, it covers only a small chunk of reality" (p. 110). A consequence of such narrowing, something which is one of the accomplishments of Rhine and his associates, is a parapsychology defined mainly as the study of ESP and PK, as operationalized in its most limited form to suit the experimental context. But what about our understanding of the rich human experiences people have in their daily life?

Our field pays very little attention to phenomena that have historically been of key importance in the shaping of human affairs. I am talking about the influence or interaction of claims of psychic phenomena on beliefs, practices, religions, and various social and political institutions throughout history. Some of these include beliefs in the healing powers of some European kings (Bloch, 1961/1973), apparitions of the Virgin Mary (Zimdars-Swartz, 1991), the miracles of saints (Ward, 1982), and “epidemics” of religious revivals and collective possessions reported in previous centuries in Europe (Knox, 1950). Socio-historical analyses of spiritualism show how beliefs about and the practices of mental and physical mediumship interacted with the issue of the position of women in society (e. g., Braude, 1989; Zingrone, 1994).

Also relevant here are retrospective studies of phenomena reported to occur in mystics and saints (Thurston, 1952). Examples include studies of levitations in Christian saints (Boufflet, 2006; Grosso, 2016).

Some survey studies have shown that a significant proportion of the population claim to have had psychic experiences. Haraldsson and Houtkooper (1991) summarized recent research with nationally representative samples of the populations of 13 Western European countries and the United States. In all these surveys three questions were asked about telepathy, clairvoyance, and contact with the dead. Although ambiguous in their interpretation, the results indicated that about 100 million Western Europeans and about 145 million Americans reported at least one of these experiences.

Unfortunately, most parapsychologists refuse to address these claims directly and even take great efforts to distance themselves from such phenomena and those who experience them. Regardless of the millions of individuals who have experiences in daily life, our studies continue to focus on artificial environments and methodologies that, at best, address the’ experiential issues only indirectly.

Even when some seemingly psychic experience can be studied experimentally, our studies lose such important dimensions as meaning and intensity. As Stevenson (1981) has argued:

We can observe the effects of strong emotion much better in spontaneous cases than in laboratory experiments. The important events in life that generate strong emotions do not happen in laboratories, or not often. I am referring here to such events as serious illness, accidents, other stresses, and—above all—death. (p. 132)

Compare, for example, the ESP dreams of disasters Barker (1967) and Stevenson (1970) studied to the less emotionally-engaging themes of the dream telepathy experiments (Storm, et al., 2017). In addition, the affective and perceptual qualities of out-of-body experiences studied in the laboratory (e. g., Tart, 1968) pale in comparison to those of spontaneous OBEs collected by such researchers as Celia Green (1968). The issue

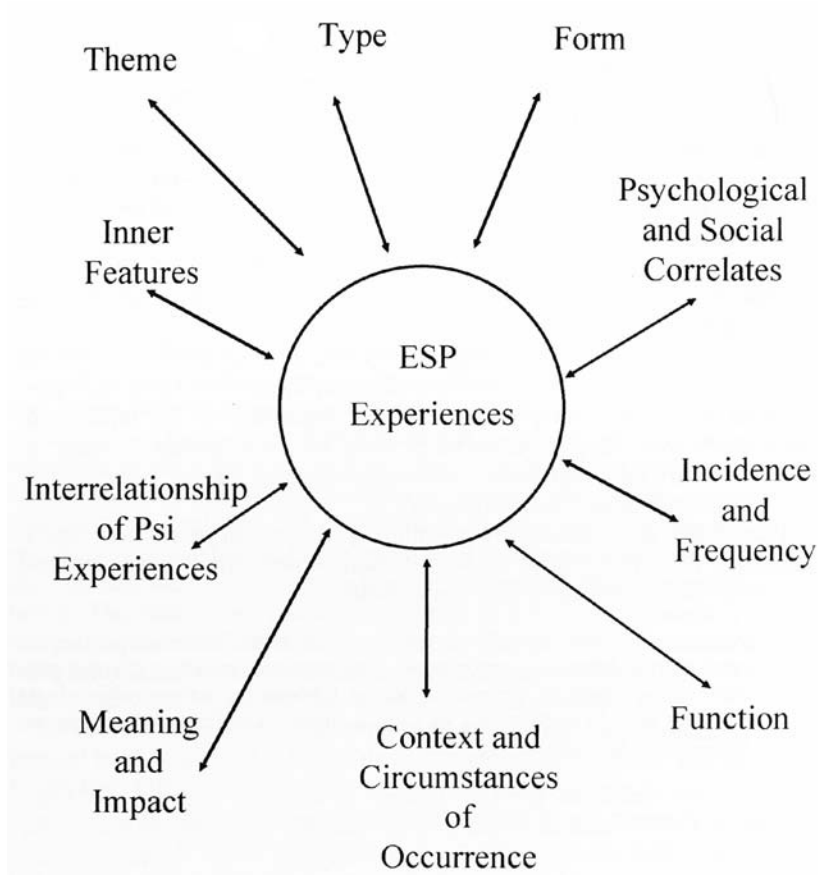


Fig. 1: Aspects of spontaneous ESP experiences

here is not that we are dealing with different phenomena, but rather that by confining our knowledge to the phenomenologically simpler and/or qualitatively different experiences that occur in experimental contexts, we may not understand those that happen in real life.

It is precisely in the study of the richness and variety of these experiences that spontaneous case research is at its best. As seen in Figure 1, when ESP experiences are examined it is possible to gather information on the theme, form, type, and incidence of the experience, among others (Irwin, 1994). Figure 2 provides a more detailed view of the varieties of one of the variables, the form of the ESP experience. All such variables can be fruitfully studied without the constraints of the experimental method and with attention to complex variable interactions, as Sybo Schouten (1979, 1981, 1982) has done. There has also been work about the features of out-of-body experiences and apparitions (Alvarado & Zingrone, 2015; Haraldsson, 2012).

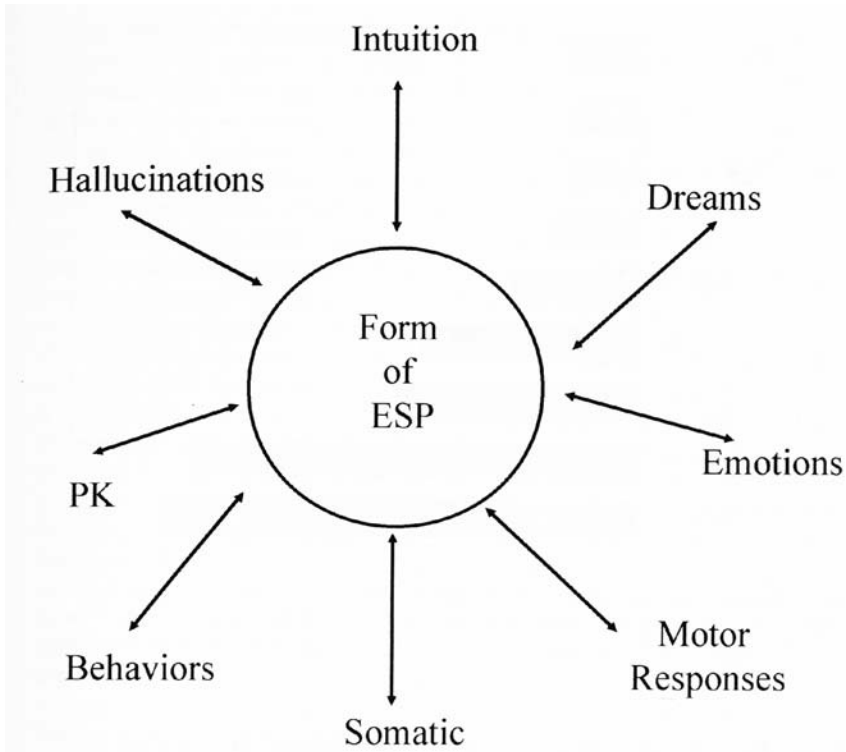


Fig. 2: Varieties of form of ESP experiences

Our studies can tell us much about the distribution of particular claims. I have compared the results of four survey studies conducted with college student samples using Palmer's (1979) questionnaire (see Figure 3). These studies, conducted in Brazil, India, and in the United States, give us an idea of the frequency of claims of specific phenomena. The figure shows that waking and dream ESP are the most common claims, while auras and movement of objects are reported least often. In addition, some researchers have addressed the issue of interrelationships between experiences (e.g., Alvarado & Zingrone, 2007-2008; Palmer, 1979), and I hope that in the future there will be much more to be said about the overall structure of spontaneous psi functioning.

The study of poltergeists is another area that yields much about phenomenological and contextual aspects of the experience not possible to obtain in other ways. Single case studies are invaluable in the depiction of both the features and the social complexities of such phenomena (e.g., Andrade, 1984; Kruth & Joines, 2016; Pratt & Roll, 1956; Roll & Pratt, 1971). Similarly, pattern analyses presented in the case collection studies of Cox (1961), Roll (1977), Gauld (Gauld & Cornell, 1979), and Huesman

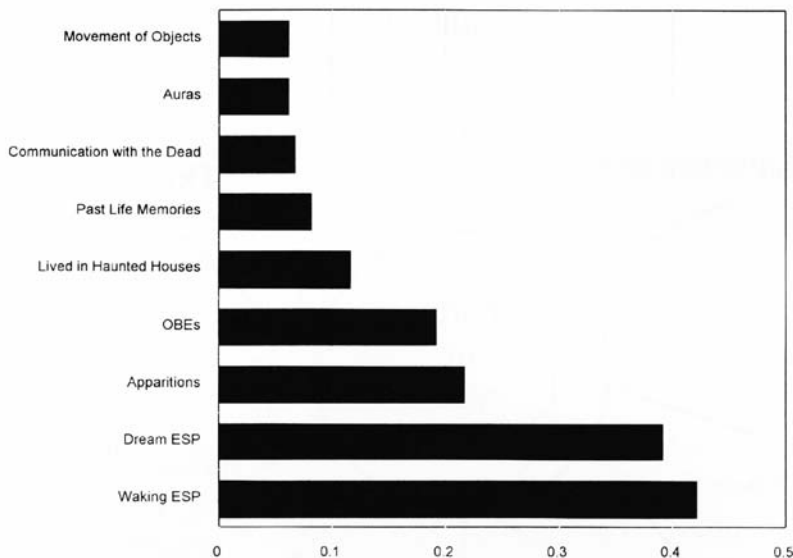


Fig. 3: Median % of experiences with student samples using Palmer's questionnaire note: The studies listed in the figure were conducted in Brazil (Zangari & Machado, 1996), India (Chadha, Alvarado, & Sahni, 1987; Usha & Pasricha, 1989) and in the United States (Palmer, 1979).

& Schriever (1989) provide even a more complete perspective of the features of this phenomenon.

Another example is the study of recurrent ESP dreams. Marabini (1956) had the chance to study the recurrent ESP dreams of a single percipient. He focused on their symbol content and similarities with non-ESP dreams. Schriever (1987) and Stevenson (1992) also underscore the phenomenological richness of ESP in recurrent dreams in their studies.

In short, I would like to state the obvious: To understand the spontaneous we need to study the spontaneous. There can be no substitute. Unfortunately, most of the research conducted in recent years has neglected the obvious.

Such neglect is not only unfortunate because of the means-centered approach prevalent in parapsychology today, but because it encourages us to fail to acknowledge or to fail to care about our social responsibilities as researchers. People who report experiences of interest to us want to know what such experiences mean to them. How many times have we all been asked to explain experiences and we have not had a clue about what to say, except offering the usual virtually useless qualifications? I have been in this

position many times as people have claimed past-life memories, ESP experiences, near-death experiences, auras, and other phenomena. We have all gone through these experiences. We all have our songs and dances to deal with them. First, we say little research has been done about that topic. Or, if we are honest, we just say we do not know. Second, we list normal explanations, emphasizing that neither spirits nor psi are necessarily involved, and on we go. The most frustrating part of all of this is not knowing what to say because we ourselves, as a field, have made the choice to remain ignorant. Why not put ourselves in a better position to counsel people by conducting more research on the subject, including spontaneous case research?⁵

Our neglect of spontaneous cases is intimately connected to our conceptions of the purpose of science in general and of parapsychology in particular. Modern science, including the social and behavioral disciplines, have become so academic, fragmented, and specialized that the purpose of the research enterprise is not always clear. As argued by philosopher Nicholas Maxwell (1984) regarding science in general, and to some extent by Abraham Maslow (1954) in psychology, and by Emily Cook (1991) in our field, there has been a separation between a concept of impersonal and objective knowledge and one in which we seek knowledge related to our human concerns, the things that are of value in life for us. This includes assessing our place in life and in the world through understanding its phenomena and through applying what we learn to solve our problems. As such, this does not presuppose any particular method of inquiry. But it is a particularly useful perspective from which to argue for the use of spontaneous case methods in the study of phenomena generally perceived to be connected to such human issues as spirituality, survival of bodily death, personal transformation, and mental health.

Many of the phenomena relevant to these issues are best studied outside of the laboratory, although the motivation for some laboratory studies does come from such concerns. A well-known example of the latter is the role that concepts on nonphysicality had for J. B. Rhine (see, for example, *The Reach of the Mind* [1947] and *New World of the Mind* [1953]). Rhine justified the classic card and dice tests on the basis that results with these procedures could say much about the existence of nonphysical aspects of human beings. One may argue—as was done by Ferdinando Cazzamalli (1954)—that Rhine was asking too much from mere card games. I would also argue that if we are going to generalize our results to these issues we should do so by paying more attention to the spontaneous phenomena that originally inspired such concerns in the first place.

5 This is not to say that we have not acquired any knowledge about these phenomena nor that we cannot counsel people even though we need to know more about these phenomena. But as parapsychologists, we can answer very few of the basic questions experiencers ask us about the nature, meaning, and purpose of their experiences.

There are many areas that may be examined with these purposes in mind. One of them is the study of aspects related to religion and parapsychology as reflected in miracles of the Catholic, Islamic, and other traditions. With a few exceptions, this topic is not part of the agenda of modern parapsychological research. But these phenomena have been reported and have been immensely influential around the world. Such authors as Raef (1970), Reginald-Omez (1956/1959), Rogo (1982b), Schwebel (2004), and Thurston (1952) have discussed aspects of these phenomena and the conceptual issues associated with them. Unfortunately these attempts offer little in terms of patterns or process. A common question has been: Is there anything special about religious contexts for the manifestation of psi? There are indications from the observations of Leroy (1928) on levitation, of White (1982) on ESP phenomena, and from my own study of luminous phenomena (Alvarado, 1987b) that the phenomena reported to occur around Catholic saints are of a higher magnitude than the phenomena reported around individuals in secular contexts. But our knowledge is too limited to say more about this issue.

Other phenomena such as Marian apparitions may allow us to study the religious context more directly through field studies of active cases. One model to follow are the studies conducted in recent years by a group of French and Italian researchers who have investigated the psychophysiology of children who claim to see and hear the Virgin Mary (Gagliardi & Margnelli, 1989; Laurentin & Joyeaux, 1985/1987).

And of course, there is the perennial problem of deciding what is the nature of reported miraculous healings, visions, incorruption of the body, bilocations, and other phenomena. Can they be explained by recourse to such conventional principles as suggestion, hallucinations, and misperception? Do they require parapsychological explanations? An interesting example of possible approaches is Piero Cassoli's (1955) case study. Cassoli studied a 17-year-old Italian girl named Angelina Ronza who claimed to have had visions of the Virgin, seemingly was healed of gastric disturbances, and had a crucifix that seemed to weep. After a careful analysis of the testimony and through personal observations, Cassoli leaned towards a paranormal explanation of the crucifix phenomena. But the most interesting part of his study was the consideration of the social psychology of the household in question. Cassoli's investigation not only revealed that Angelina lived in a context in which the Virgin's miracles were discussed and accepted but that Angelina's own phenomena started after she was given a relic related to a previous well-known case of a weeping statue of the Madonna. In other words, Cassoli was able to make a good case for the idea that the social context in religious phenomena is important in the induction of the phenomena and in the determination of its phenomenology. Such case studies are both basic to our understanding of such manifestations and

also are essential to our ability to assess the cultural and social dynamics of the context of occurrence of these phenomena.

The issue of miracles is related to another matter of concern to the general public, the relationships between spirituality and psychic phenomena. Spirituality is difficult to define, but I would argue that this is one of those topics of great importance that need to be addressed using the life history methods employed by sociologists. Rhea White (1982) has noticed that some reports of psychic phenomena in Catholic saints “may have been associated with the degree to which they had advanced in their mystical lives” (p. 18; see also Grosso, 1985, 2016). A clue to this may be gleaned from the study of systems of mysticism and their practice along the life course of individuals for whom unconditional love, charity, and a sense of mission are a form of everyday life. As seen in Melquíades Andrés Martín’s (1975) study of Spanish mysticism for the period between 1500 to 1700, this tradition emphasized a life-long commitment to contemplation and involved transformations of the self and the integration of the concepts of Christ and of God within the mystic’s essence by overcoming both the mind and the body. As Felice Masi (1994) argued in a discussion of stigmata: “The Christic idea of love, passion and redemption is incorporated in the whole individual [...] the psychological aspect is not a normal terrene one, it is not egocentric and worried with day to day concerns” (p. 26, my translation). These transpersonal dimensions cannot be measured by our psychological instruments. But they may be addressed through analyses of the life histories of the mystics and their situational concerns (Grosso, 2016). Instead of neglecting them, we should realize that these problems have been of interest for millennia in many mystical and occult systems and are still important to many people around the world.

Some concerns of experiencers are unrelated to religious issues. For example, some people want to know why they have so many experiences or even a single one and whether they are different from persons who do not have these experiences. Here is where our individual differences research may offer something to experiencers and at the same time allow us to conduct investigations based on particular hypotheses or models. Research on the cognitive correlates of psi and psi-related experiences such as Irwin’s (1979) research on coding style, Parra’s (2013) research on empathy, Richard’s (1990) research on hypnotic susceptibility, and my own research with Nancy Zingrone on vividness of visual imagery and fantasy proneness (Alvarado & Zingrone, 1994) will eventually help us to assess aspects of the psychology of psi claims in naturalistic contexts that may lead to the development of testable models. This research may also help us to explain why some people have more experiences than others, one of the concerns of the experiencers.

In addition, case studies offer the unique opportunity to consider complex interaction models by including contextual variables in the mix in addition to personality and cognitive variables. We need to know how contexts that engender belief and intense emotion such as religious settings, séances, and solitude affect psychic phenomena. Do such contexts interact with other psychological variables? We generally focus on simple models in which we correlate a measure of a psychological variable to psi experiences. But the situation could be more complex than that. The influence of cognitive and personality variables such as absorption and neuroticism may be context dependent in those natural settings in which psi is reported. Kelly and Locke's (2010) socio-cultural model of altered states of consciousness and psi and Irwin's (1992) recent model in which psychic experiences are seen as a function of an interaction of life experiences, beliefs, and cognitive variables are examples of this approach.

Models like this are common in many areas of psychology. They remind us that it is important to get into the life pattern of the individual, into his or her needs, motivations, and interpersonal relationships as Bender (1966), Coleman (1964), Ehrenwald (1955), and Roll (1970) have argued. This can include the meaning the experiences have for the life course and the self-concept of the experiencer. I am still impressed by a statement I taped in an interview conducted several years ago with a frequent experiencer who talked about how psi was an integral part of herself. She said: "Psychic experiences are a part of me as is my skin, my eyes, my hair, but even more profoundly. Because my skin, my eyes, are going to disappear, while all these things do not disappear, they continue, they continue." Such statements help us understand that spontaneous case research opens the way to the study of what Rhea White (1993, p. 62) calls the "ripple effect," that is, the impact and importance of psi experiences throughout the life course of the experiencer. Such perspectives as these can directly address the basic questions experiencers ask us that we are completely unable to answer.

Another concern of many experiencers is that their experiences are an indication of mental health problems. Research that addresses these concerns includes Parra's (2012) study of the relation of psi experiences to schizotypy, Persinger's (e.g., 1984) studies of psi experiences and temporal lobe symptomatology, and Ross & Joshi's (1992) study of a variety of psi-related claims and their relationship to dissociation and traumatic experiences. But parapsychologists seem reluctant to conduct such studies. Similarly, we seem to be reluctant to mount a research program of great practical importance, which would be designed to develop empirically-derived criteria for differential diagnoses between, say, schizophrenic delusions and ESP experiences. Over a century ago, Edmund Gurney reported some general differences between telepathic and subjective hallucinations in *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886, Vol. 1, pp. 496-502), and

the topic has received recent consideration in the writings of West (1960), Marabini (1992) and Evrard (2013). But there is a dearth of empirical studies on the subject. Such a topic might be better studied by using the case comparison approach, such as that used frequently by psychiatric researchers who have systematically compared different syndromes in terms of antecedent conditions and basic features.

Spontaneous Cases and Experiments in Perspective

Up until now, I have argued for the advantages of spontaneous cases and defended their value as a scientific approach to the study of psi. In particular, I have argued that the study of cases is fundamental to parapsychology because it offers unique insight into a wide range of specific phenomena via the experiences themselves. I have also argued that the study of cases allows us to address issues of social concern embodied in particular claims (such as miracles) as well as to address such wider issues as spirituality, mental health, and the underlying causes of these events in people's lives. Spontaneous case research can work together with the experimental approach to attack the problematic issue of generalizability of laboratory results to other contexts as well as to present the possibility of systematically contrasting findings that may highlight the impact of context on the findings.

The issue as I see it is not one of competition between methodologies, although I realize that my comments may have suggested such a perspective, especially when I have mentioned the ways in which case studies can be superior to experiments. Rather, my view is one of methodological equality, to the extent that I believe that some aspects of a problem require different approaches and that methodologies should be chosen on the basis of their strengths and weaknesses.

In criticizing experimentation, I have pointed out some problems of generalizability of laboratory results as well as problems with validity of laboratory findings as they are affected by the socio-psychological concerns of the immediate social context of experimentation. But we have to be aware that similar problems exist with case study methodology as well. The context in which cases are published or collected in case collection studies, the situational variables inherent in an interview, or the mode and style of presentation of a questionnaire can affect the validity and generalizability of the information collected. Patric Giesler (1984) has pointed to some problems in anthropological fieldwork that can bias results when the supposedly impartial observer imposes his or her views on ethnographic studies. In addition, there are the widely differing contexts in which spontaneous phenomena are reported to occur—contexts such as séances, moments of solitude, experiences of being near-death, or religious settings. These do not necessarily generalize to all real-life contexts.

Although there is some evidence from different areas of psychology that naturalistic studies may obtain different results from those conducted in more artificial laboratory conditions (e.g., Willems, 1969; Yuille, 1985), some areas show better agreement (e.g., Locke, 1986). The issue is not clear in parapsychology. Here I can only speculate. What would be the appropriate course of action when a survey produces findings at odds with those of an experiment? Perhaps the non-experimental finding is the problematic one because of a lack of construct validity in the measures used. On the other hand, an experimental study may have missed the point by using a task irrelevant to the issue in question. Such problems deserve more attention and empirical exploration.

We need to proceed along the lines of Campbell's (1986) and Maslow's (1954) assertions that it is more important to think in terms of what is appropriate to a problem rather than preferring a particular method for its own sake. In parapsychology, I would argue that once we have identified and defined a problem, we should develop research programs that are multi-methodological. We could do much more by studying our phenomena from different perspectives, picking and choosing approaches according to their strengths and weaknesses. This is what Tyrrell (1948) called "convergent synthesis," or the act of "examining, comparing, and reflecting upon all types of evidence which have any bearing on the subject" (p. 41). One way to do this might be to include a combination of spontaneous and experimental approaches in the same study. Haraldsson (1975) did this when, within the same study, he correlated both ESP test scores and spontaneous precognitive dreams to frequency of dream recall. Another way to do this might be to implement a general program of research that includes both experiments and case studies, such as Irwin's (1981) work on the relationship between absorption and out-of-body experiences and Persinger's study of ESP and its relation to the earth's geomagnetic field (Persinger, 1987; Persinger & Krippner, 1989). Several investigators that have conducted free-response ESP studies could follow a similar approach and investigate both the claims of ESP experiences as recorded on experimental intake forms and ESP test scores in relation to scales of personality variables. Even though the data to do this already exist in a number of laboratories, the experimenters who collected these data seem interested only in the experimental results and their correlations to the psychological measures. Similarly, when the experience claims are used, it is only to predict performance during the experiment. A convergent approach would require correlation of the scales of personality variables both to test performance and to spontaneous experiences.

Another example of a possible convergent approach would consist of a combination of methods that variously emphasizes the experiment or field settings. Giesler's (1984, 1985a) psi-in-process approach does exactly this. He conducted experiments in a culturally sensitive environment, utilizing detailed ethnographic information in his design.

Giesler correlated experimental psi scores to information obtained through observational methods to obtain findings more sensitive to the participant's social context. It is also possible to conduct controlled observations and quasiexperiments during field studies, such as that done in poltergeist and haunting cases studied by Roll and Pratt (1971) and Maher and Hansen (1992), as well as in the recent psychophysiological studies of children claiming to see Marian apparitions (e. g., Laurentin & Joyeaux, 1985/1987).

Much more could also be done to test hypotheses derived from case studies in experiments as well as to use case research to confirm experimental findings. For example, experimental work has a track record of studies that relate ESP to extraversion, belief in ESP, perceptual defensiveness, neuroticism, and altered states of consciousness, among other variables (Cardeña & Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015; Rao, 2017). More could be done in spontaneous case research to study these relationships. Similarly, experimental work could be carried on in which participants are categorized according to their predominant form of ESP, the frequency of their experiences, and the type of experiences they claim. In addition, these experience claims could be correlated against nonpsi aspects of experimental procedures. For example, I would argue that reported alterations in consciousness and body image in the Ganzfeld correlate positively with previous mystical experiences and OBEs, as these phenomena also involve alterations in consciousness and the sense of self. In addition, if ESP scoring is related to the ability to enter internal attention states, perhaps a phenomenon like the OBE would be a better predictor of ESP than would phenomena like waking ESP or the experience of seeing apparitions.

The issue, then, is one of doing our best to understand psi across different contexts of occurrence and using different methodologies, a strategy also suggested recently by William Braud (1994a) in an article about the conceptual and methodological expansions of our science.

Although it may not be realistic to expect every individual to employ such broadened approaches, I hope that we may collectively be able to increase the number of spontaneous case studies and pursue the integration of methodologies I have suggested. But I would like to stress that much more basic work needs to be done on spontaneous cases. Sometimes I feel we spend too much time talking about the importance of spontaneous cases—as I have done in this address—and too little time doing case research. More of us need to practice what we preach. To start with, we need to improve the level of sophistication of spontaneous case research. We need to move away from proof-oriented case studies, that is away from the presentation of just one more evidential precognitive dream or one more evidential poltergeist case. Although there is always a place for proof considerations, much more needs to be done on process; and many more specific research hypotheses and models need to be tested (Alvarado, 2006; Watt, 1994). Without

process-oriented hypothesis-testing, case studies will continue to be meaningless anomalies that seem unrelated to other aspects of nature in general and human functioning in particular.

Furthermore, we must also do more to improve and standardize our methodology. In the case of survey studies this means we should try to get a better understanding of the meaning of responses made to our questionnaires. Most of these studies do not collect descriptions nor are they survey responses followed up by interviews. Instead, we rely on simple yes and no answers that may be deceiving. This is not only because the cases are not evidential, but because the experiences respondents have in mind may not conform to our definitions of specific types of psychic phenomena.

In addition, we need to pay attention to methods used in other disciplines, such as participant observation and experiential sampling, among others, as well as to statistical techniques that will help us better understand the phenomenology of our cases (e.g., cluster analysis) and the relationship of different possible causal factors (e.g., different forms of path analysis).

All of this can help us address systematically what Gardner Murphy (1955) has called the “natural history of the paranormal communication process” (p. 98) and to provide the field with opportunities to bring experimental and case studies closer together.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that case studies in parapsychology are important for at least three reasons. First, this line of research forces us to pay attention to people’s spontaneous experiences, which are unfortunately neglected in the modern research literature on the subject. As a consequence, we will be more aware than we are now of the human and social relevance of our field. Second, cases confront us with the fact that there are areas and characteristics of psi that cannot be studied in any other way. In fact, the very characteristics of the phenomena demand approaches other than the experimental studies that predominate in our field today. Third, case studies remind us that psi phenomena are too complex and have too many dimensions to be constrained exclusively by the experimental method or solely by the parameters of case studies. Our science needs both the exactness and rigorous hypothesis testing of experimental work as well as the more expansive and contextually sensitive methodologies of the social and behavioral sciences. Parapsychology must understand the value and necessity of pluralistic approaches to the study of psi phenomena which, after all, occur both in life and in the lab.

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PART II

SINGLE CASE STUDIES IN ANOMALISTICS

INTRODUCTION

SINGLE CASE STUDIES IN ANOMALISTICS

Gerhard Mayer & Michael Schetsche

Although single case studies are nothing unusual in social sciences, and, accordingly, methodological standards are available (see Introduction), investigations in the field of anomalistics are subject to several specific conditions that limit the benefits of existing methodologies in other fields of research. Important characteristics are the unclear ontological status of anomalistic phenomena (Mayer & Schetsche, 2016) and their elusive nature, which inhibits systematic observation as well as replication under controlled conditions. This not only has an effect on the investigation of the phenomena themselves (McClenon, 2001: 67), but also on the reconstruction of statements from observers and concerned third-parties because the communication of such events or experiences is subject to particular regularities. It is linked to the need for self-positioning with regard to the extraordinary nature of the reported events (Schäfer, 2012: 234), which usually leads to a mode of “shielded communication” in the reporting (Schetsche & Schmied-Knittel, 2003: 180–182; Mayer & Schetsche, 2016). This style of communication is characterized by different strategies, such as the repeated assurance that one is neither crazy nor naïve, assuring that one’s powers of recollection are excellent, argumentatively eliminating other logical possibilities of conventional explanation, citing witnesses, and referring to (scientific) “experts” of the paranormal. Such strategies do not necessarily have to be explicit. They can be assimilated into the very construction of the narration (Bender, 2007; Childs & Murray, 2010; Lamont, 2007; Wooffitt, 1991, 1992). Furthermore, these communication strategies, which can be found to some extent in almost every (auto-biographic) account of extraordinary experiences, create the problem that the reporting person initially scrutinizes the interviewer’s attitude towards the contents to be reported, as well as his/her ideological positioning. This is not new—Favret-Saada (1980) demonstrated it as early as the 1970s with her impressive field study of sorcery and magic practices in north-western France—but it has to be methodologically emphasized time and again. The impression the interviewer gets from the counterpart, arising from his questions (and his consequently *assumed* attitude), plays a decisive role in forming the account.

These particularities form the background of this discussion of an experientially based methodology of single case studies in the field of extraordinary experiences and

anomalistic phenomena. The primary objective is a systematic reconstruction and pragmatic perpetuation of the methods of field research-based single case studies in anomalistics and frontier area research that can be used as a starting point and basis for discussion of future research activities in this field.

The thematic area in which anomalistic single case studies can be conducted is not very well defined and is primarily determined by the specific nature of the phenomena, according to the attribution of the respective individuals.¹ Thus, if an experience, an event, or a part of an event is interpreted as “paranormal”, respectively a scientific anomaly, then it can principally become the subject of such an investigation. However, there are *de facto* relatively few fields or categories of phenomena which are addressed by anomalists.²

In this regard, investigations of *poltergeist* phenomena as well as *apparitions*³ play a central role. In parapsychology, poltergeist phenomena are often referred to as RSPK phenomena. RSPK is an acronym for “recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis”.⁴ Most of

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- 1 For epistemological reasons, it must be questioned whether a generally viable and accepted scientific demarcation of anomalistics and frontier area research that is independent of the attributions of the concerned persons or individual researchers in the field is possible at all. From the perspective of field research at least, an anomaly always remains what the respective people declare it to be. In other words, the anomaly is always determined as a deviation against a discursively established horizon of the “normal”.
 - 2 The term “anomalist” here is used in a merely pragmatic sense to designate a person that addresses him- or herself to the investigation of such anomalies with a (quasi) scientific attitude. Thereby, the specific motivation and aim are not taken into consideration.
 - 3 cf. Evans (2001) who provides a description of different variations of apparitions.
 - 4 The acronym RSPK contains a non-spiritualist, animistic interpretation of the respective events because the term “psychokinesis” means the assumed influence of (human) psyche on a physical system without physical interaction. However, there are further problems with terminology. In English-speaking countries, the differentiation between “poltergeist cases” and “hauntings” has been established for a long time. While the former are usually short-term occurrences linked with certain individuals or groups of people (family systems etc.), the latter are linked to places (such as e. g. a “haunted house”) and of long duration. Some authors (e. g. Gauld & Cornell, 1979: 176) relate hauntings with apparitions, and regard the phenomena as hallucinatory (no direct effect on the physical reality), in contrast to poltergeist phenomena which result from psychokinesis or physical forces created by “ghosts” or other supernatural entities. Thus, the perception of knockings or footsteps in poltergeist cases (RSPK) is caused by real sounds, while the same in hauntings is assumed to be of hallucinatory nature. However, from theoretical considerations, it is, on the one hand, currently still impossible to clearly distinguish psychokinesis and hallucinatory experiences or extrasensory perceptions. On the other hand, apparitions can also occur in poltergeist cases. Therefore, we will use the categorization preferred by Bender, namely “person-centered” vs. “place-centered” RSPK cases.

the single case studies within the parapsychological research tradition have been conducted in this field. A second, relatively large, area concerns UFO sightings. The overlap of case investigators between these two fields is very small. A third large field of phenomena concerns *physical* and *biological anomalies*, in which the relationship with the observer is usually much weaker than in RSPK phenomena. This includes, in addition to the investigation of crop circles and similar ostensible natural phenomena, the issue of cryptozoology—especially if it concerns the existence of living creatures that do not fit into well-known classification models and/or have a strong relationship with folk myths. (The issue of the detection of hitherto unknown animal species, however, seems to have a slightly different focus with regard to methodology.) In addition, there are various other phenomena that can become the subject of anomalistic field research. They are characterized by the fact that they strikingly defy integration into the hitherto known scientific models of the world and provoke paranormal explanations, due to their strange character and the often associated mythologizations. These include, for example, the so-called “Hum”, ball lightning, and showers of amphibians, but also stigmata, spontaneous combustions, and the like.⁵ In many cases, this concerns *unique* phenomena that are usually addressed by single (groups of) researchers which debate them controversially with other individual researchers or small groups. These controversies are scarcely noticed by the scientific mainstream, although they are occasionally published in scientific journals, as was the case, for example, with the “red rain” phenomenon of Kerala (Louis & Kumar 2006). As the phenomena are of such various kinds, they require specific theoretical and methodical skills for their investigation. And finally, the field of reincarnation research has to be mentioned, which is concerned with case studies of ostensibly reincarnated persons (in the literature: *cases of reincarnation type – CORT*).⁶

This differentiation is also used in the recently published chapter on “Ghosts and Poltergeists” by Michaeleen Maher (2015: 329). Alternatively, the terms “person oriented” / “place oriented” (Roll, 1977: 399), and “person-linked” / “place-linked” or “place-bound” (Gauld & Cornell, 1979: e. g. 219) are used in some English texts. In our understanding, apparitions are predominantly understood as isolated phenomena although they can occur repeatedly and include elements of poltergeist phenomena, or can be part of poltergeist cases. By contrast, poltergeist cases consist of complex constellations of phenomena which mostly follow a very specific, and temporal, dynamic (see Mayer & Bauer, 2015a, b). The designations “RSPK investigation” and “RSPK cases” are used by us in a neutral way. They include apparitional as well as psychokinetic phenomena.

- 5 The American author Charles Fort presented a collection of such phenomena in several volumes during the first third of the 20th century that are now classified under the umbrella term *Fortean* (Fort, 1974). In the more recent past, William Corliss most notably made a systematic collection of scientific anomalies (e. g. Corliss, 1986).
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of the presumed previous personality can be verified, how accurate the statements made by the concerned person are, the likelihood of a conventional transmission of information, etc., in order to assess the plausibility of the presence of a scientific anomaly. Thereby, the investigation of specific bodily characteristics such as dermatological features (birthmarks or the like), which physiologically correspond in some way with features of the “previous personality” (e.g. injuries that led to their death), can be a particular element. CORT field studies are often immensely expensive due to the fact that the majority of the relatively seldom reported cases are concentrated in certain areas of the world. The investigators usually have to travel far, to build a network of informants and to make on-site inquiries with the help of translators. Accordingly, such investigations are associated with the names of only a few researchers: the deceased Ian Stevenson, Erlendur Haraldsson, and Jürgen Keil. Antonia Mills and Jim Tucker are followers of Stevenson’s work who have written a current overview of CORT research (Mills & Tucker, 2015; see also Bauer & Keil, 2015, for an overview in German).

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RSPK INVESTIGATIONS

Gerhard Mayer & Michael Schetsche

The earliest systematic investigations of poltergeist cases driven by a scientific motivation are to be found in the 19th century (Potts, 2004: 212–214). There had been spectacular occasions of intensive field investigations earlier, such as the haunting at Tedworth, which caused a stir during the years 1661–1663, and was investigated by the chaplain Joseph Glanvill (Finuncane, 2001: 10–13), or the “Cock Lane poltergeist case” (1762), which was examined by a commission of clerics and other investigators, and finally declared as fraud (ibid.: 13–14), but the possibility of “paranormal” explanations as an alternative to a spiritualist interpretation did not achieve a large enough positive response before the above-mentioned period. The German physician and author Justinus Kerner called for the examination of the “Nachtgebiete der Natur” [dark side of nature] (Kerner, 1836).¹ He included poltergeist phenomena, thereby classifying these as “nature”, with the sciences being responsible for their investigation—although he anticipated the specific difficulties that the phenomena of “Nachtgebiete” carry very well (Bauer, 1989: 15). Kerner himself examined the RSPK case at the Weinsberger Oberamtsgericht [county court of Weinsberg] that caused a stir in the year 1835 and resulted in academic controversies. Towards the end of the 19th century, a further systematization followed with the establishment of groups such as The Cambridge Ghost Club (founded in 1851) or the London-based Ghost Club (founded in 1862), which devoted themselves to the examination of the paranormal. The Society for Psychical Research (S.P.R.), founded in 1882, has a particular place in the history of organized RSPK investigations (Gauld, 1968; Oppenheim, 1985).² Whatever the specific individual motivations and beliefs of the S.P.R. members might have been, many of them had an excellent scientific reputation—a fact that is reflected in the accurate and critical work of the S.P.R. While this field of investigation was dominated towards the end of the 19th century by a group of people guided by standards of scientific methodology for gaining knowledge, and with a principal openness towards the possibility of paranormal phenomena, the situa-

1 See the contribution by Michael Nahm in this volume (“Historical Perspective: Justinus Kerner’s Case study ...”).

2 See also the entry “Society for Psychical Research” by Donald West (2015) in the *Psi Encyclopedia of the Society for Psychical Research* providing many relevant references. Retrieved from <https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/society-psychical-research>

tion differentiated during the last decades of the 20th century. From then on, the range of poltergeist investigators reached from the serious researcher in the tradition of the early Society for Psychical Research (S. P. R.) through to providers of the esoteric market with purely commercial interests, who make full use of the still popular interest in the “supernatural” (Potts, 2004: 211, and 225–226).³ According to the literature and various Internet sources, there are hardly any investigators who work alone, and without connection to a group of individuals with similar interests. There are two major reasons for this: firstly, RSPK investigations are usually very extensive and require, depending on the advocated model, considerable personal, temporal, and technical resources; and secondly, investigations by single individuals in this field are highly problematic for methodological reasons (the typically unclear ontological status of the examined phenomena makes a mutual confirmation of the validity of the data and the resultant findings necessary). In addition, other, more psychical, reasons for the significant group building in this field of research can be found, such as the positive reinforcement of heterodox belief systems in the group, or the mutual assistance in the defense against processes of stigmatization.

A useful, although certainly not the only possible,⁴ dimensioning of the field of actors and groups can be obtained from the three main lines of theoretical basic assumptions or explanatory models of poltergeist phenomena. In a *spiritualist* interpretation, RSPK phenomena are understood as an expression of the activity of “otherworldly” entities, i. e. entities that do not belong to the “this-worldly” realm subjected to the laws of physics. As causal agents, deceased humans, but also other kinds of entities, such as demons and angels, are possible. In an *animistic-parapsychological* interpretation, the causes of RSPK phenomena are seen in living human beings. According to this view, the various events result from human capabilities and/or inter-individual processes which are still poorly understood, and cannot be explained using generally accepted scientific models. Finally, RSPK phenomena can be understood as events resulting from natural causes. While the groups that are more oriented towards the scientific tradition are more attached to the latter two models, the spiritualist interpretation forms the motivational basis of many members of ghost-hunting groups characterized by lay research approaches, and likewise, determines their methods.

3 An extreme example is the offer of a US-American who tried to sell “personally captured real ghosts” in glass bottles for 20 dollars each (see the newspaper announcement “Gespenster in Flaschen” in *Reutlinger Generalanzeiger* from June 3, 2008).

4 These attempts to dimension the field have to be seen as theoretically deduced working hypotheses, the empirical examination of which has yet to be carried out.

Closely associated with the respective models of explanation is the dimension of beliefs, which ranges from ideological skepticism to uncritical belief in ghosts. While proponents at the two extremes (at least according to our assessment) are not oriented towards gaining new scientific insights, and are only searching for confirmation of their firmly established world view, the “open-minded” skeptic as well as the “open-minded” believer represent intermediate stages within this dimension, and are able to work scientifically because of their basic attitude of openness towards results.

A further differentiation can be made on the basis of the degree of professional qualification and professionalization of the investigators. This is, however, more difficult than it seems to be at first glance because the investigation of RSPK cases cannot be assigned to a particular professional training or academic discipline, but requires a wide range of competences—again depending on the adopted model of RSPK. The mastery of a scientific-critical methodology of investigation and evaluation may indeed be widely accepted as a necessary precondition but this does not apply to the assessment of the validity of the respective procedures. The subject of investigation appears both difficult to grasp and ill-defined due to its ontological nature, and different ideas of science and scientific cultures often conflict. Almost all of the RSPK investigators who follow the tradition of scientific parapsychology have undergone scientific training (by all appearances, there seems to be a surplus of psychologists with a respective professional qualification). With regard to skeptically oriented investigators, the situation does not seem so clear-cut: they have often completed an academic training that is, however, frequently not closely linked to the phenomena under investigation. People with scientific training can also be found among members of ghost-hunting groups, according to sample tests. However, the proportion of lay investigators is apparently very high in such groups.⁵

However, a scientific training is not the sole criterion for the assessment of professional competence. Other qualifiers include the mastery of technical measuring and control instruments as well as criminological methods of investigation which can be acquired outside an academic context, for example as part of a vocational training. In this regard, a considerable degree of professionalism can be found among lay researchers. Potts (2004: 219) has shown that with the extensive use of technical apparatuses by ghost hunters, a remarkable difference from traditional investigators becomes evident. If professionalism

5 A systematic count on the basis of publicly accessible sources is not possible because detailed data regarding the professional career of individual investigators are frequently lacking, especially with lay research groups, according to our impression. This illustrates how a relationship to science is highly desirable: a person who has an academic degree advertises it, while another without tends to withhold that fact (see section “Academic training – amateur research” of Part I of this volume for more considerations on lay research in anomalistics).

and seriousness is advertised on the websites of such groups, then it refers exactly to these competences, usually in connection with long-term experience with regard to such investigations (Mayer, 2013).

More specifically, there are no *professional RSPK investigators*—professionalism can only be attributed to the role of a scientist, criminologist, illusionist, etc. Even for parapsychologists, i. e. scientists that dedicate a considerable part of their professional activity to researching anomalies or parapsychological phenomena, the designation is not applicable in most cases. RSPK investigations are almost always an additional activity with an often significant spare time or hobby character, especially if the financing is taken into consideration.⁶ This makes clear mapping of the research field difficult. There are many gray areas with blurred borders, such as the area between lay research and research with a scientific-academic background. For example, the French police officer Emile Tizané gathered a collection of poltergeist cases and developed a phenomenology of poltergeist phenomena by analyzing these cases (Tizané, 1951). Likewise, there are overlaps between spiritistic groups and scientific parapsychology (very apparent in Brazil, for instance, cf. Playfair, 2011: 139–146), and some members of ghost-hunting groups who are not academically trained provide publications that are positively received, even by their scientific colleagues—not least because some have double memberships. To mention a prominent example: the “king of ghost hunters”, Peter Underwood—he got this title and label from the Ghost Research Foundation—was president of the Ghost Club (founded in 1862) over many long years (from 1962–1993) and he was also a long-time member of the Society for Psychical Research.

From the above discussion, it should be clear that a multidimensional field of analysis is required to position individual actors or groups in a meaningful way. Neither the aspect of professionalism nor of scientific standards can be causally related to theoretical basic assumptions or explanatory models of RSPK phenomena that are personally preferred, even though clear tendencies can be recognized, as already indicated. However, before we attempt to illustrate this complexity with the presentation of different (groups of) investigators and investigative approaches, we will first give an overview of investigative methods in the following section. Although their selection depends largely on the theoretical basic assumptions of the researchers, it does not allow clear conclusions to be made about them or about the degree of scientific orientation of the investigators. Thereafter, we will specify the above-described types of investigators and approaches that are generated from theoretical deductions by means of the description of several groups of

6 In this respect, one would have to attribute an *amateur* status to almost all investigators in this field, the “serious” ones as well as the “less serious” ones, because they pursue the investigations as a kind of hobby.

investigators and individuals. The following section includes an excursus which focusses on the particularities of recurrent localized PK phenomena (hauntings) before we end this chapter with concluding considerations.

Methods

Quite different methods are used in RSPK investigations, whereby the selection is significantly influenced by the theories and models of the investigators. Whether only conventional explanations of the phenomena are admitted (position of “ideological” skeptics and “anomalous psychology”), or whether non-conventional explanatory approaches are also taken into account has a strong influence on the adopted perspective.⁷ Initially, one can differentiate between *phenomenon-related* and *observer-related* methods.

Phenomenon-related approaches that focus upon *conventional* explanations primarily involve the investigation of environmental and contextual variables that can produce respective perceptions that are then incorrectly framed or interpreted. In addition, they examine the possibility, and likelihood, of intentional manipulation and fraud. These two aspects are also considered with an acceptance in principle of *non-conventional* models of explanation, but further methods of investigation are added in order to explore the possibility of paranormal causes of the phenomena. With a *strictly anomalous* hypothesis, attempts are made to prove the anomalous character by way of systematical exclusion of conventional explanations without making assertions about anomalous hypotheses. An approach according to an *animistic* hypothesis only differs from this in searching for a meaningful correlation between the character of the phenomena and the psychodynamic/sociodynamic structures and experiences of the respective people. And finally, a *spiritualist* hypothesis makes the assumption of a possible interaction of “ghostly” entities and the physical world. This results in the idea of the possibility of recording the phenomena and achieving successful communication between humans and those entities. Several investigators are not content with a retrospective analysis of the occurrences but, in expecting an observation, try to provoke the reoccurrence of phenomena in a quasi-experimental way, preferably under controlled conditions, in order to document and assess them as well as possible.

7 White (1992) provides a good overview of different approaches and lists 13 in total: (1) The Individual Case Approach, (2) Case Collections, (3) The Survey Approach, (4) The Cross-Cultural Approach, (5) The Longitudinal Approach, (6) The Clinical Approach, (7) The Psychological Approach, (8) The Phenomenological Approach, (9) The Archetypal Approach, (10) The Folklorist Approach, (11) The Active Imagination Approach, (12) The Social Constructionist Approach, and (13) The Experience-Centered Approach. These approaches are not of equal relevance from the perspective of our work. Therefore, we will only occasionally refer to this deserving overview.

Observer-related approaches are aimed at a better understanding of individuals who have paranormal experiences. Using this method, one can also try to indirectly obtain insights into the nature of the phenomena. In this case, psychological and social science approaches are applied. McClenon (2001: 63) mentions three methods: social surveys, participant observations, and content analysis of collections of accounts. He points to the possibility of a methodical triangulation in order to overcome methodological weaknesses of qualitative approaches:

Observational studies of haunting phenomena are particularly subject to error since some researchers are strongly motivated to obtain evidence supporting a particular position. One method for overcoming such tendencies is to use triangulation within research strategies, maintain awareness of tendencies toward bias, and clearly state conclusions in a manner that allow them to be subject to replication (2001: 64).

In RSPK investigations, both phenomenon-related and observer-related methods are often applied, and with some approaches, this differentiation cannot be maintained at all. This is the case, for example, with an on-site re-staging of a RSPK situation in order to reassess former reports and compare it with one's own perceptions and impressions, paying special attention to local peculiarities. In his presidential address of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association in 1969, Hans Bender listed the following sources and methodological possibilities for the documentation of RSPK cases (Bender, 1969: 86):

1. The questioning of witnesses.
2. Written reports of witnesses.
3. Reconstruction of the alleged phenomena through the use of photographs and/or film with a view toward verifying the witnesses' statements.
4. Personal observations of the researcher.
5. Taped and filmed records of poltergeist occurrences.
6. Experimental controls such as sealing of boxes and cupboards containing frequently moved objects.
7. Use of criminological methods to reveal trickery.
8. Attempts to provoke poltergeist occurrences through posthypnotic suggestion.
9. Psychodiagnostic examination of poltergeist agents and witnesses.
10. Analysis of motivation.
11. Laboratory experimentation with subjects.

This listing shows both phenomenon-related and observer-related methods of investigation. The psychological setting of priorities by Bender is reflected in the relatively limited value that he ascribes to technical records of (indirect) indicators of poltergeist phenomena, such as environmental physical data, that are of great importance for several other investigators, particularly in the field of lay research.

Technical Equipment

The notion that paranormal phenomena become physically noticeable and, thereby, can be detected and recorded, forms the basis for the use of technical measuring and recording devices in investigations of hauntings or poltergeist cases. The concepts of the character of such physical evidence range from unspecific changes in local environmental variables, such as temperature and the strength of the electromagnetic field, to visual figurative appearances, as well as direct attempts of communication by means of language. With such assumptions, the use of technical devices serves the need, on the one hand, for the detection of the extraordinary because they enlarge the range of human perception, and, on the other hand, for the technical preservation of material-physical traces and, therewith, provide them with a status of a greater objectivity.

The standard equipment of a technical-oriented investigation comprises:

- magnetic field measuring equipment (“ghost detectors”)
- temperature sensors
- motion detectors
- recording equipment for acoustic signals
- video cameras
- photographic cameras

The first two apparatuses take account of the common idea that the presence of “ghosts” becomes noticeable with changes in the magnetic field and/or the environmental temperature (cold spots). With regard to measurement of the magnetic field, the normal environmental conditions must be assessed in order to enable the detection of temporary changes. The more cautious investigators measure various fields (geomagnetic, electromagnetic field up to the range of radio waves, and microwaves).⁸ Temperature is often

8 In the ghost-hunting scene, the EMF meter and detector has become established as a classic “ghost detector” and is offered in various variants, under that name as well as “ghost meter”. There are simple models for hobbyists and beginners that fit comfortably in the hand and are equipped with an acoustic signal or a red warning light, the activation of which indicates the presence of a “ghost”. In addition, several guidebooks to ghost hunting are available which describe technological issues in detail as well as general methodological aspects of ghost hunting

measured with infrared thermometers that are able to measure the surface temperatures of a limited area. Thermal imaging cameras are technically more sophisticated. Motion detectors are used in the same way as in conventional monitoring systems to activate, for example, a video camera. The use of infrared sensors implies the notion that such phenomena are linked to electromagnetic energy within the range of infrared radiation (Cornell, 2002: 388). However, infrared motion detectors can also be used to detect conventional causes (e. g. animals) or to disclose attempted frauds.

Visual apparitions and acoustic phenomena are more impressive than such indirect indicators of paranormal activity; therefore, recording devices are also used. Ghost hunters interpret unexplainable movements on video files or anomalous “extras” on photographs as evidence, or strong indications at least, for the existence of ghosts and their presence at the investigation site, even if nobody perceived those shadows or shapes at the moment of the recording.

There must be very few, if any, groups of investigators that do not work with audio recording devices. Digital recordings are currently prevailing over analog techniques, as is the case with video recordings and photographs. Such devices should record anomalous noises and verbal communications of ghosts. As in a séance, they are called or addressed, and the investigator tries to provoke utterances by asking questions, making requests, and producing sounds (e. g. raps). At the end of the field investigation, the audio recordings are evaluated with respect to EVPs⁹ and other noise phenomena, using proper analysis software. Thereby, several technical manipulations of the raw data, such as changing the playing speed or a frequency shift, can be performed as necessary, in order to detect EVPs or other signals interpreted as communication attempts.

Experienced investigators recommend a parallel use of analog and digital recording devices in order to better control technology-related artifacts. Two recording devices should be running in parallel to allow a comparison afterwards. Auerbach notes on this: “Generally if both recorders do record the same voices and sounds, it’s not likely to be anything paranormal, even when you didn’t hear the sounds yourself” (Auerbach, 2004: 119–120). In addition to their phenomenon-related usage, technical instruments are also used for documentation purposes. The local and spatial situation is photographed, interviews with witnesses are recorded, and the local temperature as well as other environmental variables are measured and documented, in order to attain a better assess-

(e. g. Parsons, 2015; Ruickbie, 2013; Warren, 2003; Wilson, 2005).

9 EVP is an abbreviation of *electric voice phenomenon*. It denominates noise phenomena which are gathered on audio recordings during field investigations and could be interpreted as words or sentence fragments.

ment of witness testimonies and generate, or make an evaluation of, various alternative explanations.

The above-mentioned technical instruments are only the core apparatuses which can be employed. In his book *The Ghost Hunter's Guide*, Underwood (1986: 24–37) lists several further aids which can be used, depending on the nature of the case. The growing availability of computer technology since the mid-1980s has made it possible to easily connect measuring instruments, to coordinate their functions, and to correlate the data. Thus, some investigators, or investigation groups, have developed full registration systems, such as the SPIDER detector system, which is equipped with various sensors, cameras, and measuring instruments (Cornell, 2002: 377–381). In addition to such event-sensitive and change-sensitive apparatuses that are applied during time-limited field investigations, long-term active surveillance systems have increasingly been used in order to avoid missing relevant events. For instance, in some sites that have a reputation for being haunted, there are now permanent operating systems which provide data by webcam via the Internet. However, because the extensive deployment of technology has not proved particularly worthwhile to date, most experienced ghost investigators with an academic background have become skeptical of using technology in this way. Thus, Cornell states disenchanted: “Considering the number of cases and the time involved, one must recognize that the use of such equipment has not produced any great weight of evidence to confirm the paranormal nature of those events it has been designed to record” (Cornell, 2002: 381). And already in 1986, Underwood noted: “One ghost hunter I knew used to take with him over five tons of equipment yet, perhaps surprisingly, his reports were of no more interest to the scientist or anyone else than those prepared meticulously by an amateur with the simplest ghost hunting apparatus” (Underwood, 1986: 27). Loyd Auerbach, who is well-known in the scene with his popular instructions on ghost hunting (Auerbach, 1986, 2004), also takes a critical position towards a non-reflecting technical orientation during investigations. Due to the fact that technical devices are not developed for the detection of anomalies, natural causes for the incidence of anomalies in the data always have to be considered; they make little sense as providers of non-correlated anomalies. However, they might be useful as confirmation of human perceptions—most impressively if human perceptions, e. g. of a medium, correlate with the respective physical data (local changes of temperature or strength of the magnetic field) (Auerbach, 2004: 98–103).

One important aspect of the use of technical apparatuses has yet to be mentioned: their dysfunction. There are a vast number of anecdotal accounts of unexplainable failures or faulty functioning, especially of electronic devices, in the context of paranormal phenomena in the parapsychological as well as anthropological context. Such problems

are often interpreted as indicators of the presence of paranormal activity if they occur in the context of an investigation of a haunted site.¹⁰

“Living Detectors”

For some investigators who are convinced of a direct physical interaction of the realm “beyond” and the “this-worldly” physical realm, the work with sensitive persons or psychics is deficient due to the large subjectivity and uncertainty of the gathered information, whereas for others, the use of a medium to detect and communicate with ghosts forms an integral part of their research method. However, the level of importance given to such mediums in the investigation of a haunting or poltergeist case depends strongly on the attitude and beliefs of the investigators. In some cases, the mediumistically generated information is at the core, and data gathered by technical apparatuses are regarded as validating accessory parts. They should add, by means of “hard” data, objective evidence to the “stories” provided by the medium.¹¹ Other researchers, such as the above-quoted Loyd Auerbach, use mediums strictly as detectors who, like technical devices, provide data to be analyzed, evaluated, and correlated with the other data (Auerbach, 2004: 93–97). A further possibility is to use them as a kind of “last resource”, or “joker” if the progress of the investigation stagnates or does not produce any satisfactory results by other means. Their use is not necessarily related to any theoretical conceptions about the nature of information produced by a medium, but can be purely pragmatic. Therefore, it plays a secondary role, whether, for example, the information is attributed to an enlarged sensitivity of well-known human sensory perceptions gained from natural ability or training, or alternatively, it is assumed that he or she obtains information by means of access to the “otherworld”, that is to other layers of reality which remain sealed to people without medial abilities.

The importance of the use of animals, primarily dogs, in such investigations is principally similar to that of sensitive people. However, there is a significant difference: while mediums are seen as humans with special abilities, animals are traditionally attributed with a heightened sensitivity for “paranormal activity”. In a conventional view, this can be ascribed to their more sensitive senses which detect frequency ranges and signal strengths beyond the capability of the human system of sensory perception—in that

10 See, for example, the investigation guide published by the S.P.R. (Barrington, 1996), or the TV documentary *Der Geisterjäger* (2008) from Télévision Suisse. The physicist and parapsychologist Walter von Lucadou presents a theoretical explanation for this phenomenon with his *Model of Pragmatic Information* (Lucadou, 2015).

11 This should apply specifically to some ghost-hunting groups in which a medium is an inherent part or even the founder.

respect comparable to some technical aids. However, some may, in this case, also take similar mediumistic mechanisms as an explanation, as with human sensitives. Whichever models are preferred, this handed down idea of a generally higher sensitivity of animals is the reason for the suggestions in manuals for ghost hunters to watch out for specific behavior of animals at poltergeist locations or haunted sites, and to use animals as “ghost detectors”. Thus, the Advanced Ghost Hunters of Seattle-Tacoma (A.G.H.O.S.T.) present themselves in a TV documentary with a “ghost dog” as an inherent part of the investigating team.¹² And in the first episode of the British series *Most Haunted*, a dog is used as a “ghost detector” who—according to the interpretation of his strange behavior by the medium Derek Acorah—perceives the ghost of a monkey.¹³

Historical Inquiries

Historical inquiries about haunted sites are an important part of RSPK research, especially—and obviously—in cases of place-centered hauntings. They have three basic functions: (a) They contribute to plausibility when determining whether the reported phenomena and/or the particularities in the gathered data actually are a reflection of paranormal activity, or whether misperceptions or fraud have to be considered; historically loaded places generally confirm the RSPK hypothesis. (b) Historical information is used as an interpretation and communication aid. If, for example, the name and the history of a “tragic” person linked to a haunted place is known, he or she can be invoked by name in séance-type parts of the investigation, and a response may be provoked by providing known information. At the same time, such information also provides an interpretive framework for communications from the “spirit world” that are diffuse and difficult to understand. (c) Furthermore, information and perceptions provided by sensitive persons during RSPK investigations can be evaluated and verified, as the case may be, with historical inquiries (falsification is seldom possible due to methodological reasons).¹⁴

12 *Mysterious Worlds – America’s Ghost Hunters* (2003, director: Michael Brockhoff).

13 Episode “Athelhampton Hall”, aired on May 25, 2002. See <http://www.tv.com/shows/most-haunted/athelhampton-hall-282480/> [accessed July 29, 2016].

14 The structure of the British TV series *Most Haunted*, which had a significant influence on the development of the ghost-hunting scene in English-speaking countries (see section “Actors, paradigms, methodological consequences”), is largely based on historical inquiries and emphasizes this aspect by adding a simultaneous scrolling text that confirms, or denotes as unconfirmed, historically verifiable specific statements of the medium. The indication that the medium has no historical information at all before visiting the haunted place and is totally ignorant is important for the functioning of this structural element. This “blinding” should

Interviews

Whatever approach is adopted, interviews with witnesses or victims of poltergeist attacks, or also experts of any kind, are part of every field-based single case study. With regard to methodology, RSPK investigations do not differ from those in many other fields: interviews are conducted and questionnaires employed, as required, and therefore, basically the same rules apply as generally in empirical social research. Differences between individual researchers mainly arise from different priorities, which strongly depend on personal beliefs and the investigational approach on the whole. While some investigators mainly confine themselves to the inquiry of visual experiences and perceptions by means of interviewing witnesses, others highly emphasize the survey of the psychosocial dynamics of the respective family system in order to generate theses on the “function” of the paranormal phenomena. RSPK investigations in the tradition of the IGPP, for instance, are methodologically highly process-oriented and directed to the detection of a so-called “affective field” (Bender, 1964; Mischo, 1983), which is reflected in respective interview guides and explorative questionnaires. A formalized documentation form for the investigation of RSPK cases that was used for some time included the analysis of the presumed causes of the emergence of the affective field as a central aspect.

The use of personality questionnaires can also have different objectives: a specific expression of certain personality traits can be used, for example, as evidence of highly unreliable witness statements and perception accounts but also as a signifier of high sensitivity and openness for exceptional experiences (ExE). Information on the physical and mental state of the witnesses during the ExE that could be relevant for an assessment of the reported phenomena can also be gathered with questionnaires. Questionnaires mainly used by psychologically oriented academic investigators, in addition to the “Revised Paranormal Belief Scale” (Tobacyk, 1988),¹⁵ are the “Revised Transliminality Scale” (Lange et al., 2000), the “Tellegen Absorption Scale” (Jamieson, 2005), the “Perceptual Aberration Scale” (Chapman et al., 1978), the “Whitley Index” (see Houran, Wiseman & Thalbourne, 2002), the “Symptom Checklist-90-Revised” (Derogatis, 1994), and further questionnaires (see Irwin, 2009).

signify the (pseudo-)scientific character of the endeavor, increasing the *thrill* and, therewith, the entertainment value of the documentary. Due to the fact that the locations are the “Most Haunted” places in Great Britain (and in later sequels also in other countries) the “blinding” of the medium must be nothing but a farce.

15 Schofield et al. (2018) developed the “Belief in the Supernatural Scale” whose items seem to be more suitable than the very often used scale by Tobacyk.

In addition to these rather skeptically oriented person-related questionnaires, other procedures for the assessment of the personality of the witnesses/concerned persons are sometimes also applied. In his *Ghost Hunter's Guide*, RSPK investigator Peter Underwood states that he conducts experiments with Zener cards, or performs a word-association test, in order to test the ESP ability of the respective people, and to examine the relationship to the intuitive, magical, and subconscious. However, this should really be considered as a secondary aspect, because he apparently used these tools primarily as psi-inducing elements in field investigations.¹⁶ In his book *Ghost Hunting*, Auerbach describes an “Anomalous experience checklist” that was developed following the checklists for field investigations used by Moss and Schmeidler (Auerbach, 2004: 137–140).¹⁷ It includes terms for the description of the perceived phenomena that can be marked or discarded, in order to verbalize and characterize the experiences in the most differentiated way possible. The “Dokumentationssystem für außergewöhnliche Erfahrungen (DAE)” [Documentary system for extraordinary experiences] (Hofmann & Wiedemer, 1997), developed at the IGPP, although conceptualized for another context and a broader range of experiences, as well as the subsequent advanced form of the documentation system (DOKU) of the IGPP counseling center (Bauer & Belz, 2012; Belz & Fach, 2015), can also contribute to the characterization and classification of such extraordinary perceptions.

An important aspect of RSPK investigations that can distinguish them from most other field investigations has yet to be mentioned. The subject, RSPK or haunting, is not an indisputable, largely understood phenomenon that can be put into a clear relationship with the people concerned or involved, but it can—according to the current state of knowledge—most likely be understood as a specific state of a complex system, in which all involved factors and their relationships play a role. It hardly seems to be possible to make a clear analytical distinction. Furthermore, such a situation implies that the investigator himself can become a critical parameter regarding the occurrence, or the probability of occurrence, of the phenomena, a condition that is frequently reported (e. g. Roll, 1977: 395–397). This often results in a stronger involvement accompanied by a diminished scientific distance to the subject of research and to the field, with all the

16 “It is always wise for the ghost hunter to have among his apparatus a few evocative articles: a small bell, perhaps, a paper-knife or dagger, a bible, a crucifix, a small toy, a photograph; for often the presence of such miscellanea will seem to promote apparent phenomena and in any case—as with Zener cards and the Word-Association Tests—they provide interest for everyone present, help to keep sleep at bay and also help to retain the all-important sense of relaxation and lack of the tension that can prohibit phenomena” (Underwood, 1986: 28).

17 “Appearance checklist”, “activity checklist” and “personality checklist” (Moss & Schmeidler, 1968).

consequent advantages and disadvantages. According to the theoretical standpoint, this is even considered necessary for conducting the investigation in an appropriate manner. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the specific subject (ExE related to paranormal claims and beliefs), which is combined with a high risk of social stigmatization, demands a particular basis of trust so that the interviewed individuals open up and provide information frankly (see also Favret-Saada, 1980); and secondly, the attempt to investigate the presumed paranormal phenomena at the location makes it necessary to stay longer on-site with the people involved. This is often overnight and under psi-conducive conditions, again with all the accompanying advantages and disadvantages. Cases can be found in the literature where this balancing act between scientific distance and involvement seems to have been successful (e. g. McClenon, 2001).

Experimental RSPK Investigations

In a broader sense, several experimental approaches also belong to the field of RSPK investigations. This does not mean experimental elements such as producing psi-conducive situations with different technical aids in the context of conventional RSPK investigations but experiments in a relatively strict scientific sense attempting to induce “paranormal” perceptions and experiences in an artificial way. Such experiments are usually directed towards the generation, supplementation, and confirmation of conventional explanatory models of RSPK, and are often initiated by skeptics and proponents of anomalistic psychology. The scope ranges from neurophysiological experiments (e. g. Brugger, 2001; Persinger & Koren, 2001; Radin, 2001) to testing the mechanical poltergeist theory of Lambert, which reduces poltergeist phenomena to unnoticeable earth vibrations caused by currents in underground streams and thrusts of tidal waves (Maher, 2015: 336f; with regard to this approach, see also Houran & Brugger, 2000). In order to prove this hypothesis, Gauld and Cornell conducted extensive “house shaking” experiments on a house destined for demolition, in which the building was made to vibrate with an appropriate installation (steel shaft, electric motors) (Gauld & Cornell, 1979: 334–337).¹⁸

Two of the most well-known experiments of this kind were conducted in 2001 in the Edinburgh “South Bridge Vaults” (“The Edinburgh Ghost Project”). Five of the ten “vaults” (small chambers, rooms, and corridors that are built in the arches of Edinburgh’s South Bridge) were regarded as haunted, or “active”. That is, during sightseeing tours, visitors as well as guides often reported several unusual experiences such as visual appa-

18 With these experiments, they could show that serious damage to the building structure would occur before psychokinesis-like movements of single objects that would correspond with poltergeist phenomena appeared in the house.

ritions and a sense of presence. The other five vaults were used for experimental controls. As a result, a strong dependency of extraordinary experiences on the expectations and beliefs of the participants could be verified in experiment 1 (Houran, Wiseman, & Thalbourne, 2002),¹⁹ whereas in experiment 2, a high dependency of extraordinary experiences on the “haunted order” of the vaults was detected, which was—in contradiction with the results of experiment 1—enhanced when participants that knew about the “haunting myths” of the vaults were excluded from the statistical calculations (Wiseman, Watt, Stevens, Greening & O’Keefe, 2003). Wiseman interpreted this finding in accordance with the results of his first experiment of this kind (“Hampton Court Palace”), to the effect that traditional haunting locations are characterized by specific local conditions (e.g. high variance in the geomagnetic field) which induce such (hallucinatory) perceptions.²⁰ The methodology of these experiments traces back to an approach of Schmeidler and collaborators (Schmeidler, 1966). In an experiment, Moss and Schmeidler let eight psychics (mediums) independently explore a house that was haunted, according to independent witness reports. The accordance of the perceptions was tested by means of various checklists that were compiled, among others, from witness reports which had to be completed by the “sensitives” as well as by a respective number of controls. In total, the correlation of the statements from the “sensitives” with those from the witnesses was significantly larger than that of the statements from the “controls” (Moss & Schmeidler, 1968). These few examples should be sufficient to demonstrate such approaches.

Actors, Paradigms, Methodological Consequences

After providing an overview of common investigative methods, we will now present examples of investigational approaches that display varying degrees of scholarship, or academic acceptability. With regard to the academically based field, we naturally refer to approaches which were, and are, adopted in Freiburg (“Freiburg school”). With both the example of different investigative groups and lines of tradition at the IGPP and the “Parapsychologische Beratungsstelle” [Parapsychological Counseling Center], founded

19 Cornell criticized these experiments to the effect that they were only designed to demonstrate that one is able to induce respective sensations and experiences (Cornell, 2002: 389–391).

20 See also French et al. (2009), who provide an overview of studies on the correlation of extraordinary experiences and environmental conditions. Furthermore, they present the findings of their own experiment where they did not find significant correlations between the frequency of such experiences and the application of infrasound or electromagnetic radiation. However, their results indicate a significant correlation between suggestibility and frequency of extraordinary experiences under such environmental conditions.

by a former staff member of the IGPP, it is possible to demonstrate that this orientation towards academic standards alone does not lead to a methodological approach which is constant and consistent over time, but which is characterized by various tasks and setting of priorities that, in turn, are reflected in the chosen methods. Different approaches to lay research with varying proximity to academic science will be presented with the examples of Egon Pfeiffer, who cooperated closely with the IGPP for a long period of time, and the ghost-hunting movement that has developed during the last fifteen years, especially in the USA.

RSPK Investigations at the IGPP

The archive of the IGPP contains a comprehensive collection of investigation reports and related documents. The earliest documented RSPK investigations in which the founder of the institute, Hans Bender, was significantly involved were conducted prior to the foundation year of the IGPP: the first case record dates from 1947/1948. In the 1980s, Huesmann & Schriever (1989) performed a comparative analysis of RSPK reports from the period of 1947–1986. Out of the total of 67 detailed reports, 54 could be included in the evaluation. Streichardt also presented statistics for the period of 1986–1992:²¹ from 85 reported RSPK cases, 11 were examined in more detail.²² In the 1990s, the situation changed insofar as, on the one hand, the *Parapsychologische Beratungsstelle* [Parapsychological Counseling Center] became a place for concerned people to go and, thus, many RSPK investigations were conducted by von Lucadou and his staff. On the other hand, a loose cooperation was established between the IGPP and Egon Pfeiffer, who ran an *Informationsstelle Parapsychologie* [Parapsychology Information Center] in Ratingen (near Düsseldorf) and also conducted extensive investigations of RSPK cases. The *Beratung und Information* [Counseling and Information] department at the IGPP was set up in 1996 in its current form. A documentation system (DOKU) has been devised (see Bauer & Belz, 2012). During the period from 1996 to August 2016, the members of the counseling team investigated 13 cases on-site. Since 2003, ad-hoc investigation groups have occasionally been deployed under the heading of *Task Force Grenzgebiete* [Task Force Frontier Areas] to conduct single case studies in the field of anomalistic phenomena. Two of those investigations can be included in the category of RSPK case studies. Due to this diversification, the research situation in Freiburg has obtained a certain “occult” lack of clarity during the last 20 years, at least in regard to field-based single case studies.

21 Unpublished report (archive of the IGPP).

22 This does not mean that on-site investigations were conducted in every case; sometimes the individuals concerned visited the IGPP and were intensively interviewed and submitted to a comprehensive test diagnosis.

The Tradition of the “Freiburg School”

RSPK investigations in the context of the IGPP are, for historical reasons, strongly committed to a psychological, process-oriented approach which is based on Bender's research. Although this approach did not appear out of nowhere and refers to the work of other parapsychologists (e. g. W. Roll, A. R. G. Owen), one can speak of a “Freiburg school” of RSPK research initiated by Hans Bender because the psychological and psychotherapeutic approach has been strongly pursued and further developed (Mischo, 1983; Streichardt, 1991, 1992). Mischo (1983: 171) describes three issues that “arise with the majority of RSPK phenomena, and characterize the approach established by Bender in Freiburg: a parapsychological, a psychodiagnostic, and a psychohygienic” (translated by G. M.). These three issues are partly conflicting: the parapsychological concern is principally interested in the maintenance and clearest possible occurrence of paranormal phenomena, whereas the purpose of psychohygienic interventions lies in the “dissolution” of a situation or occurrence that often causes psychological stress to the individuals concerned. However, according to Mischo, for the “psychodiagnostician”, “it does not play a decisive role if the symptoms in the external space are “real” in a parapsychological sense or if they can be traced back to manipulations. The symptomatic character and its informative value in relation to certain psycho- and sociodynamic constellations are crucial for him” (p. 173; translated by G. M.). The strong interest of Bender in the former, parapsychological, issue becomes clearly evident from his list of methodological possibilities for documentation of RSPK cases mentioned in the section “Methods” of this chapter, as well as, for example, his statement that “a quick analysis of the situation and a speedy decision as to what methodological approach is to be applied are necessary since the phenomena may wane and even completely cease in a short period of time” (Bender, 1969: 86–87). The exploration of the nature of paranormal phenomena and their inherent ideologically provoking character appeared to be a decisive driving force behind his dedicated research work. During the 1980s, and increasingly after Bender's death, this aspect has become less important; at least the publications by authors associated with the IGPP from this period create this impression. Instead, psychodiagnostic and psychohygienic dimensions have come to the fore. This might have several causes, such as the individual professional emphasis of the people involved with RSPK investigations. However, this development could also be due to an increasingly defensive strategy in dealing with paranormal phenomena that can be interpreted as resulting from the fear of exclusion from and stigmatization by the scientific community.²³ Field investigations

23 The heyday of optimism in German parapsychological research from the period of the early 1960s until the mid-1970s was replaced by an increasing and harsh criticism from agents of skeptical organizations (CSI, former CSICOP, was founded in 1976), which had a significant

connected with the IGPP have occasionally been conducted in other fields of anomalistic phenomena, but these were isolated cases which need not be considered in this context.

The Counseling and Information Department of the IGPP

The on-site investigations of RSPK cases by members of the counseling and information department of the IGPP are largely formed by a clinical-psychological and psychohygienic approach. This continues the more recent line of tradition of the “Freiburg school” that is based on the priorities set by Johannes Mischo, Bender’s successor as director of the IGPP. The primary purpose is to reduce the suffering of the people seeking help or advice (through psychological counseling, reframing offers etc.; see Bauer & Belz, 2012, and Belz & Fach, 2015). In addition to categorization of the cases with the documentation system DOKU and psychodiagnostic examinations with questionnaires, interviews are conducted in field investigations which are documented by audio and video recordings. A further processing of the data only takes place in specific cases (e. g. if they are used as illustrative material in the context of advanced training offers for psychotherapists).

Explorations of parapsychological issues *sensu stricto* has become a by-product of the work. However, Wolfgang Fach analyzed the ExE reported by clients on the basis of the DOKU system and found four fundamental categories or classes (Belz & Fach, 2015). With a depth-psychological approach that is embedded into a functionalistic-systemic model, attempts were made to systematize correlations between the specific character of the “paranormal” phenomena and the diagnosed psychodynamics of the people involved. This allows the extraordinary phenomena themselves to be used for diagnostic purposes, comparable with depth-psychological dream interpretation.²⁴ It can be also used in the other direction to obtain more information about the specific character of ExE.²⁵

Task Force Grenzgebiete

After the strengthening of the empirical cultural and social-science approaches at the IGPP, a decision was made to conduct scientific investigations of RSPK phenomena and anomalies in the form of field studies under the label of Task Force Grenzgebiete (TFG).

effect on public opinion.

24 This approach is not new but was hitherto not systematized in this way.

25 The description of a RSPK investigation by the counseling department of the IGPP can be found in the first German edition of this work (Fach, 2011).

This approach should complement the psychohygienic and clinical-psychological approaches of the counseling department. Therefore, interdisciplinary ad hoc investigation groups are used whose aim is to deal with the following issues:

- reconstruction of the phenomenon
- psychodynamic situation and reactions of the people involved
- social dynamics between the people involved and the public

In this list, the first two issues mentioned by Mischo, i. e. the parapsychological and the psychodiagnostic (in a broad sense), are taken into consideration but are complemented by a further, namely sociocultural, dimension. The psychohygienic issue, however, is not a topic emphasized by the investigation design, although it does not remain unconsidered in principle; for instance, a member of the IGPP counseling group may be included in the investigation team.

Due to the fact that classic person-related RSPK cases that are reported to the IGPP always relate to psychohygienic issues (and very often with individual suffering of the involved individuals) they are not generally forwarded to the Task Force Grenzgebiete by the counseling department. This leaves those occurrences that do not fit the clinical-psychological frame at first glance. With regard to RSPK phenomena, it concerns occurrences with a higher structural complexity (or a more opaque structure) which cannot so easily be inserted into a depth-psychological model of paranormal phenomena and have often been attributed a place-bound component. The number of RSPK-type cases that have been investigated by the TFG is correspondingly low. In four cases, photographic anomalies built the starting point of the investigation; in a further one, it was a “haunted hotel”. The resources employed differed significantly, according to the structure of the cases but also to external factors. The two investigations presented in Part IV of this volume (“A Remarkable Photographic Anomaly”; “Becoming a Haunt Myth ...”) were conducted with considerable effort. The interdisciplinary approach combined with the “parapsychological issue” requires a methodological openness that makes the flexibility necessary for dealing with various phenomena possible. Bender’s list, described above (section “Methods”), shows a respective methodological variety that is, in principle, transferable to the work of the TFG. However, two points, namely the provoking of RSPK phenomena with posthypnotic suggestion and laboratory experimentation with agents, are further removed from the core of the preferred methodology than the others. On the other hand, historical and sociological investigations play a significant role, and Bender’s list should be complemented with these two points.

The question about the nature, and, with that, the genuineness of the phenomena constitutes an important aspect of the research efforts. However, the methodical focus

of the TFG when clarifying this issue during previous investigations has not been on the measuring of relevant physical parameters (magnetic field, temperature), as is the case with several other investigation groups (e.g. ghost-hunting groups which interpret the detection of “cold spots” as a strong indication for the presence of an anomaly), whereas interviews with witnesses and concerned individuals have played an important role. The desired aim is not a “hard” proof of the existence of RSPK phenomena that withstands the criteria of scientific evidence but an interpretative evaluation of plausibility on the basis of sufficient data that, particularly in interesting cases, is as diverse as possible. Beyond the issue of the genuineness of the phenomena, well examined cases provide a considerable increase in knowledge with regard to different sociocultural dimensions (e.g. individual as well as collective interpretations, or the relationship between subjective and scientific evidence). It is for this reason that qualitative interviews with witnesses are of superior importance for the investigations.

The results of each TFG investigation are summarized in detailed reports, the extent of which depends on the character and complexity of the respective case as well as the investigative effort. In these reports, not only the gathered data but also the concrete procedure, the applied methods and the circumstances of the respective case are documented in detail. Such a systematical documentation of the process of the investigations and the results obtained create, at the same time, the prerequisites for later reanalysis that eventually might allow the reconstruction of those structures of RSPK cases that cannot be detected solely by the consideration of single case studies; this equally concerns the level of phenomena and the person-related or socio-dynamic level. However, the TFG is currently far from having investigated a sufficient number of cases to enable such a systematical comparative study.

The Parapsychologische Beratungsstelle in Freiburg

The Parapsychologische Beratungsstelle [Parapsychological Counseling Center] in Freiburg was established in 1989 by the Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Parapsychologie e.V. (WGFP) [Scientific Society for the Promotion of Parapsychology] and is directed by the psychologist and physicist Walter von Lucadou. In accordance with its name, the objective of the institution is to provide qualified information and counseling concerning extraordinary experiences and events. As a public service, it is subsidized by the federal state. With regard to content alignment, it is akin to the Beratung und Information department at the IGPP. A major part of the work consists of the response to telephone or e-mail requests as well as providing information events.²⁶ The

26 The number of requests amounts to approx. 3,000 per year (<http://www.parapsychologische->

number of on-site consultations, which often include elements of field investigations, is stated as 112 for the period from 1989 to 2004, corresponding to an average of seven missions per year (Zahradnik, 2007: 20). As von Lucadou was a staff member of the IGPP for six years (from 1979 to 1985), and is still in close contact with the institute, many of the basic assumptions of the “Freiburg school” for dealing with RSPK cases influence the work of this counseling center.²⁷ Individual setting of priorities can be deduced from von Lucadou’s publications; in particular, his *Model of Pragmatic Information* (Lucadou, 2015). Despite the strong psychohygienic orientation that is prescribed by educational work on behalf of the state, von Lucadou and his counseling center have always emphasized the significance of the other dimensions of RSPK investigations postulated by Bender, and conducted their work in accordance with them.

Lay Research Connected with Science: Egon Pfeiffer

As mentioned previously, the division of RSPK investigators with regard to their degree of professionalism is problematic because—and this applies not only to the field of RSPK investigations—a high degree of specific technical qualification *can* also be found in lay research. If the rules of scientific methodology are known and taken into consideration, lay researchers are also capable of good scientific work or providing scientifically useful data (i. e. that can be evaluated at a later time and interpreted in a meaningful way). A good example of this is the work of Egon Pfeiffer who collaborated intensively with Hans Bender and the IGPP for several years.

Egon Pfeiffer, a pictorial and mediumistic artist (Lechner-Knecht, 1981: 888), whom we might call an autodidactic follower of Bender, established his counseling center Informationsstelle Parapsychologie [Parapsychology Information Center] in Ratingen in 1978. Pfeiffer is the author of several non-fiction books on parapsychological issues (e. g. his *Grenzgang Niemandsland* in two volumes; Pfeiffer, 1993; 1996); he was invited to several television shows as an “expert in parapsychology”,²⁸ gave many lectures, conducted comparatively public ASW experiments, and engaged in the investigation of Philippine spiritual healers. This gave him a certain public recognition which made his counseling center a contact point for people with extraordinary experiences. In 1988, he received the “Schweizer-Preis” [Swiss Award] of merit for the presentation of paranormal phenomena by the Schweizerische Stiftung für Parapsychologie [Swiss Foundation for Parapsychology].

beratungsstelle.de/Beratung_Information/..

27 See the chapter “Dead Monks Walking” (Lucadou & Pohl) in part IV of this volume, in which the approach of the counseling center is presented on the basis of a case study.

28 See Schetsche (1996: 44–45) on the issue of a media-defined or staged expert status in general.

The fact that Pfeiffer, as a lay researcher, worked outside of an academic structure, enabled him to take a clear position as a believer in the existence of paranormal phenomena without the need to use strategically defensive structures of argumentation in his publications or media appearances. Pfeiffer cooperated in a sustained manner with the IGPP during the 1990s; therefore, he periodically sent progress reports of his RSPK investigations to Freiburg that were commented upon, and was occasionally provided with methodical instructions for further action.²⁹ There are reports of 26 RSPK investigations for this period of time³⁰ that strongly resemble the methodological approach of the IGPP in the early decades (before the focus had shifted considerably towards psychodiagnostics and therapeutic help for the individuals concerned). The following remarks are based solely on data and impressions gained from his case reports archived at the IGPP.

Pfeiffer was usually successful in gaining the confidence of the individuals involved. This was probably because, on the one hand, he took the phenomena seriously and made his position clear. This meant that the people felt recognized and that their perceptions were taken seriously. And on the other hand, he was not afraid to get relatively deeply involved in the concerned systems, and did not keep the involved individuals at bay by means of scientific distance. Thereby, his status as a lay researcher who had not lost the ability to speak the language of ordinary people was certainly helpful. Although he seemed to investigate and act with a theoretical orientation with regard to the aspect of psychohygiene and pastoral care (this is evident from the conceptual apparatus used: focus person, affective field, place-centered vs. person-centered RSPK phenomena, possession, animistic vs. spiritualist hypothesis, etc.), he never lost his hands-on and pragmatic approach. Overall, his approach was strongly oriented towards therapeutic and psychohygienic methods (in his late period, at least), although the *classic* parapsychological researcher in search of a “clear proof” was obviously always one of the ingredients. Thus, Pfeiffer always tried to distinguish between “genuine” and “fake” phenomena, and tested alternative hypotheses or offered them for interpretation. He assigned an important role to his publication *Grenzgang Niemandsland*. He recommended this book to his clients to help them understand possible interpretations of the events. In most of the “genuine cases” (according to his assessment), he adopted an animistic hypothesis—although he

29 Since the beginning of the 1990s, Pfeiffer sought financial support for his unpaid research and counseling activity with partly considerable travel expenses. In 1993 and 1994, he received a symbolic reimbursement of costs by the IGPP (see letter from Mischo to Pfeiffer dated January 2, 1995, IGPP archive. Signature 20/14).

30 IGPP archive. Signature 20/14: collection “Egon Pfeiffer / Informationsstelle Parapsychologie Ratingen”.

occasionally did not want to completely rule out a spiritualist interpretation. He also took the differentiation between person-centered and place-centered RSPK into account. Depending on the case, a quite intensive support of the clients took place. In some RSPK cases, the investigation period endured for several years (sometimes up to ten or more). When the possibility of genuine paranormal phenomena could not be excluded after a first exploratory telephone call, he conducted on-site investigations insofar as his financial resources made it possible. In some cases, he applied an IGPP questionnaire as well as a formalized report containing information on the “affective field”. The use of technical devices was rather cautious, and, in most cases, only for the documentation of external circumstances or reports from the individuals involved (photographs of the locations of RSPK occurrences and audio recordings of the interviews, for instance). Other technical devices were only applied in a few cases in an attempt to clarify the phenomena themselves. Further aids were maps, site plans, and architectural elevations and plans. Sometimes he brought in a clairvoyant, a sensitive person, or a retired policeman to search for traces. The applied methods were individually adapted to the structure of the respective cases. In summary, the following methodological approaches can be found within Pfeiffer’s investigations:

- *“police investigation” approach*: interviews (concerned people, witnesses; plausibility assessments have to be made concerning credibility and psychopathological issues), examination of the RSPK sites, writing of history logs, testing of “alibis” (who was at home at time?), analysis of objects by experts (e. g. of a charred power cable by an electrician)
- *experimental approach*: attempts to replicate and verify the reported events (e. g. giving a (religious) icon into the hands of a concerned person in order to test if a flush develops, artificial production of alleged materializations, examining the floor with regard to creaking boards in order to produce knocks or raps, spreading flour, spreading a connector with honey, sealing rooms, safeguarding access possibilities)
- *psychometric approach*: deployment of clairvoyants or sensitives in order to obtain relevant information
- *psychodiagnostic approach*: “visual diagnostics” to determine the affective field and/or the focus person (but without the use of classic testing procedures/questionnaires)
- *psychohygienic approach*: provision of alternative interpretation frameworks (e. g. by means of his book *Grenzgang Niemandsland*)

This arsenal of methods differs significantly in terms of its diversity only in one point from what was traditionally common at the IGPP since the time of Bender: the deploy-

ment of clairvoyants, or sensitives, in RSPK investigations.³¹ However, clear differences are found in the setting of priorities for the investigations: Pfeiffer emphasized proof-oriented aspects relatively strongly, whereas psychodiagnostic aspects played a significantly less important role. The exact opposite is true for the more process-oriented researchers of the IGPP, at least since the beginning of the 1990s.

Ghost-hunting Groups

Further examples of lay-scientific RSPK investigations can be found within the ghost-hunting scene, which developed significantly during the first decade of the 21st century. The hotspot of this relatively young movement that, however, at least partly refers to a British tradition initiated by the Ghost Club (Guiley, 2000: 151–153), is in the USA.³² The investigations made by most ghost-hunting groups, i. e. organized groups of “ghost hunters”, are of lay-scientific character. The investigated field does not remain unaffected. The following depiction firstly, and mainly, focusses on the movement in the USA, and this is followed by a short description of the situation in Great Britain and Germany in order to mark some, partly considerable, cultural differences.

USA

During the last two decades of the 20th century, an increasing number of ghost-hunting groups formed in the USA which saw RSPK investigations as a leisure activity, and did not seek any, or only a little, connection to academic science (Radford, 2008; Stollznow, 2009). Since the beginning of the new millennium, the development has accelerated tremendously so that about 1,200 such groups can be found on the Internet that are active in the USA.³³ The considerable influence of the American reality TV series *Ghost Hunters*, which has been aired since October 2004 (and is still broadcasted), on this development

31 Such a method is used by some American researchers as a supplemental data source (e. g. McClenon, 2001) but was not practiced at the IGPP to our knowledge—at least not systematically. However, Bender himself was occasionally interested in the assessment of current cases by the Dutch clairvoyant Gerard Croiset as shown by the documentation of his investigations of the “Belméz Faces” (protocol written by Bender, dated June 20, 1972 [IGPP archive, E/23-370]; see the respective chapter in Part III of this volume for more details of these investigations).

32 See Hill (2017) and Mayer (2010, 2013) for a detailed overview of the phenomenon.

33 http://www.ghostvillage.com/links/links_groups.shtml [accessed: October 13, 2016]. However, there is a considerable uncertainty in estimating the number of groups/websites, as a lot of groups are short lived, and some of the provided links are dead. The website has not been updated since 2012.

is obvious. The investigations of this series are tailored to those of TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society),³⁴ one of the older ghost-hunting groups which was established in 1990 by the two plumbers Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson.³⁵ In the first years of the series TAPS personified an extreme group: these “ghost hunters” are absolutely free from any scientific ambitions, emphasize the blue collar milieu of their background, and interpret the nocturnal ghost hunt as kind of a “spiritualist drain cleaning”, in analogy to their plumbing work by day. The “enterprise” TAPS itself personifies all the elements of entertainment and pop culture. TAPS offers fan merchandise (T-shirts, caps, etc.) and workshops in spectacular haunted hotels, and produces its own magazine. A network of ghost-hunting groups, the TAPS family, has been founded and currently consists of 62 US American groups and 14 groups in other, mainly English-speaking, countries.³⁶ The primary proclaimed goal is altruistic and free help for people in (paranormal) need. The network also provides a platform for exchanging information as well as mutual support, and aims to be represented throughout the country by members; implicitly, this probably also includes the wish to gain control of current RSPK cases. Due to their media presence, TAPS represents a model for many newly established groups. However, there are groups which reject this approach, orient themselves more strongly towards scientific methodology or to their understanding of what that means, and are critical of inflationary, and uncontrolled, growth of the ghost-hunting scene. Thus, one finds attempts at demarcation between groups, where the crucial differences might be found in the individual motivation of individual group members which, however, can influence the approach of a whole group.

Within the scene, one can find three basic motives, from which one can deduce three types of investigators: the hobbyists, the serious researchers, and the assistants (Juliano, 2009). *Hobbyists* are mainly interested in the thrill linked to ghost hunting, possibly associated with the wish to confirm their beliefs through direct contact with the “supernatural”. *Researchers* are driven by the motivation to get hard evidence of the existence of the paranormal/ghosts with (pseudo-)scientific methods. The primary objective of *assistants* is to help people concerned by RSPK phenomena. It is not so important for them to get evidence of the existence of the paranormal by practicing ghost hunting. The conviction that paranormal phenomena or “ghosts”, whatever exactly is meant by this, exist is common to all three types. This applies also to those who describe themselves as

34 <http://the-atlantic-paranormal-society.com/> [accessed: October 13, 2016].

35 See Burger (2010) for a depiction of the structure of the *Ghost Hunter* series.

36 <http://tapsfamily.com/> [accessed: October 14, 2016]. Since 2009, the number of members has decreased from 92 to 62 US American and 20 to 14 international groups.

“skeptics” or “debunkers”. The emphasis on scientificity, professionalism, and a skeptical attitude are common strategies of legitimating dealing with the “unexplained”. In addition, a further strategy is to emphasize the technical aspect of the work as well as the down-to-earth character of the group members. The latter is not without consequences for the attitude toward ghosts in general. On the one hand, for many, ghosts obtain a little-questions status of reality because reality TV is permanently providing “evidence” of their existence; on the other, they largely lose their frightening character because they are presented as controllable to some extent if one simply applies the right tools combined with the respective technical skills. Accordingly, some groups are promoting ghost hunting for children because this craft can be educationally valuable.³⁷

Ghost hunting, in the described “pop-cultural” variants, is mainly a North American phenomenon which becomes evident due to the mere fact of the number of active groups but also in a respective mentality that is reflected on their websites. The orientation toward the (ostensible) rationality of high-tech ghost hunting (Potts, 2004) as well as the belief in the technical feasibility and solution of the problems is accompanied by an uncritical belief in ghosts and demons that might appear quite strange from a Western European perspective. Thus, for example, a “demonologist” belongs to the operations unit of TAPS who dispels ghosts, or exorcises demons, in the name of the Lord. He is a firm part of the team, as are the “lead investigators”, the “tech manager”, the “case manager”, the “EVP specialist”, and the “interviewer”.

Great Britain

People in Great Britain are traditionally known to have an above-average affinity to ghosts and hauntings. The specific guide book *The Good Ghost Guide* (Brooks, 1994), for instance, describes over a thousand British hauntings, and the first ghost-hunting groups were established here. The Brits have also their own reality TV series which deals with RSPK investigations, and is similarly popular as the American *Ghost Hunters* series. It is called *Most Haunted*, and aired for the first time in 2002. The structural conceptions of the two series, which belong to the same film genre, differ considerably. In contrast to the *Ghost Hunters* series that is totally geared to the work of TAPS, the investigation team of *Most Haunted* is specially assembled for the production of the episodes. The aspect of entertainment is strongly emphasized by producing the episodes in the style of slightly creepy ghost stories. The “ghost hunt” gains its attraction from the thrill which is expected from the contact with the “otherworldly”. This is amplified with the central role

37 See, for example, <http://kids.ghostvillage.com/parents/ghosthuntingwithkids.shtml> [accessed: October 20, 2016].

of the medium as a “probe” and connection to the ghosts. The concrete statements about the names and the character of the present ghosts are respectively evaluated with regard to historical correspondences, and the results are immediately displayed on the screen. The aspect of scientific evaluation comes increasingly to the fore over the course of the airing of the series by bringing in experienced academic researchers. These parapsychological scientific experts are supposed to represent the skeptical pole of the team, and provide alternative (conventional) explanations of the encountered phenomena, without taking the role of a dull debunker.

Germany

In German television, documentaries on ghost hunting were only occasionally broadcasted until 2009, when the private channel *Das Vierte* adopted the first two seasons of the American series *Ghost Hunters* for a German audience.³⁸ This resulted in a boost to the development of the German ghost-hunting scene, and the number of ghost-hunting groups more than doubled in the following years. In December 2012, about 30 groups were presenting themselves on the Internet (Bartoschek & Waschkau, 2013: 45).³⁹ In 2007, a first ghost-hunter network was established that, however, soon split up due to personal, as well as approach-related, differences.⁴⁰ It was followed up by two other networks. The first was “GeisterNet”, which is still in existence and whose members orient themselves relatively strongly towards the objectives and approach of the American TAPS family, with an emphasis on helping people who have problems with poltergeist phenomena. The second (which no longer exists) was the more skeptical Organisation of Investigation for Anomalistic Phenomena (O.I.A.P.), which adopted an approach which was oriented more towards scientific anomalistics. These two networks symbolized two different approaches that can be found in German ghost-hunting groups in general. However, despite these differences between individual groups, common characteristics can be found; for instance, a clear formal borrowing from English-speaking role models concerning Internet presentation (e. g. design of websites)—reflected by the mere fact that they usually choose English, or anglicized, names for the groups—as well as the methodological focus on the heavy use of technical measurement and recording devices.

38 In 2014, *Das Vierte* ceased broadcasting, and was replaced by the German *Disney Channel* [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Vierte].

39 However, the number has since dropped back, and the peak of the ghost-hunting wave seems to have been passed.

40 Andreas Wehner, co-founder of the Organisation of Investigation for Anomalistic Phenomena (O.I.A.P.), in an e-mail to one of the co-authors [GM] from January 26, 2010.

Overall, it seems that the majority of German ghost hunters have to be assigned to the more skeptical part of the spectrum, referring more strongly to parapsychological models of explanation of RSPK phenomena. Assessing the investigation reports and video documentaries provided on the websites of these groups gives the impression that the *thrill* which is linked with a so-called “Parapsychologische Untersuchung” [parapsychological investigation] plays the most important role. The aim is clearly—predetermined not least by the technical orientation of the investigation method—to detect as many anomalies as possible. Accordingly, an investigation is then considered successful if the investigators were able to “catch” many distinctive, and impressive, phenomena “in the box”, comparable with a butterfly collector who is delighted at the rare and particularly splendid specimens obtained during his hunting trip.

Digression: The Special Case of Hauntings — Theoretical Issues and Methodological Implications

For ghost hunting groups, paranormal phenomena with a place-centered component play a major role.⁴¹ Such investigations are easy to schedule because hauntings are considered to be long lasting. If nothing fundamental happens in relation to the “spirit world” the haunting will continue—according to commonly held beliefs. This particularly applies to apparitions denominated as “noninteractive” manifestations which imperturbably reiterate a specific behavior as if the behavior pattern were recorded on a data carrier. Potts writes:

In one sense, the idea of a ghost as a “recording” partakes of the ancient mystical traditions of spirit of place and earth memory. The Celts believed that the earth remembers everything and that trees especially were repositories of memories and spirits. Other cultures believed that ghosts were lodged in certain substances such as particular stones. Recording ghosts, in a similar fashion, are thought to exist as a form of recording—or memory—imprinted in the stone and other materials of buildings. Yet there is something specifically contemporary about this inflection of mystical tradition. Its pseudoscientific approach marks it as a post-Enlightenment speculation, while the centrality of recording as metaphor places it firmly within the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Historically, ghosts have been conceptualized according to prevailing currents in the culture of the time: in our case, that includes the significance of recording—as technology and metaphor. Hence we have “noninteractive” ghosts that play and replay like video recordings or computer programs (Potts, 2004: 227–228).

41 In Germany, lay research groups preferably investigate cases of hauntings. This is a good thing, because the damage that can be caused by a lack of psychological training is usually limited, since the psychological risks for those affected are generally less in such cases.

Place-centered manifestations of the paranormal as being part of such concepts (of ghosts) always have a connection to the past, to past events (Potts, 2006: 83). For this reason, historical research is among the methodological tools used for the investigation of allegedly haunted places. It is hardly surprising that a “historian” is part of the team in many ghost hunting groups, although this is only rarely an academically trained historian. The historical research is carried out in advance—at the latest during the interview with the people concerned—in order to use the historical information thus gained as an aid to interpretation and communication. However, this brings with it the major methodological problem of a predetermined framework of interpretation: one knows what one is looking for, and everything one finds is fitted into the preformed foil of interpretation.⁴² For many thrill-oriented ghost hunting groups, relevant travel guides and encyclopedic works, in which the most famous haunted places of a country are presented together with the corresponding stories and myths, provide great assistance (e. g. Belanger, 2005).⁴³

Such “ghost travelers” may be contrasted with the *helpers* whose main concern is to make life easier for people affected and harassed by ghosts and poltergeist phenomena. The “animists” among them concentrate primarily on the history of the case, and the historical dimension of the haunted site is of secondary interest at best—depending, for example, on the extent to which knowledge of local historical facts on the part of those affected could influence their patterns of interpretation of the haunted phenomena and the psychosocial dynamics of the system as a whole.

When *helpers* believe in ghosts, things are different. Proponents of the spiritualistic hypothesis will search for the causes of paranormal activity more frequently and more quickly in local-centered factors, so that here too the historical dimension has a high relevance for the investigation. However, the research effort here is in most cases considerably greater than with a “classic” haunted site, since one cannot usually refer to established and handed-down stories that provide a “spook trigger”.

For a psychological-clinical approach to the understanding of poltergeist phenomena, place-centered hauntings represent an uncomfortable (and for some perhaps

42 This is particularly evident in the aforementioned documentary *Mysterious Worlds – America’s Ghost Hunters*, in which the American “ghost expert” Troy Taylor (see <http://www.prairieghosts.com/abtauthor.html>), who has a great influence on the ghost-hunting scene through his many book publications, propagates and demonstrates such an approach.

43 Underwood (1986), too, dedicates four chapters of his *Ghost Hunter’s Guide* to recommended haunted places all over the world and presents a “ghost calendar” in another chapter, which lists data on which ghosts appear in what places. This could be considered a kind of “ghost tourism”, to which the corresponding public excursions of some ghost-hunting groups and specialized travel organizations also belong.

disturbing) provocation, since they do not fit smoothly into the preferred functional model and interpretation of RSPK phenomena and ExE.

The results of the two investigations of “A Remarkable Photographic Anomaly” and the “Castle Hotel” case, which are presented in Part IV of this volume, suggest a place-centered aspect if the reported and documented phenomena are actually genuine anomalies. Indeed, although we can find typical structures characteristic for person-centered RSPK phenomena, the related models are not sufficient. Thus, by superimposing different levels, the symbolic content of the phenomena can no longer be brought so easily into a meaningful connection with the psychodynamic situation of the individuals involved.

Although one can also successfully use the established patterns of interpretation identified in many person-centered RSPK investigations (“focus person”, “affective field”), some details or elements cannot be well integrated into such an understanding. Understandably, this again raises the “old questions” about the ontological status of paranormal phenomena and calls for extended modeling—for example, of the connection between person-centered and location-centered RSPK components. It might make sense in any case not to think about this common differentiation as mutually exclusive alternatives but rather in the form of a continuum: as a form of differentiation between phenomena that are more strongly location-*induced* or more strongly person-*induced*.⁴⁴ And perhaps it would make sense to add a further dimension that takes the structural framework of the case more into account. In such an understanding, “RSPK systems” like those examined would be characterized by a specific—however at the moment not yet reconstructable—interaction between three elements:

- *Factors of place and time* (a locality with a long and partly very special history)
- *Personal factors* (psychical problems, interpretive systems, character traits)
- *Structural factors* (group phenomena, crisis-like framework conditions, but also characteristic structures of communication and interaction).

These three elements or dimensions could be understood as trajectories of a not necessarily causal, but nevertheless statistically “functioning” explanation model of RSPK and perhaps other spontaneous phenomena. In terms of research strategy, it is necessary to determine the extent to which it might be possible to empirically test hypotheses formulated within the framework of such a model in the medium and long term, within the context of further investigations. As more similarities between the initially quite different cases then become apparent, the level of classical individual case studies is gradually left behind in favor of a systematic comparative approach.

44 Cf. Gauld & Cornell (1979: 208–223), Machado (2009: 117–121), and Stokes (1997: 71–72).

Concluding Considerations

It has been shown that the concrete procedure for investigations in the field depends to a large extent on the respective research group—on the basic models or paradigms, the specific research interests, but also the degree of academic training of the involved persons, and the usually associated degree of scientificness of the approach. These factors, in particular, determine the concrete methods used in on-site investigations, including the technical equipment used. However, the various exemplary case studies presented in this volume clearly show that further parameters such as the framework conditions on site (e.g. public knowledge of the events) can strongly influence, or maybe correctly, limit the selection of the investigation methods. The difference between academically trained and untrained investigation groups is determined only superficially by the amount of technical equipment used, for instance in poltergeist investigations—whereby the rule is that lay researchers have a stronger inclination to use various, more or less meaningful, physical measuring instruments. On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that the massive use of technology is primarily the result of specific conceptions about the phenomena, but also due to a lack of knowledge about or reflexive handling of the findings of former RSPK investigations:

When the Society for Psychical Research (S. P. R.) was founded in 1882 in London its purpose was “to examine without prejudice or prepossession and in a scientific spirit those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be inexplicable on any generally recognized hypothesis.” The establishment of the S. P. R. attracted many of Great Britain’s and Europe’s most eminent scholars and scientists who sought to inquire into the scientific and philosophical implications raised by psychical phenomena. They made substantial contributions towards developing new hypotheses and alternative explanations. However, if we are honest, we must admit that despite their having accumulated a vast number of well-researched cases of every type of psychical phenomenon—indicating that such events do in fact occur—the true and detailed nature of these phenomena remains unexplained even after more than 100 years of organized research (Cornell, 2002: 4).

The experienced field researcher Tony Cornell sums up the unsatisfactory situation of the investigation of spontaneous paranormal phenomena with this inventory. The wish to gain certainty or at least a substantial increase in knowledge of “the true and detailed nature of these phenomena” by means of a sophisticated technology-oriented methodology and considerable resources was not fulfilled. Cornell himself was a proponent of the approach of taking the laboratory to the examination site in order to obtain as many “hard” data as possible, which could lead to reasonably reliable and objective findings through mutual verification, on the one hand, and influence the authentic psi-inductive contexts as little as possible, on the other. Together with Howard Wilkinson, he devel-

oped the mobile investigation device SPIDER (Spontaneous Psychophysical Incident Data Electronic Recorder), which made a computer-assisted synchronous recording of a wide variety of measurement data (photos, videos, audio recordings, various physical parameters including electromagnetic waves, temperature fluctuations) at the alleged haunted site possible (Cornell, 2002: *passim*, particularly on pp. 379–380). However, neither the use of SPIDER nor the continuous monitoring of various RSPK-inclined locations yielded a significant gain in knowledge (*ibid.*: 377–395).

It is true that the consideration of biologically or physically based phenomenon-related investigations seems to be especially appropriate for RSPK phenomena that occur repeatedly at one location. This applies, for example, to the use of sensitives as human “measuring probes” or to the attempt to investigate the physical environmental conditions of supposedly “haunted places” following the phenomenon-centered investigations of “haunted places” carried out by Houran et al. (2002) and Wiseman et al. (2003) (e. g., to localize or detect conventional causes for extraordinary perceptual experiences). With both strategies, however, the general question arises as to the scientific knowledge gained by such methods. The use of psychics, or sensitives in general, as “psi detectors” has a long tradition, is still considered a promising strategy by several investigators (especially by ghost hunting groups), and, in fact, has occasionally found positive experimental confirmation (Moss & Schmeidler, 1968). Depending on the objective of the investigator group, issues of the *genuineness* of the phenomena (with the associated thrill) or psychohygienic aspects (termination of the poltergeist phenomena through “redemption” of the entity that allegedly caused it) play a role. However, none of this provides scientifically relevant answers to the question of the ontological nature of RSPK phenomena. In the context of a field research-based single case study, the analysis of various environmental conditions, which in the sense of the experiments by Wiseman et al. (2003) searches for conventional causes for extraordinary experiences, serves only to consider the plausibility of the anomalistic character of the reported phenomena. It, too, is therefore primarily directed at the question of their “genuineness”—and in the event of the failure of an attempt to find a conventional explanation, it does not produce any direct insight into the phenomena themselves. A differentiation here only takes place in the area of conventional explanations for corresponding experiences, but not in the area of anomalous phenomena.

After many years of attempts by parapsychologists to investigate RSPK phenomena in a phenomenon-related way, an indirect, person-oriented and process-related, approach seems to be relatively unspectacular, but ultimately more promising than roving through allegedly haunted ruins armed with various measuring instruments and recording tools, as is practiced by ghost-hunting groups (Alvarado, 1996). Their idea of a possible phys-

ical-technical detection of ghostly apparitions results from a scientifically highly dubious interaction model, but it is convenient for all participants to pretend a misleading “objectivity” of the instrument-based investigation results. Due to the lack of theoretical models of a scientific nature, it is consistently unclear what is being measured at all, so that the explanatory value of the “findings” obtained is also largely close to zero. At best, the residents of the house that has been, according to their experience, haunted for years now finally get to know that it is haunted—because the technically highly equipped investigation team has once again mirrored all their expectations in a technically sophisticated way.

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CRYPTOZOLOGY & CROP CIRCLE RESEARCH

TWO FURTHER FIELDS OF INVESTIGATION AT A GLANCE

Gerhard Mayer & Michael Schetsche

In the following, two further fields of research in anomalistics will be mentioned in which field research-based single case studies can play a significant role from a methodological point of view. The purpose is not to give a sufficient overview of these areas of research but to look at some particularities of anomalistic research from a different angle and, thereby, further complete the picture. Cryptozoology and crop circle research are both areas in which lay researchers in particular are interested;¹ and both have a relatively close connection to RSPK and UFO investigations.

Cryptozoology

Cryptozoology is to be considered as a subdomain of zoology that deals with the scientific study of animal forms whose existence is based only on testimony or circumstantial evidence or on material that has been judged insufficient. Arment (2004: 9) gives the following definition:

What is cryptozoology? In short, it is a targeted-search methodology for zoological discovery. Specifically, it is just one path by which the status of purported new or lost species may be resolved. Practically, it is a lengthy process of collecting and analyzing data to determine which mystery animals may be unknown biological species, and then searching for conclusive physical evidence.

Although there have been and still are controversies about the exact determination of the subject area, which have led to different classification systems (ibid.: 16–18), this is probably not the decisive reason why cryptozoology enjoys a dubious reputation from a scientific perspective or is partially denied recognition as a scientific discipline. The reason for this is rather the fact that the field has been heavily occupied by people who uncritically associate paranormal phenomena, mythical figures, and entities from other “realms of reality” (ghosts, vampires, werewolves, monsters, etc.) with cryptozoology. This has led, for example, to the entry in Wikipedia devaluating it as a pseudo-science:

1 In both fields, “scenes” have developed, which have their own communication platforms and journals and in which lay research plays a major role.

“Cryptozoology is a pseudoscience and subculture [...] Because it does not follow the scientific method, cryptozoology is considered a pseudoscience by the academic world: it is neither a branch of zoology nor folkloristics”²

For the self-conception of a serious scientific cryptozoology it is therefore important to distinguish it from cultural studies (e. g. ethnological studies) and mythical creatures. Although these can be used as stimulating sources (e. g. for finding habitats of potential *cryptids*, as the unknown species are sometimes called), the actual research activity of cryptozoology can clearly be located in zoology/biology. In addition to extensive literature research, if necessary, the methodological procedure includes interviews with eyewitnesses and field investigations with data collection of various types (photo surveillance, footprints, hair samples), each of which requires special analytical procedures. A detailed description of cryptozoological research methodology can be found in Arment (2004: 95–127). An important difference from other sub-sciences of zoology/biology should also be noted: In cryptozoology—comparable with other areas of anomalistics—dealing with forgeries plays a comparatively large role. This concerns both reports of cryptids and emerging film and photographic documents or even material traces and parts of cryptids. The latter was, for instance, the case with a Bigfoot hoax in 2008 by Whitton and Dyer that caused a certain stir in the international press.³ The Bigfoot hoax might be seen as a consequence (and part) of a mainly US-American development that has certain similarities with the ghost-hunting movement (see Bader, Mencken, & Baker, 2010: 100–128). In recent years, a considerable number of Bigfoot groups have formed that go “hunting for Bigfoot” at night, with high-tech equipment and the desire to provide definitive proof of Bigfoot’s existence through audio, photo, and video recordings. The websites of such groups also are structurally similar to those of ghost-hunting groups,⁴ and their activity is an attractive subject for TV documentaries, also astonishingly similar to those about ghost hunting groups with regard to their production style.

2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cryptozoology> (accessed: October 26, 2018). This, however, is not a scientifically based argument, and reflects a problem with academic mainstream science well known in the field of anomalistics (see e. g. Hövelmann, 2015; Mayer & Schetsche, 2016).

3 cf. <https://web.archive.org/web/20110926220325/http://www.wsbtv.com/news/17197939/detail.html> and <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/08/080818-bigfoot-dna.html>.

4 See, for instance, the website of *Oregon Bigfoot* providing a sighting database, photos, videos, sounds, books, DVDs etc. (<http://www.oregonbigfoot.com/about.php> – accessed: July 6, 2017).

Crop Circle Research

Crop circle research deals with the investigation of regular geometric patterns (mostly) in cornfields.⁵ The first reports on circular patterns in grain fields date back to the end of the 16th century. But it was only in the course of the 1980s that a larger public became aware of the phenomenon of patterns soon to be called “crop circles”, when the mass media increasingly reported them (Müller, 2001: 10–52; Thomas, 2002). In 1986, there was a qualitative leap in development as increasingly complex geometric shapes were discovered in fields. According to Müller (p. 16), the first scientific investigation of a crop circle formation was initiated by the British government in 1963; the research team at that time was led by the Australian astrophysicist Robert Randall. Since celestial and light phenomena in the context of the emergence of crop circles had already been reported at this time, a connection to the then virulent UFO topic was quickly established among the public—such an interpretation still exists today, even if it does not dominate.

The decisive questions in the investigation of these crop circles to this day are: Is it possible for humans (a) under the given conditions (time limitation, technical aids, spatial situation) to generate such complex geometric patterns without being detected, and (b) to bend the grain stalks in the way specific to crop circles? For those who consider these questions as not yet conclusively answered in the affirmative, the thus identified “genuine” crop circle phenomena represent anomalies. As already indicated in the last sentence, there are now known to be many fake crop circles, which can clearly be designated as human artefacts because of respective confessions, or due to particular structural characteristics. There is probably no other area in anomalistics where the question of forgeries builds so much of the focus of the examination. It is possible to construct reasonably plausible (conventional) hypotheses for the manifestation of simply shaped crop circles (geo-ecological causes, meteorological causes, etc.). However, skeptical investigation groups principally consider crop circle formation of a higher complexity as inevitably man-made, and thus certain forgeries. This shifts the perspective away from the phenomenon towards the groups of people involved. Accordingly, Hoos only distinguishes between the “scene of crop circle investigators” and the “scene of crop circle makers” and describes the “crop circles as a social event” (Hoos, 2004: 111).

This may well be apt in some respects, but with such a strongly defined position the spectrum of investigative questions is unacceptably reduced from the point of view of anomalistics. For those crop circle researchers who consider the possibility of an anomaly, and for this reason only study the phenomena judged worth investigating at all, the

5 For a concise overview in German see Haselhoff (2015).

extremely unfortunate situation arises in which the phenomenon area is permanently and deliberately “contaminated” with forgeries—by whomever and for whatever motive. The basic problem of a crop circle investigation is therefore generally to check the “genuineness” of the incident. Since it is one of the concerns of some “crop circle skeptics” to deceive the “crop circle anomalists” by creating patterns that appear as “genuine” as possible and thus to prove that their judgements cannot be taken seriously in the critical (“genuine”) cases, a situation of great distrust arises. However, the “scene of crop circle makers” does not only consist of “crop circle skeptics”, but crop circle patterns are also produced by people who are looking for the fun and thrill of a forbidden nighttime action—comparable in some respects to the graffiti artists who spray their pictures on subway trains and house walls during the night hours under the protection of darkness. In addition, false claims of responsibility are conceivable: Someone proclaims his authorship for a particularly successful work, although he or she has nothing to do with the creation. Here, too, different motivations are conceivable. This makes the situation even more confusing for the serious researcher.

The result of an investigation often consists of a plausibility assessment of how likely the phenomena are to be based on an anomaly. In addition to the described problems that a crop circle researcher faces, namely the permanent danger of becoming the victim of forgery activities from the “crop circle makers” camp, he also enjoys advantages over investigators in other areas of anomalistics: The phenomena to be investigated have a relatively long temporal stability. Since the crop circles are thus “almost permanent” anomalies, they can be very well documented and investigated with much “harder” methods than many other anomalies. Therefore, one finds a strong scientific orientation in the investigation methodology. Nevertheless, plausibility considerations are also important here, as it is not always possible to carry out complex analyses and the phenomenology may not be as homogeneous as one would like it to be.

Data collection is methodically relatively simple, although expensive with regard to the resources used (travel expenses, capturing aerial images).⁶ For adequate data evaluation in critical cases, however, external expertise is required to carry out laboratory tests. Although plant and soil investigations are the best way to detect material (physical) anomalies, other indicators are also considered, such as the malfunction of technical equipment, photographic anomalies, strange animal behavior, etc. For this purpose, interviews with potential witnesses are conducted. The formations themselves are also analyzed for formal characteristics (geometry, shape relationships,

6 See the guideline for data gathering and documentation by Müller (2001: 138–139). With the development of quadcopters with cameras, which are relatively inexpensive and easily to handle, the situation has changed regarding aerial images.

etc.) in order to obtain indications about lineages and potential authorship, as the case may be.

In many cases, the worldview component is rather subordinated, since the emergence of these formations (at least of the relatively simple forms) does not necessarily require the thesis of a causative intelligence (meteorite tail thesis and the like—see Müller 2001: 99 and 126–135). However, the more complex and emblematic the forms become, the more virulent the thesis of intelligent causation becomes—be it through simple forgery, be it through an unknown intelligence-led method.⁷

The patterns should be neither too simple nor too complex. If other characteristics (e. g. accuracy, condition of the stems) fit, the probability increases that they are considered genuine, i. e. as anomalies, by plausibility assessments. In the case of very complex geometric forms, explanations which are more easily compatible with natural laws, such as electrically charged, highly energetic air vortices or ball lightning, can no longer be plausibly applied. If one accepts the anomalistic interpretation, one has here to draw on the causation by an intelligent force of unknown nature. Alternatively, a kind of PK explanation is proposed that hypothesizes an interaction of the human mind and natural processes in a paranormal way.

The two areas of anomalistic field research outlined here, cryptozoology and crop circle research, allow some of the basic conditions of anomalistics from the edges of the border areas to be shown. The fact that in both cases we are dealing with *physically* manifested objects, which therefore can be examined with conventional methods of the natural sciences, makes the question of the justification of an *anomalistic* character virulent.

This is most evident in cryptozoology: here one finds the paradoxical situation that it is precisely the reference to mythical figures and entities with unclear ontological status, such as werewolves, monsters, etc., that justifies the designation of this subfield of zoology as a separate field of research—from which “serious cryptozoology” vehemently tries to distance itself. This is because when a herpetologist discovers a new, previously unknown species of frog during his field research, it is a remarkable but nevertheless “normal” process within the scope of his activity. And the fact that marine biologists have recently discovered a large number of hitherto unknown animal species in their inventory of the living environment of the oceans⁸ has not yet made them cryptozoologists. Two significant characteristics of cryptozoology can often be found: an interest in *relatively large* animals, by tendency, or in those that are arranged outside the existing classification

7 Various hypotheses of sources of crop circles are discussed by Thomas (2002: 143–165).

8 <http://www.coml.org/>

system or *considered extinct*. The aspect of the largeness of the creatures searched for gives the lack of a prior detection accompanied by clear physical evidence of their existence an anomalistic character (it is simply reasonable and acceptable that small species of frogs or insects are overlooked, whereas it is hard to imagine, considering today's human pervasion of the earthly habitats, that larger animals should be capable of eluding the human gaze which is supported by the use of multiple technical aids); the same applies for creatures which push the boundaries of the existing classification schemes or are considered long extinct.

With these characteristics, the *predictability* of a discovery plays a decisive role. Another important point is that it is a targeted search with an open outcome, in which the fundamental status of the pursued "phenomena" is unclear, sightings are rare (although not singular), and the existing state of knowledge is unclear and ambiguous. In this point, such investigations resemble RSPK investigations. Due to the extremely unfavorable initial situation in terms of research logic, this area is strongly influenced by lay scientific actors. This applies in a comparable way to crop circle research and—in some aspects—also to RSPK research (ghost-hunting groups).

A further aspect must be added at this point: The materiality of the objects under investigation includes the *forgery possibility*. This has become particularly relevant in crop circle research, as a "crop circle maker" scene has developed.⁹ While RSPK phenomena manifest themselves either as phenomena (apparitions) or often as unspecific effects on physical objects (e. g. measuring instruments, data carriers, but also objects that move in an allegedly unexplainable manner)—effects that are highly ambiguous and/or elusive—the crop circles are semi-permanent objects that are intersubjectively perceivable over a longer period, and have a material status that can be well investigated. The existence of crop circles as such is not at issue, but the explanation for their cause. At the end of an investigation there can only be a consideration of the plausibility of competing interpretation models on the basis of all available data—in the ideal case with one of the following results: forgery, (un)common orthodox explanation, or anomaly. Such a situation only arises in the rarest of cases in RSPK investigations—such as in the "Remarkable Photographic Anomaly" case, in which the existence of an exceptional extra on a picture likewise was not at issue, and the case of the "Bélmez faces", both presented in this volume. Often enough, the result will be of a forth kind: The case must remain undecided due to unclear and insufficient data.

9 Because the "crop circle makers" do not usually sign their works, i. e. indicate their authorship, the designation "crop circle forgers" would be more apt. To some extent, such artificially produced pseudo-anomalies can be found in the UFO scene as well.

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UFO RESEARCH

Andreas Anton

UFOs – Definition and Classification

Reports of strange air phenomena have astonished human beings for centuries and have been interpreted as *UFOs* (unidentified flying objects) in the sense of alien spaceships since at least the middle of the 20th century. Because of the large number of events that have been linked to the UFO theme since then, and the intensive social and cultural reception of the subject and accompanying scientific and social controversies, the UFO topic plays an important role within today's anomalistic research. The keyword "UFO phenomenon" includes a broad spectrum of human experiences, ranging from simple sightings of unusual lights in the sky to complex, extraordinary experiences with unknown beings and objects. The term "UFO" was first used by the Air Technical Intelligence Center of the US Air Force in the early 1950s. In its initial definition, an UFO was "any airborne object which by performance, aerodynamic characteristics, or unusual features, does not conform to any presently known aircraft or missile type, or which cannot be positively identified as a familiar object" (Air Force Regulation 200-2). With this definition, military logic was at the forefront: it was mainly about the detection of enemy aircraft. A scientifically oriented definition, which is still common today, comes from astronomer Josef Allen Hynek:

We can define the UFO simply as the reported perception of an object or light seen in the sky or upon the land, the appearance, trajectory, and general dynamic and luminescent behavior of which do not suggest a logical, conventional explanation and which is not only mystifying to the original percipients but remains unidentified after close scrutiny of all available evidence by persons who are technically capable of making a common sense identification, if one is possible. (Hynek, 1972: 26)

In some cases, the witnesses of UFO sightings also report a closer contact with the unknown objects or even with their "pilots". These specific cases are called *contact experiences*. As in the case of "pure" UFO sightings, these are *spontaneous phenomena*, which are abruptly occurring, elusive, and non-reproducible events. These characteristics imply significant methodical and methodological problems for the scientific exploration of UFO phenomena. In order to specify and classify individual UFO experiences phenomenologically, different classification systems have been developed. Most of these case classifications allow classification of the type of visual objects or the type of experience. The most common use is the classification by Hynek (1972), which subdivides

UFO observations into *Nocturnal Lights* (NL), *Daylight Discs* (DD), and *Radar/Visual Cases* (RV). Contact experiences are differentiated into *Close Encounters of the First Kind* (UFO sightings at a short distance), the *Second Kind* (physical interactions of UFOs with the environment) and the *Third Kind* (UFO encounters in which an animated creature is present). In addition to Hynek's classification, the French astronomer Jacques Vallée (1990) developed a system for the registration of UFO cases in which factors such as flight behavior, possible anomalies, and effects of UFOs on the witnesses are considered in detail.

Other classification systems differentiate the results of UFO investigations. The most common categorization in this context was developed by astronomer Allan Hendry (1979). Hendry subdivided clarified UFO cases into the categories *IFOs* (identified flying objects), *Hoax*, *Fantasy* (psychologically explainable), and *Exceptions* (cases with insufficient data and unreliable witnesses). Unexplained experiences are ordered according to their credibility and strangeness into the categories *Near IFO* (low strangeness, a conventional explanation is very likely), *Problematic UFO* (essential strangeness, but conventional explanations cannot be completely excluded), *Good UFO* (several strange features, minimal conventional explainability), and *Best UFO* (high strangeness and credibility, conventional explanations can be excluded).

Some Historical Notes

At the end of the 19th and early 20th century there were some cultural precursors of the modern UFO phenomenon. This includes the period of "mysterious airships", which occurred mainly in the USA towards the end of the 19th century (Keel, 1996). A few years before flight pioneers tested the first aircraft, there were some reports of mechanical, wooden, and metal flying structures and contacts to their mostly human crew. Numerous articles appeared in local newspapers, whereupon more witnesses emerged, causing a large increase in messages within a larger area and period of time. Such clusters of sightings and corresponding media reports are called *sighting waves* or *UFO series*. The best-known of the mystery airship waves began in California in 1896. Afterwards, reports and accounts of similar airships came from other areas, generally moving eastward across the country. Historian Mike Dash described the 1896–1897 series of airship sightings, writing: "Not only were [the mystery airships] bigger, faster and more robust than anything then produced by the aviators of the world; they seemed to be able to fly enormous distances, and some were equipped with giant wings." (2000: 129) Elsewhere he writes:

The 1896–1897 airship wave is probably the best investigated of all historical anomalies. The files of almost 1,500 newspapers from across the United States have been combed for reports, an astonishing feat of research. The general conclusion

of investigators was that a considerable number of the simpler sightings were mis-identification of planets and stars, and a large number of the more complex the result of hoaxes and practical jokes. A small residuum remains perplexing. (ibid.: 465)

Other predecessors of the modern UFO phenomenon are the reports about the so-called *Foo Fighters*, which were made during the Second World War. From 1944, allied military pilots reported on observations of strange light phenomena in the air above Europe. In the few official documents, the Foo Fighters are described as fawn to basketball-sized, brightly shining or metallic shining objects of white, yellowish or reddish color. Many witnesses reported concordantly about the surprising and unpredictable appearance and disappearance of these flying objects. In some cases the objects were said to have performed flight maneuvers that were unusual and inexplicable for the technical possibilities of aircrafts at that time. The US Air Force regarded these mysterious flying objects as a secret weapon of the Germans at first, but German pilots also saw the phenomena and could not explain them (Lucanio & Coville, 2002: 16–17). Despite some attempts, there is still no definitive explanation of the sightings.

Similar things happened shortly afterwards in Scandinavia: From 1946 onwards there were an increasing number of sightings of so called *Ghost Rockets* in Sweden and nearby countries. The Ghost Rockets were described by the witnesses as fast-flying rocket- or missile-shaped objects, with or without wings, that were visible for mere seconds. Several hundred sightings had been reported by the end of the year 1946. Two hundred sightings were even verified with radar returns. One hypothesis was that the Ghost Rockets could have been German or Russian rocket tests. However, this has never been confirmed.

The mysterious airships, Foo Fighters, and Ghost Rockets were later interpreted as a part of the UFO phenomenon, which began in 1947.

The Beginning of the Modern UFO Phenomenon

On June 24, 1947, US-American businessman and aviator Kenneth Arnold saw nine strange flat objects flying near Mount Rainier on a flight south-east of Seattle. According to Arnold, these flying objects “flew like they take a saucer and throw it across the water” (Sagan, 1997: 69). He estimated the speed of the flying objects at 1200 miles per hour. Based on the descriptions of Arnold, the term *Flying Saucers* entered into the media coverage of UFOs. Arnold’s sighting can be described as the birth of the modern UFO phenomenon. In contrast to its precursors, the modern UFO phenomenon is dominated by an aerospace interpretation of the experiences. UFOs were now considered as potential *alien spaceships*.

Arnold’s experience has been published throughout the USA. Afterwards, numerous other UFO observers and country-wide newspaper and magazine articles appeared. This

was the first modern UFO sighting wave in the USA. The Arnold case was investigated by the US Air Force, which stated a mirage as a possible explanation for the sighting. In the same year, a phase of military interest (mainly the US Air Force) in the UFO phenomenon began. From 1947 to 1969 several official investigations were carried out on UFOs: first the projects *Sign* (1947–1949) and *Grudge* (1949–1951), and finally the *Project Blue Book*, in which data on UFOs were collected and analyzed for more than 17 years. The aim of all these projects was to find out whether UFOs could pose a threat to US national security (e.g. with regard to secret weapons of the Soviet Union). For this purpose, as many of the objects as possible should be clearly identified. UFO monitoring stations were set up, and Air Force personnel were instructed to provide information and materials related to UFOs to specific military units. On the basis of their collected cases, the US Air Force ordered independent analyses of the UFO phenomenon. At the same time, the first groups of private researchers with interest in the UFO phenomenon were found in the USA and Europe.

Overall, the history of the UFO phenomenon is closely linked to military and intelligence interests—and cannot be reconstructed without these references. In the meantime, it became known that not only the USA, but a large number of other Western states (e.g. Canada, Great Britain, France, Sweden and Brazil) gathered data on UFO sightings in military and intelligence agencies and examined whether these could constitute a military security risk. In connection with these investigations, numerous official documents and files were prepared, which became public in various ways and were the subject of controversy (and also conspiracy theories) regarding their content as well as the role of state authorities with respect to the UFO phenomenon (Alexander, 2011). In recent years, in some countries, the complete file material for UFOs has been published and partly made available on the Internet.

Scientific Exploration of UFO Sightings

The first state-run scientific studies of the UFO phenomenon were carried out in the 1950s. These included the *Robertson Panel* in 1953 (named after its leader, the physicist Howard Percy Robertson), the study of the Battelle Memorial Institute from 1952 to 1955 (both used the data collected in Project Blue Book) and the *Flying Saucer Working Party* from 1950 to 1951 in Great Britain. The task of the Robertson Panel, formed by the CIA and the US Air Force, was to assess the threat to national security with respect to the sightings of UFOs and to elaborate procedural recommendations on UFOs. The panel came to the conclusion that there was no evidence of a direct threat to national security in the objects sighted. Furthermore, the general public interest in UFOs should be reduced by a targeted PR campaign of “debunking” and denigration (Durant, 1953). The

Battelle Memorial Institute Report (also known as Project Blue Book – Special Report No. 14) is the result of the cooperation between Project Blue Book and the Battelle Memorial Institute. From 1952 to 1954, around 3000 UFO sightings were categorized and analyzed by scientists of the Battelle Memorial Institute. An interesting statistical finding of the study was that, contrary to expectations, the percentage of unexplained cases increased with the reliability of information about a sighting. In the highest quality category “excellent”, 35% of the cases remained unexplained, compared to 18% in the category of the poorest cases. Despite these statistical conspicuities, the US Air Force saw the report as a confirmation of its official assessment that the UFO phenomenon can basically be explained conventionally. US Air Force officer Edward J. Ruppelt, who was the director of Project Blue Book at that time, criticized this assessment and claimed that the report had been misused for political purposes without addressing the content (Ruppelt, 1956). The Flying Saucer Working Party was the first official institution for the scientific exploration of UFOs in Great Britain. The department was affiliated to the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (MoD), and composed of staff from the intelligence services, the Ministry of Aviation, the admiralty, and the Ministry of Defence. The occasion was an increasing number of UFO reports in the UK and the opinion of the Ministry of Defence Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Henry Tizard, that UFO reports should not be dismissed out of hand without some serious study. The group investigated several hundred UFO reports and concluded that it is impossible to scientifically confirm or refute extraterrestrial aircraft as a cause for UFO sightings. Most of the sightings could be explained by conventional causes. The report ended: “We consider that no progress will be made by attempting further investigation of uncoordinated and subjective evidence, and that positive results could only be obtained by organizing throughout the country, or the world continuous observation of the skies by a coordinated network of visual observers, equipped with photographic apparatus, and supplemented by a network of radar stations and sound locators. We should regard this, on the evidence so far available, as a singularly profitless enterprise. We accordingly recommend very strongly that no further investigation of reported mysterious aerial phenomena be undertaken, unless and until some material evidence becomes available.” (MoD, 1951: 4)

The most comprehensive study on the UFO theme so far is the so-called *Condon Report*, which was concerned with a scientific evaluation of the UFO cases from the Sign, Grudge and Blue Book projects. From 1966 to 1968, a research team headed by the quantum physicist Edward U. Condon investigated the UFO phenomenon at the University of Colorado. In the nearly 1,000-page report drawn up by the US Air Force, 37 project staff members examined various facets of the UFO phenomenon and relevant scientific foundations. In this context, 59 UFO cases were investigated more intensively. Although a conventional cause could not be found in all cases, the project leader concluded in his

summary that UFOs are not a threat to national security and that no scientific findings can be expected from studying UFO cases further. The report states: “The history of the past 21 years has repeatedly led Air Force officers to the conclusion that none of the things seen, or thought to have been seen, which pass by the name of UFO reports, constituted any hazard or threat to national security. [...] We know of no reason to question the finding of the Air Force that the whole class of UFO reports so far considered does not pose a defense problem.” (Condon, 1968: 7) At another point of the report: “Our general conclusion is that nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge. Careful consideration of the record as it is available to us leads us to conclude that further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby.” (ibid.: 2) After this, the US Air Force launched Project Blue Book and, according to what is publicly known, did not carry out any further investigations into the UFO phenomenon. Critics argued that the summary made by Condon is in massive contradiction to the investigated UFO cases in the report. The physicist Peter A. Sturrock, Emeritus Professor of the Center for Space Science and Astrophysics in Stanford, writes with respect to the Condon report: “The analysis of evidence by categories shows that there are substantial and significant differences between the findings of the project staff and those that the director attributes to the project.” (Sturrock, 1987: 75) Allen Hynek also harshly criticized the summary of the Condon report. He wrote:

The Condon Report settled nothing. However, carefully read, the report constitutes about as good an argument for the study of the UFO phenomenon as could have been made in a short time, and by a group of specialists in their individual disciplines having no prior knowledge of the subject. (Hynek, 1972: 243)

With the founding of the first private UFO research groups, such as the *Aerial Phenomena Research Organization* (APRO) in 1952 and the *National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena* (NICAP) in 1956 in the USA or the *British UFO Research Association* (BUFORA), the investigation of the UFO phenomenon outside state (or military) influence began. These private research teams set up their own hotlines for UFO observations and contact experiences, and conducted individual case studies on the UFO phenomenon. Various private UFO research groups were also set up in Germany: the *Deutsche UFO/IFO Studiengesellschaft* (DUIST) in 1956, the *Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des UFO-Phänomens* (GEP) in 1972, the *Mutual UFO Network – Central European Section* (MUFON-CES) in 1974, the *Centrales Erforschungsnetz außergewöhnlicher Himmelsphänomene* in 1976, and the *Deutschsprachige Gesellschaft für UFO-Forschung* (DEGUFO) in 1993. Except for DUIST, which was dissolved in 1988, all the groups are still active today.

Research Methods

Object-Oriented Exploration of UFO Cases: The focus of object-oriented UFO research is on observed and device-detected unknown aerial phenomena. The main goals of this research are a typologization of unexplained UFO cases with their specific characteristics as well as the collection and examination of hypotheses for possible causes. Further questions focus on whether there is clear evidence for UFO cases in which a completely new phenomenon or even unknown intelligent actors have to be assumed as a cause. The basic investigation method of object-centric research is the *individual case study*. Within the context of the retrospective processing of spontaneous observations of UFOs, the testimonies of the witnesses are analyzed and, if possible, secondary data are obtained (properties of the viewing location, weather conditions, astronomical data, overflights of aircraft and spacecraft, etc.). Various methods of witness questioning are used, such as written interviews, the use of a standardized questionnaire for UFO witnesses, or exploratory interviews conducted in person and at the place of observation. In addition, methods of trace tracing are used: for example, taking soil samples and carrying out measurements of radioactivity or electromagnetic fields on site. Other important methods include the analysis of photo and video material to identify possible causes of UFO sightings. On the basis of these investigations, hypotheses can then be developed to explain a case. In this way, cases are reduced to explainable phenomena (IFOs) if possible, and unexplained cases are separated. Both types of results are documented together with the collected data and the investigator's approach. These methods reflect the attempt to capture the UFO experience as accurately and in a manner as structured as possible, and to compare it with material from other cases.

In addition to individual case studies, object-oriented research also includes systematic technical methods of capturing unknown celestial objects, for example, by means of camera setups with automatic recording of celestial segments. To date, such projects have only been carried out on a selective basis, but they have the potential to provide information that is independent of witness reports. The aim of such projects is to register aerial phenomena of unexplained origin under controlled reception conditions. If this is successful, structural differences between "measured UFOs" and "reported UFOs" or physical interactions of UFOs with the material environment can be investigated. Another investigation method of object-centered UFO research is the establishment of case collections—ideally with homogeneous documentation structure and depth of detail. Such case collections can be used, for example, to search for consistent patterns in unresolved UFO cases. Numerous such case collections now exist; however, they vary in documentation quality and are therefore only partially comparable or suitable for scientific analysis. The development of typologies and hypotheses for unexplained

cases are still extremely difficult tasks due to the heterogeneous starting material and are controversial.

Since the field of UFO research is currently dominated by lay scientists, there is sometimes a certain degree of methodological naivety. In most cases, this remains inconsequential, but can lead to distortions and misjudgments, especially in complex and interesting cases. However, there have been increasing attempts in recent years to standardize the research methodology and orientate it towards sociological and psychological standards. For example, Ickinger (2006) proposed a model for investigating UFO cases that consists of three pillars: data collection, data evaluation and documentation.

Elements of Data Collection

- Witness statements (questionnaire, interview, local inspection of the site)
- Photos and films (photographic and film material, comparative images, camera specifications)
- Instrumental registration (characteristics of technical devices that play a role in the context of the screening, e. g. typical artifacts, susceptibility to errors, etc.)
- Spraying, residues (documentation, samples, laboratory tests)
- Interactions (e. g. influence of technical devices)
- General research (astronomical and meteorological data, air traffic, etc.)

Data Evaluation

- Testimonies (reliability, credibility, stringency)
- Photos and films (fraud, photographic effects, conventional, misinterpreted stimuli such as birds, insects, lens reflections, etc.)
- Instrumental registration (source of errors, error interpretation)
- Interactions (correlation/causality?)
- Evaluation (IFO, UFO, strangeness, comparison cases, etc.)

Documentation

- Case file (documents for case research, correspondence, photos, drawings, etc.)
- Case report (overview, key data, classification)
- Data protection (safeguarding or, if necessary, anonymizing of personal data)
- Case database (analytical processing, statistics, analysis, data exchange)
- Case analysis (theory development, witness profiles, etc.)

Subject-Oriented Exploration of UFO Cases: In subject-oriented UFO research, the UFO observers and their experiences are the focus of research interest. Typical in this context are questions about the phenomenological structure of perceptions, about temporal, spa-

tial, and cultural patterns in the distribution of UFO sightings, about connections with other extraordinary experiences, or also about psychometric differences between people with UFO experiences and the average population. In addition, the way a society handles the UFO phenomenon, communication via UFOs, cultural differences in attitudes to the UFO phenomenon, UFO-related belief systems, and the role of state, media, and scientific institutions, as well as fictional literature and films in connection with UFOs, are research questions of subject-oriented UFO research. For the latter questions, however, the term “subject-oriented” is misleading: in the broadest sense, these are cultural studies research approaches that attempt to reconstruct the UFO phenomenon on a purely epistemological level (Dean, 1998). Investigations in this context are oriented towards psychological, sociological, or ethnological research methods and predominantly follow the dominant paradigms in these disciplines. Psychological tests and perceptual psychological studies have been carried out, statistical analyses of the distribution of UFO experiences have been conducted, and systematic comparisons have been made between various aspects of the UFO phenomenon and fiction from books, films, and television. Subject-oriented and cultural studies research of the UFO phenomenon often takes place in the traditional academic (university) context, while object-oriented approaches are still pursued primarily by private (lay) researchers.

Exemplary Case Study: The Hessdalen Lights

Among the few scientific projects that, after the Condon study, were dedicated to an object-oriented empirical investigation of the UFO phenomenon are the analyses of strange light phenomena observed by numerous witnesses in the Hessdalen area (a small valley in central Norway) from the early 1980s onwards. Believing the corresponding reports, the light phenomena emerge under different weather conditions, have different shapes and colors, can float motionlessly in the air, but can also accelerate to high speeds. They have been seen high in the sky but also close to the ground, sometimes appearing only for a few seconds, but sometimes for more than an hour. The systematic investigation of the phenomena began in 1983 in the context of *Project Hessdalen*. The aim of the study, which was supported by the Physical Institute of the University of Oslo, was to record the phenomena with the help of technical equipment in order to learn more about their nature. Photographic cameras, infrared devices, magnetometers, seismographs, and other technical equipment were used for observation and recording. In a first observation phase (21 January to 26 February 1984), a total of 53 objects which could not be clearly identified were sighted and technically registered with the aid of the devices used (Ailleris, 2011). In the following years, further investigations of the phenomena (*New Project Hessdalen*) took place. In cooperation with Østfold University,

a permanent, automatic measuring station was set up for the registration and recording of the light phenomena, the so-called *Hessdalen Automatic Measurement Station*. In addition, a cooperation project between Østfold University and the Institute for Radio Astronomy in Bologna (*Project EMBLA*, 1999–2004) attempted to reproduce the results of Project Hessdalen with the aid of modern measuring instruments and to gain further insights into the phenomena. Again, some previously unidentified atmospheric light effects could be documented (Teodorani, 2004). The possible explanations that have been discussed range from ball lighting, plasma phenomena, fraud, and car or aircraft headlights to an extraterrestrial origin of the lights. To date, no definitive explanation for the Hessdalen phenomena has been found.

Empirical Findings

Since Kenneth Arnold's historic UFO sighting in 1947, UFOs have become a subject of public perception and a challenge for science. If one tries to summarize the few academic studies that focus on the physical reality and nature of UFOs (object-oriented UFO research), it is clear that there are no conclusive explanations for UFO phenomena so far. One thing that is certain, however, is that observations are made (nearly daily) all over the world in the sky or on the ground, observations that cannot be explained by the eyewitnesses either initially or permanently with the help of conventional interpretation schemes and are therefore often labelled as "UFO". Experience has shown that the majority of these observations can be explained by erroneously interpreted stimuli. Most of these are astronomical objects (stars, planets, comets, etc.), airplanes or satellites, various rare natural phenomena such as bizarre cloud formations, northern lights, etc., as well as disco, car, and aircraft spotlights or flocks of birds. When filming or photographing UFOs, all kinds of technical defects, lens reflections, or light reflections can lead to misinterpretations. In addition, there are deliberate deceptions or fakes of photographic and film material (Hendry, 1979).

However, there is still a certain percentage of UFO sighting cases that cannot be explained in a conventional way, even after detailed investigations. These cases are at the core of the anomalistic UFO phenomenon. Estimates of the proportion of unexplained UFO sightings vary widely and depend on the quality of appropriate case studies. Overall, it is unlikely to account for more than 5% of reported cases. Statistical analyses of unexplained UFO sightings reveal some similar characteristics of the observed phenomena, but also show a high degree of heterogeneity. So far, there are no clear empirical findings on the causes of unexplained UFO sightings and it has to be assumed that there are multi-causal phenomena behind them, for which several conventional but also non-conventional causes can be considered as explanations.

The results of investigations that focus on the question of common features of UFO observers (subject-oriented UFO research) are clearer. Among other things, sociodemographic, psychological, and ideological variables are of interest here. In addition, the significance of culturally conveyed interpretations of UFO sightings is interesting. It can be seen that details of UFO experiences are verifiably influenced by cultural symbols and ideas (e.g. from science fiction). The suspicion that people with UFO sighting experiences have special social or (pathological) psychological characteristics is not plausible in view of the diversity of the reported observations and experiences, but it is still a common statement in public and scientific discourse. Empirical studies of this question have so far provided no reliable indications that people with UFO sightings differ significantly from the rest of the population. In this context, it is important to differentiate between UFO viewers and UFO reports. Representative surveys have shown that only a small number of people with UFO viewing experience actually report this (Wunder, 2006). One reason for the high proportion of unreported UFO sightings could be the fear of social stigma. Since the UFO phenomenon is often associated with an irrational, dubious, unbelievable, or ridiculous character in public perception, it is socially risky to report the sighting of a UFO. If the experience is reported, this often happens in a kind of cautious mode of communication with the aim of underpinning the normality status of the witness and the credibility of the report.

Theoretical Explanations

Some scientists who are skeptical about the UFO phenomenon assume that all UFO sightings can be explained in a conventional way. According to the opinion of the sceptics, those cases that have not yet been clarified could be explained by misinterpretations of various conventional stimuli, hallucinations, secret military projects, deliberate fraud, etc. On the other hand, there is the notion that the reported and partly technically documented characteristics of UFOs (at least in some cases) could lead to anomalous phenomena for which no scientific explanations are yet available. In this context, a distinction can be made between theses which suspect previously unknown natural phenomena (*weak UFO anomaly principle*) behind unexplained UFO phenomena, and assumptions about the construction and control of UFOs by unknown intelligences such as extraterrestrials, time travelers or dimensional travelers (*strong UFO anomaly principle*) (Anton & Ammon, 2015). The latter are usually rejected due to a lack of clear evidence and speculative assumptions in the scientific community. In particular, in connection with the so-called *Extraterrestrial Hypothesis* (ETH), many scientists doubt the technical feasibility of interstellar travel or underline the improbability of the emergence of intelligent life outside the earth. Representatives of a more open position, on the other hand, reject

such a priori exclusions and demand that the thesis that UFOs could be alien spacecraft should continue to be openly discussed (Anton, 2013).

Difficulties in Scientific Exploration of UFOs

Prior to any scientific investigation, the object of research should be defined as clearly as possible. The problem with the common definitions of the term “UFO”, however, is that they are *negative* definitions. That means they define what UFOs are *not*. UFOs thus form a residual category for unexplained observations of phenomena that could have multiple causes. This makes it difficult to formulate clear and verifiable hypotheses. However, such a negative definition seems currently unavoidable due to the diversity of observed phenomena and the lack of reliable knowledge about UFOs.

In science, phenomena are usually only considered to have been proven when they can be observed or reproduced several times under controlled conditions. The fact that UFO sightings are spontaneous phenomena makes them an extremely difficult scientific research subject. This is undoubtedly one of the most important reasons why the question of the possible objective reality behind the UFO sightings described by witnesses has so far only rarely been investigated in the context of academic research. Instead, UFO research is nowadays mainly carried out by groups of private researchers. These groups have very different approaches and objectives. Although some organizations are oriented towards scientific standards in their work, the problem remains that amateur scientific research (due to the lack of financial and human resources) can only insufficiently investigate such challenging phenomena as UFOs.

From the point of view of sociology of science, UFOs are a classic anomaly, i. e. a more or less undesirable deviation from the pool of generally accepted scientific knowledge. The defensive reflex of science against anomalous phenomena results from its destabilizing character for paradigmatic scientific thought structures. Anomalies bring with them uncertainty and are therefore, often without further investigation, a priori banned into the realm of irrational, ridiculous, or simply untrue ideas. If we follow the mathematician Kurt Gödel, any sufficiently powerful formal system will not be able to prove its own consistency or lack of contradiction. This also applies in principle to scientific models and theories: they are based on assumptions that are not accessible for critical (self-) verification. These tacit premises define a (supposedly) consistent framework of what is scientifically acceptable or communicable and what, on the other hand, falls out of this framework as an “anomaly”. The status “anomaly” has nothing to do with the “objective reality” of the phenomenon, but is merely the result of an attribution process. However, such attributions may change over time: The history of science is full of former “anomalies” that could later be integrated into the corpus of recognized scientific knowledge (e. g.

meteorites or so-called freak waves). According to the British astrophysicist Peter A. Sturrock, scientific anomalies can be divided into three different types:

An “OK Anomaly” is one that has been discovered by an established scientist, preferably using expensive equipment, and which appears to be an anomaly that scientists can cope with. A “Not-OK Anomaly” is one that is not obviously resolvable and presents an unwelcome challenge to established scientists, possibly (but not necessarily) because it has been discovered by a non-scientist. A “Sleeping Anomaly” is one that has not yet been recognized as an anomaly. (Sturrock, 2007: 242)

Due to their characteristics, Not-OK Anomalies represent massive deviations from the canon of accepted scientific knowledge, which is why, in many cases, they are not taken seriously by science. UFOs can be described as such Not-OK Anomalies, since they cannot be conclusively explained with valid scientific theories and sometimes have phenomenological properties that seem to be incompatible with our current scientific view of the world.

There are numerous eyewitness accounts of UFOs that demonstrate speeds and maneuverability not achievable by human aircraft. They suddenly emerge and disappear, they create supposedly mysterious light effects (so-called “solid lights”) and they seem to show reactions to human action that give the impression that they are under the control of some kind of intelligence (Kean, 2010).

Another reason for scientific ignorance towards the UFO theme seems to be the rejection of the interpretation that regards UFOs as alien spaceships. Scientists (especially in the field of astrosiences) who regard a visit of extraterrestrials to Earth as completely impossible or at least highly improbable consider a closer examination of the UFO question to be absurd and unnecessary, as long as they equate the phenomenon (which happens regularly) with this special interpretation. In this context, two main arguments are put forward: the unlikely emergence of intelligent life in space and the impossibility of bridging interstellar distances. However, the following must be said: The discoveries of astrophysics, astronomy and astrobiology in the last two decades show that there are extrasolar, sometimes even Earth-like planets in our galaxy and that life is possible even under extreme conditions. Against this backdrop, it seems likely today that Earth is not the only planet with life, and that mankind may not be the only intelligent species in the universe. Furthermore, based on our present state of knowledge, we simply cannot know what technical possibilities a potential alien civilization might have. Nevertheless, technologies are already imaginable today which, if feasible, would force a complete reassessment of the possibility of interstellar travel. In summary, the possibility of an earlier, present, or future visit of extraterrestrials to Earth cannot be ruled out at the present state of scientific knowledge. In particular, there seem to be no commonly accepted scientific principles that would exclude the bridging of interstellar distances by technical means in general. Against this background, it is

astonishing that some scientists argue so persistently against the UFO-ET hypothesis and also against a scientific investigation of the UFO topic. Thus, in addition to the arguments produced within the scientific discourse against the UFO-ET hypothesis, there appear to be grounds for rejecting the UFO theme, which must be sought in other contexts. The political scientists Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall assume that there is a *politically* motivated taboo on the UFO topic, which results from the fear that UFOs in the sense of an extraterrestrial presence could delegitimize existing political systems and the associated anthropocentric worldview. Wendt and Duvall write:

The UFO compels decision because it exceeds modern governmentality, but we argue that the decision cannot be made. The reason is that modern decision presupposes anthropocentrism, which is threatened metaphysically by the possibility that UFOs might be ETs. As such, genuine UFO ignorance cannot be acknowledged without calling modern sovereignty itself into question. This puts the problem of normalizing the UFO back onto governmentality, where it can be ‘known’ only without trying to find out what it is—through a taboo. The UFO, in short, is a previously unacknowledged site of contestation in an ongoing historical project to constitute sovereignty in anthropocentric terms. Importantly, our argument here is structural rather than agentic. We are not saying the authorities are hiding the Truth about UFOs, much less that it is ET. We are saying they cannot ask the question. (Wendt & Duvall, 2008: 612).

There is no need to share this thesis to realize that there is a public discrediting of the UFO phenomenon, which is reflected not only in the rejection of the topic by the sciences and a tendentious reporting in the mass media, which often ridicules the topic, but also in the frequent pathologization of UFO witnesses and their reports. My thesis is that, in addition to the scientific reservations about the subject, there is also a *social aversion* to the UFO-ET hypothesis, which is based on anthropologically deeply rooted collective fears, fed by different but interacting sources:

The Fear of Physical Destruction: If an extraterrestrial civilization today is able to build spaceships and thus bridge interstellar distances, their technology must inevitably be far superior to human technology. If this technological superiority goes hand in hand with hostile intentions, the danger of physical threat, if not the complete destruction of humanity, becomes evident. In this context, the memories of war and annihilation stored in collective human memory are projected as fears into the future and onto hypothetical non-human strangers.

The Fear of Cultural Destruction: If UFOs turn out to be alien spaceships, it would be an *asymmetric cultural contact* with their builders or inmates. As the history of mankind has shown in numerous examples, such contact between cultures of different levels of development has always had a detrimental effect on the “inferior” culture and often even

meant its complete end. The destruction of the inferior culture was in many cases not the result of evil motives and military superiority of the “conquerors”, but rather the consequence of the mass psychological impact of the confrontation with a foreign culture.

The Fear of Another Ideological Shock: In the course of scientific progress and increasing rationalization, mankind has been confronted with a whole series of fundamental shifts in its self-perception and worldviews, which have proved to be “ideological shocks”, destroying fundamental collective worldviews and thus leading to a high degree of uncertainty. Sigmund Freud referred in this context to three particularly serious “collective offenses” of the human race: the Copernican turn, Darwinism, and the psychological realization that man is not “master in his own house” (Freud 1969: 283–284). Contact with a technically superior alien civilization would undoubtedly add another, perhaps even the most serious, to these narcissistic offenses. The knowledge of being technically “retarded” and the collapse of cultural self-esteem are, psychologically speaking, only a step away from each other.

The Fear of Losing Control and Sovereignty: Human domination and sovereignty on Earth, as well as the use and exploitation of natural resources, are based not only on man’s technical possibilities, but above all on the idea of man’s special position in the cosmos. This anthropocentrism also implies that only *man himself* has the ability, technical means, and power to direct his further development. The presence of an extraterrestrial intelligence would radically question this anthropocentric view of the world. Mankind would have been thrown from the throne. Whether and to what extent mankind has its destiny in its own hands would become an open question through the presence of extraterrestrial intelligence.

In summary, it can be said that a significant part of the scientific and social marginalization of the UFO theme is based on aspects closely related to the interpretation that UFOs could be spacecraft of extraterrestrial intelligences. It would therefore require a greater separation of the still closely related subject areas “UFOs” and “extraterrestrials” in the public discourse or in the public perception, in order to make UFOs an accepted and serious scientific object of investigation.

Conclusion

The legitimacy of the demand for professional, open, systematic scientific research into the UFO phenomenon is based primarily on three sources:

- A variety of reports of UFO sightings from witnesses who have no apparent reason to be considered untrustworthy a priori, including some high-ranking military, pilots, and government officials (Kean, 2010)

- The still remaining residual of unexplained UFO sightings (Ailleris, 2011)
- The numerous references to physical traces of UFOs, e.g. photo and film material, radar recordings, ground traces, vegetation damage, functional impairments of vehicles and machines, gravitational, inertial and electromagnetic effects for which no satisfactory explanations have yet been found (Sturrock et al., 1998)

The above considerations almost inevitably lead to the conclusion that research into the UFO phenomenon urgently needs to be professionalized. In other words, instead of leaving the research of UFOs increasingly to layman researchers working in private settings—with all the associated consequences—established scientific and academic research should deal with the topic proactively. This argumentation is certainly not to question the benefits and merits of private UFO research organizations. The efforts of such organizations to standardize case studies, documentation and assessments, as well as the creation of methodically sound and differentiated hypotheses for possible causes of unexplained UFO cases are of great value. A case collection made according to scientific standards by lay researchers in private UFO groups could also serve as a support and legitimation for scientific-institutional UFO research (Westrum, 1977).

This scientific examination of the topic should not only be carried out with the “safety gap” of the perspective of cultural studies or subject-oriented perspectives, but should also explicitly address the question of the phenomenological nature of UFOs. It should be a matter of course that those scientists who deal with the UFO topic should not be judged according to the allegedly absurd character of the subject matter, but according to the scientific quality of their work. Unfortunately, the reality is different so far. In my opinion, there is little hope that the scientific system will open up to unbiased research into UFOs in the foreseeable future. In order to do this, the subject would probably first have to be freed from the taint of the irrational, ridiculous, and absurd, which—for the reasons described above—is traditionally attached to it. This hurdle appears high, but not insurmountable. In order to establish a serious scientific investigation of the UFO phenomenon, some UFO researchers have long been discussing and calling for the establishment of national—or better international—institutions and authorities to investigate the UFO phenomenon. Ideally, such institutions would be closely networked with governments, military and civil airspace surveillance institutions, police authorities, private UFO research organizations, and other research institutions. In addition to systematic data collection, evaluation, and analysis in accordance with scientific standards, the tasks of such an institution or agency would be to carry out field studies, organize international conferences, publish the results of research, etc. It would also be desirable to establish a comprehensive UFO research paradigm that would help overcome the divisions between professional and lay-scientific research, as well as between the natural and cultural sciences. UFO research understood

in this way should first of all reflect the scientific, epistemological, methodological, and political special status of the UFO phenomenon as a research subject and systematically integrate these dimensions into its questions, methodology, and research organization (Anton, Hövelmann & Schetsche, 2013).

Hynek wrote: “When the long awaited solution to the UFO problem comes, I believe that it will prove to be not merely the next small step in the march of science but a mighty and totally unexpected quantum jump.” (Hynek, 1972: 288) The fact that, in view of what we know about UFOs today, this possibility cannot at least be ruled out should be reason enough for science to deal with all the necessary skepticism, but also with openness and great seriousness with the UFO phenomenon.

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PART III

HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: JUSTINUS KERNER'S CASE STUDY INTO THE "PRISON SPOOK" IN WEINSBERG AND SPOOKY ACTIONS AT A DISTANCE IN 1835–1836

Michael Nahm

Introduction

Justinus Kerner (1786–1862; Figure 1A) was a renowned writer and proponent of German Romanticism during the first half of the 19th century. While working as physician by profession, he pursued manifold other interests. Most importantly, Kerner wrote numerous poems and a few prose treatises brimming with Romantic themes such as nature and death, and he also spent considerable time and effort on advancing studies into psychical phenomena, which he considered the most important of all aspects of nature open to scientific study (Kerner, 1836a: VII). Consequently, characterizations of Kerner's personality and life are often subdivided into three facets: 1) physician, 2) poet and writer, and 3) occultist (e. g. Schott, 1986; Grüsser, 1987). However, even during his lifetime, many of his contemporaries seemed unable to reconcile the first two facets of Kerner, for which he earned great respect, with his occupation and publications concerning phenomena of the "night side", the "night domain", or the "night life of nature". He used these terms to depict phenomena associated with somnambulism, near-death states, and apparitions; varying the wording of Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert's (1780–1860) influential treatise *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* [*Views from the night side of natural science*] (Schubert, 1808) in which Schubert emphasized the significance of these kinds of topics for a better understanding of human nature. Accordingly, Kerner saw no discrepancies between his manifold areas of activity. By contrast, he considered psychical phenomena an integral part of human life and approached them from the position of a physician. He stressed that they were accessible to scientific studies like other phenomena typically studied by natural scientists, and must be treated with the same investigative spirit.

Kerner and his body of work continue to receive attention today. His 200th birthday was commemorated with numerous celebrations and scientific symposia in 1986 (see the celebration publication by Stadt Weinsberg & Schott, 1990). Members of Germany's academic community, however, approached Kerner's work predominantly

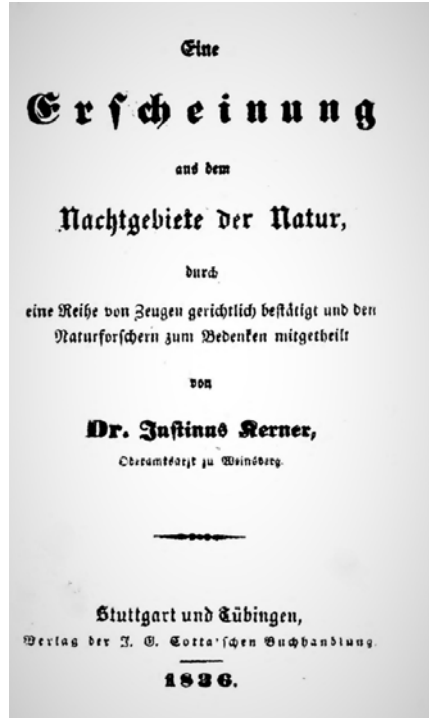


Figure 1A: Justinus Kerner (1786–1862) in the last years of his life. **Figure 1B:** Title page of Kerner's book about the prison spook in Weinsberg 1835–1836; its full title being *Eine Erscheinung aus dem Nachtgebiete der Natur, durch eine Reihe von Zeugen gerichtlich bestätigt und den Naturforschern zum Bedenken mitgetheilt* [A phenomenon from the night domain of nature, judicially confirmed by a series of witnesses, and conveyed to natural researchers for consideration].

from the perspectives of literature, art, medicine, psychiatry, and the sociocultural aspects of his life (for examples since the turn of the millennium, see e.g. Braun, 2007; Buchholz, 2016; Fix, 2010; Gruber, 2000; Häfner, 2009a, b, c; Klenner, 2002; Peter, 2015; Potthast, 2014; Simon, 2012; Weltzien, 2011). Also, his most famous work regarding the treatment of patients experiencing peculiar mental states, the voluminous monograph on *Die Seherin von Prevorst* [*The seeress of Prevorst*], was reissued several years ago as an abbreviated edition (Kerner, 2007). Similarly, the biographical treatises that depict Kerner's life from his own view and that of one of his daughters (Pörnbacher, 2005), or from that of his son Theobald (T. Kerner, 2005/1894) have been republished. The latter portrayed the illustrious life at the Kerner family's house, the *Kernerhaus* in Weinsberg, a small town in Baden-Württemberg that was once a famous center of Southern German Romanticism owing to Kerner's many activities. Nevertheless, Kerner's pioneering role in the context of psychical research has also been discussed and appreciated by a few

authors sympathizing with parapsychology and its fields of research such as near-death phenomena and hauntings, as exemplified by Emil Mattiesen (1925, 1937, 1936–1939), Peter Ringger (1953, 1959), Heino Gehrts (1962/2015, 1989a/2015, 1989b/2015, 1989c; for a collection of articles Gehrts wrote on Kerner and his social environment, see Fritz, 2015), Lee Byron Jennings (1966, 1968, 1974, 1990), Eberhard Bauer (1986, 1989/1990, 2010; Mayer & Bauer, 2015), and references to Kerner in earlier publications by myself (Nahm, 2009, 2012a).¹

In the English literature, Kerner and his work are much less known. He is referred to in historically orientated treatises on hypnotism, medicine, psychiatry, mediumship, and hauntings (e. g., Alvarado et al., 2012; Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970; Erbguth, 2004; Gauld, 1995; Peter, 2011; Wilson, 2009), but apart from some poems, only his treatise about the seeress of Prevorst (published in an abbreviated version by Catherine Crowe in 1845) and Kerner's longest prosaic work, *Reiseschatten* [*Travel Shadows*], have been translated into English (Segel, 2014).² Nevertheless, Kerner's studies of psychical research topics had a significant impact on the English readership just before the wave of Spiritualism was to sweep across Europe after 1850. This was partly due to the above-mentioned translation by Crowe (1845), but also due to another influential treatise published by her, termed *The Night Side of Nature* (Crowe, 1848). She adopted the title of this book from Kerner's writings, and frequently referred to German Romantic writers and publishers, especially to Kerner. Her book is also considered the source that introduced the term "poltergeist" to English readers (Bennett, 2000).

In this chapter, I introduce one of Kerner's most important investigations into the night side of nature. It concerns a study of haunting phenomena that took place in the district prison of Weinsberg, Germany, in 1835 and early 1836. Kerner termed his report *Eine Erscheinung aus dem Nachtgebiete der Natur* [*A phenomenon from the night domain of nature*] (Kerner, 1836a; Figure 1B). At that time, Kerner was the physician for Weinsberg and its surrounding district, and he received an order from the Weinsberg district court to clarify the origin of strange occurrences that were attributed to one of the imprisoned women, Elisabetha Eslinger. Kerner's documentation of the prison spook belongs to the most extensively documented cases of hauntings performed in the

1 Judging from Justinus Kerner's numerous writings on diverse matters of psychical research, the scientific importance he attributed to these phenomena, his own investigations, and his publishing of the first journals exclusively devoted to parapsychological topics (*Blätter aus Prevorst*, 1831–1839, and *Magikon*, 1840–1853), he can justly be considered the first parapsychologist (see also Jennings, 1990).

2 In the English literature, biographical information on Kerner's life is also scarce; but see Howitt Watts (1883), the introduction in Segel (2014), and the short overview by Jennings (1989).

19th century, and it stirred considerable discussions at the time. Catherine Crowe (1848) and Alois Kaindl (1908) provided summaries of Kerner's spook report in English, but since then, it seems to have been almost forgotten. Neither the "classic" English treatises on hauntings and poltergeists from recent decades (e.g., Bardens, 1968; Carrington & Fodor, 1951; Gault & Cornell, 1979; MacKenzie, 1982; Maxwell-Stuart, 2011; Owen, 1964; Rogo, 1979; Roll, 1974; Thurston, 1953; Wilson, 2009), nor the historical sections in recent books on "ghost hunting" (e.g., Fraser, 2010; Green, 2016; Parsons, 2015; Ruickbie, 2013) contain a mention of it. Kerner's study is included in Table 1 in Puhle (1999), listed in the bibliography in the entries about Justinus Kerner in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Jennings, 1989) and the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (Melton, 2001, vol. 1), and it is cited in Lange and Houran (2001) as an example that may have involved contagion of spook experiences. However, the only recent source I found in which Kerner's investigation is described in a few sentences, at least, is Puhle & Parker (2004). Hence, a refreshed familiarization with the case and a substantiation of its historical significance seems well warranted for the English-speaking world.

In the following, I will provide an overview and a summary of the case, the latter being based on my own translations of the original text. Thereafter, I will touch upon Kerner's interpretation of the documented phenomena, compare the methods of investigation and documentation used by Kerner with modern approaches regarding anomalous single case studies, and highlight limitations of his approach. Finally, I present and discuss the reception of Kerner's investigation.

"A Phenomenon From the Night Domain of Nature": An Overview

Kerner's case study is remarkable for three reasons: 1) It mainly took place inside a well secured prison, and 2) the strange phenomena occurred practically every night for months, usually multiple times per night. Consequently, they were 3) witnessed by dozens of people whose testimonies Kerner collated into a comprehensive report. The book in question (Kerner, 1836a) contains 351 pages. Yet it is printed in relatively large letters on a small paper format, and thus, its text body is not as voluminous as the sheer number of pages might suggest. Of these 351 pages, pages V–XLVI consist of a preface in which Kerner discusses the scientific importance of studying phenomena that belong to the night side of nature, his personal involvement in such studies, and the reactions of some contemporaries to these occupations, and he also provides an introduction to the investigated case. Pages 1–310 form the main body of the text. It is not divided into separate chapters, but its main structure runs along the following lines, indicated by the respective pages numbers:

- 1-3: The decision of the Weinsberg court to subject Mrs. Eslinger to an examination by a physician (i. e. Justinus Kerner) to evaluate the reports of the prison's guard, Mr. Mayer, and other prisoners who had complained about disturbing phenomena that seemed to be associated with her. Dated September 12, 1835.
- 3-40: A report from Kerner that summarizes his observations and the testimonies of interrogated witnesses after eleven weeks. Dated November 21, 1835.
- 40-188: Presentation of numerous other witness reports, including a diary of one of the female prisoners who stayed in the same cell as Mrs. Eslinger for 10 days (pp. 65-85). Up to page 158, Kerner collates occurrences that were reported to happen inside the prison. Thereafter, he presented occurrences that were reported to have happened at external locations, including Kerner's own house.
- 188-205: General considerations about the reported phenomena.
- 205-215: Description of how the cause for the spook, a supposed ghost named "Anton", left Mrs. Eslinger on February 11, 1836.
- 215-302: Description of four other case reports of hauntings to put the Weinsberg prison spook into the context of related occurrences. These are:
- 215-224: 1) A case of a young man who claimed to be stalked by a ghost who urged him to pray for him on a graveyard for 21 days. The case stirred considerable public attention at the time.
- 227-236: 2) A case occurring in another prison in Weinsberg. It concerned localized poltergeist phenomena that seemed independent of the coming and going of prisoners.
- 239-292: 3) Extensive description of massive localized poltergeist disturbances in Uffikon, Switzerland, based on first-hand testimonies (see also Moser, 1980/1950: 298-304).
- 293-302: 4) Description of the poltergeist phenomena and the stable spook occurring in a castle in Schmiedelfeld, Germany.
- 302-306: Concluding remarks.
- 306-309: Appendix with additional testimonies from Karl Friedrich Heyd, the judge of the district court in Weinsberg.
- 310: Corrigendum.

Remarks on the Circumstances of the Case

The investigation performed by Kerner comprised a number of notable aspects. As already mentioned, the reported occurrences mainly took place inside a prison. The following description of the prison and its cells is based on information related by Kerner and other authors (Kerner, 1836a; T. Kerner, 2005/1894; Meyer, 1838). As usual, the prison building was tightly secured with thickly barred windows and locked doors. Hence, no external intruders could be regarded responsible for the observed phenomena. The prison court was surrounded by a wall with a secured entrance that was always closed. Female and male prisoners were kept on the first floor in separate cells which were constructed like “a prison inside a prison”, i. e. the cells consisted of masoned and paneled walls built into the prison’s floor. The walls of these cells stood free and were entirely surrounded by corridors, i. e. none of the cell walls corresponded with the outer walls of the prison building. Mrs. Eslinger’s cell had two small glass windows that looked into this corridor, and they were secured with thick bars on the outside. A third and even smaller barred glass window in the roof of the cell served as an inlet for fresh air (the measurements of the windows and the rooms are not given, but see Figure 2). The little window in the roof could only be opened via a rope that ran across a rough-running metal reel, and the latter would shriek unmistakably every time it was moved. Apart from that, the prison cell was equipped with one door, two simple beds on which more than one person could lie, one stove in the corner next to the door, and one chair. Another cell for male prisoners was constructed similarly, but it only had one window (T. Kerner, 2005/1894). At night, the corridor was lit by an oil lamp that hung in front of the door of the prison guard’s room on the same floor (*ibid.*). Hence, the male prisoners could look into the corridor when strange noises commenced and moved along the corridor to Mrs. Eslinger’s cell and back. Kerner’s book does not contain a floor plan of the location, but judging upon written descriptions of the prison’s interior (Kerner, 1836a, Meyer, 1838), and upon floor plans of the building (Haag, 1995), Figure 2 gives an idea of what the location in which the reported spook activities took place might have looked like (see also Figure 5).³

The reported disturbances occurred almost every night for many weeks and could thus be observed and documented over and over again. They were allegedly caused by a responsive “ghost” who repeatedly claimed to have visited people also outside the prison, i. e. in other houses in Weinsberg and in other towns—both on request and of its own accord. Consequently, these disturbances were witnessed by a huge number of individuals,

3 The plans of the building contained in Haag (1995) date to 1809, 1824, and 1907. None of them corresponds to the situation of the first floor of the building in 1836. Hence, the floor plan of the right wing of the building in Figure 2 was drawn to fit the written descriptions of the prison and its cells contained in the text of Kerner’s book.

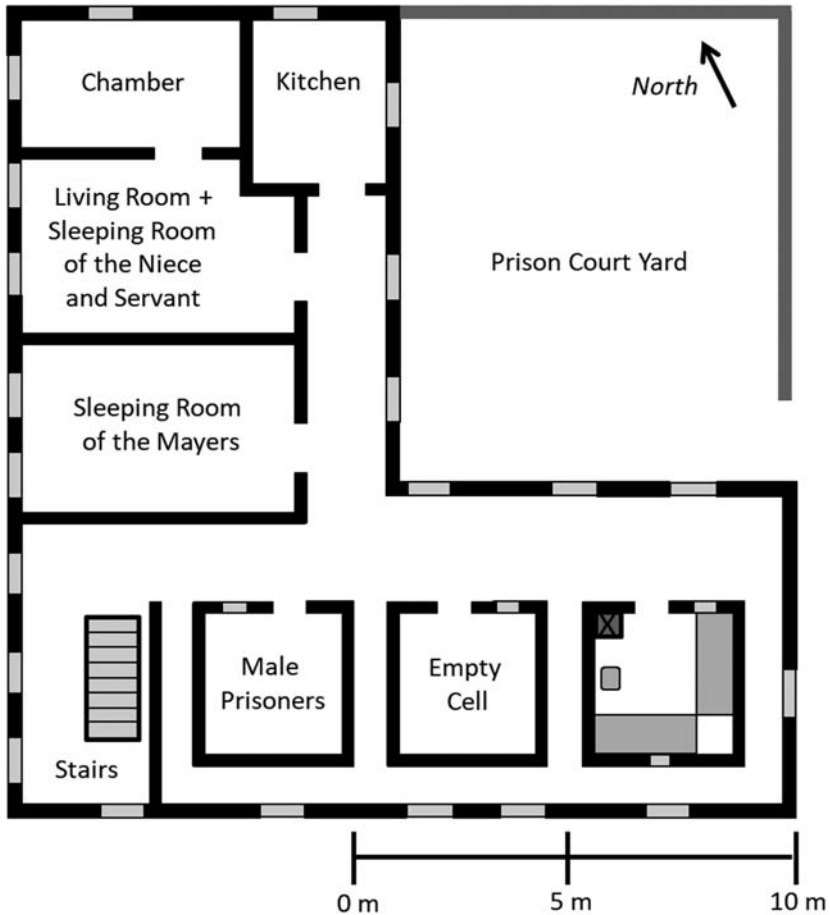


Figure 2: Reconstructed floor plan of the first floor of the Weinsberg prison in 1836. The cell at the right, equipped with two beds, a stove, and one chair, depicts the cell in which Mrs. Eslinger might have stayed.

and almost all of them were interrogated concerning their observations or urged to write them down. The prisoners of both sexes came from different towns in the district around Weinsberg and were usually not aware of the haunting recently attributed to the prison, as was affirmed in interrogations by Karl Friedrich Heyd (1788–1873),⁴ the judge and principal of the district court (e.g. Kerner, 1836a: 88f). However, all witnesses reported

⁴ Karl Friedrich von Heyd was district judge in Weinsberg until 1839. Thereafter, he filled higher political positions in Württemberg. He was ennobled in 1856.

very similar or congruent observations independently from each other. In addition to prisoners, numerous other people, also from the higher social strata of Weinsberg and the nearest large city, Heilbronn, witnessed the typical phenomena (including members of the court, physicians, and a university professor). Apart from Kerner's own testimonies, and the claims of Mrs. Eslinger and one of her daughters, Kerner included the testimonies of 47 witnesses in his report. A compilation of these witnesses is provided in Table 1. As a side note, it seems worth noting that Justinus Kerner's brother Karl Friedrich von Kerner (1775–1840), an ennobled major general and former Interior Minister of Württemberg, also claimed to have witnessed three “objective” haunting incidents related to the prison spook during a stay in Weinsberg (Pfaff, 1854). However, Kerner did not mention the experiences of his older brother in his spook report.

According to the testimonies of the 50 witnesses featured in Kerner's report, 48 perceived unusual acoustic phenomena, such as spoken words, shrieks, walking steps, knocks, gun shots, dripping water, rustling paper, objects being thrown about, flocks of birds in flight, but also violent clattering of windows, slamming of doors, roaring sounds and blows that shook the entire house, and a whole range of swishing and swooshing noises that were often deemed impossible to compare to known sounds. In addition, 29 witnesses reported inexplicable visual impressions in the dark that mostly resembled a moving yellowish or whitish blotch, but sometimes also twinkling stars, human-like shapes or a fully-fledged apparition. Tactile sensations like a cold wind or being distinctly touched were reported by 25 witnesses. Many also reported that their blanket was being pulled by something or thrown off of the bed. Moreover, 14 people reported an intense and sickening stench of decay that usually came and went along with the occurrence of the other phenomena. In addition, two cats reportedly displayed seemingly abnormal behavior in the presence of the spook; one even died. The following section comprises a summary of the case and of some of the witness testimonies.

Table 1: Overview of the witnesses who reported seemingly inexplicable observations and experiences in the context of the “prison spook” in Weinsberg in 1835/1836. The column “Nights in prison” refers to the number of evenings or nights that witnesses spent in the prison in which Mrs. Eslinger, the focus person, stayed. The column “Nights elsewhere” refers to the number of nights in which witnesses reported inexplicable occurrences in their home. In the cases of the prison guard Mr. Mayer, his wife, their niece, and their servant, the prison was their home.

JUSTINUS KERNER'S CASE STUDY INTO THE "PRISON SPOOK"

Number/ Gender	Name	Residence	Role/ Occupation	Nights in Prison	Nights elsewhere	Interrogator	
1	f	Elisabetha Eslinger	Baurenlautern	Prisoner	Passim	Many	Members of court, Kerner, others
2	f	Rosine Schahl	Altlautern	Prisoner	8		Members of court, Pastor Hegler
3	f	?	Altlautern	Daughter of Mrs. Eslinger		Several	Kerner
4	m	Justinus Kerner	Weinsberg	Investigator	4	Many	
5	f	Friederike Kerner	Weinsberg	Wife of J. Kerner	1	Many	
6	m	Mr. Mayer	Weinsberg	Prison super- visor	Passim	Passim	Members of court, Kerner
7	f	Mrs. Mayer	Weinsberg	Wife of prison supervisor	Passim	Passim	Kerner
8	f	?	Weinsberg	Niece of pri- son supervisor	Passim	Passim	Kerner
9	f	Friederike Föll	Löwenstein	Prisoner	8 weeks		No report; Mr. Mayer?
10	f	Catharina Sinn	Oberhambach	Prisoner	2 weeks		Pastor Binder
11	f	Sophie Seyffer	Löwenstein	Prisoner	>1		Pastor Hegler
12	f	Christine Mößner	Ellhofen	Prisoner	14		Pastor Mayer
13	f	Rosina Acker	Deinbach	Prisoner	14		Pastor Lehmann
14	f	Dorothea Brenner	Lehren	Prisoner	2		Pastor Stockmayer
15	f	Rosina Braun	Lehren	Prisoner	3		Pastor Stockmayer
16	f	Friederike Welling	Großbottwar	Prisoner	2		Kerner
17	f	?	Weinsberg	Servant of pri- son supervisor	Passim	Passim	Kerner
18	f	Margaretha Leibesberger	Lachweiler	Prisoner	10		Kerner
19	m	Karl Friedrich Heyd	Weinsberg	Judge of the district court	2		Kerner
20	f	Elisabetha Neidhard	Neuhütten	Prisoner	1		Pastor Binder
21	f	Maria Bär	Sulzbach	Prisoner	1		Kerner, Pastor Hegelmayer
22	m	Christian Bauer	Eschenau	Prisoner	14		Heyd
23	m	Johann Strecker	Willsbach	Prisoner	>15		Heyd
24	m	Georg Samet	Weinsberg	Prisoner	1		Heyd
25	m	Mr. Benz	Weiler	Prisoner	4		Pastor Keller

MICHAEL NAHM

Number/ Gender	Name	Residence	Role/ Occupation	Nights in Prison	Nights elsewhere	Interrogator	
26	m	Ludwig Gräter	Schwabbach	Prisoner	6	Pastor Otto	
27	m	Theobald Kerner	Weinsberg	Son of J. Kerner	1	Kerner	
28	m	Heinrich Christian Kapff	Heilbronn	Professor of physics	1	5	Kerner
29	m	Christian Duttenhofer	Heilbronn	Copper engraver	1	1	Kerner
30	m	Johann Stockmayer	Lehensteins- feld	Pastor	1		Kerner
31	m	Joseph Wagner	Heilbronn	Painter	1		Kerner
32	m	Philipp Friedrich Sicherer	Heilbronn	Physician	1		Kerner
33	m	Karl Franz Fraas	Weinsberg	Legal adviser	1		Kerner
34	m	Baron Albert von Hügel	Eschenau	Chamberlain and cavalry captain	1	≥1	Kerner
35	m	W. Megnin	Willsbach	Pastor	1		Kerner
36	m	Johann Friedrich Seyffer	Heilbronn	Physician	1		Kerner
37	m	Mr. Krust	Weinsberg	Prisoner	2		Kerner
38	m	Friedrich Gailing	Rappbach	Prisoner	1		Heyd (?)
39	m	Johannes Stoll	Bonlanden	Prisoner	1		Heyd (?)
40	m	Mr. Häberlein	Weinsberg	Prisoner	1		Heyd (?)
41	m	Mr. Eckhardt	Weinsberg	Actuary of the court		1	Kerner
42	f	Mrs. Eckhardt	Weinsberg	Wife of Mr. Eckhardt		2	Kerner
43	m	Mr. Theurer	Weinsberg	Assessor of the court		Several	Kerner
44	m	Mr. Neusser	Weinsberg	Teacher		2	Kerner
45	m	Mr. Bürger	Weinsberg	Trainee lawyer	1	Several	Kerner
46	m	Mr. Kümmel	Weinsberg	?		3	Kerner (?)
47	m	Mr. Kümmel's son	Weinsberg	?		2	Kümmel
48	m	Carl Dörr	Heilbronn	Landscapeist		3	Kerner
49	f	Auguste Steinbeis	Stuttgart	Sister of J. Kerner		2	Kerner
50	f	Christiane Wörner	Weinsberg	Business owner		1	Kerner, Heyd

A Phenomenon From the Night Domain of Nature: a Summary of the Case

Mrs. Eslinger, the focus person in the center of the occurrences, was a poor woman aged 39 who had two children. She was married for 18 years before her husband died. At the time of the mysterious incidents, she had been sentenced to prison for more than five months because she tried to draw other people into a (fraudulent) undertaking to unearth an allegedly hidden treasure (Brüning, 1998; Kerner, 1836a). She claimed to have been able to see ghosts since her youth, but she never came into close contact with them. However, according to her, an apparition named "Anton" had recently begun to stalk her, urging her to pray for him, in a certain cellar in a neighboring town, to unban and release him from this location and his former misdoings. Mrs. Eslinger refused to follow the demands of "Anton"; and, being imprisoned, she could not fulfil them anyway. The supposed ghost appeared audibly and visibly to her, and was allegedly also seen by her 14-year-old daughter who confirmed this to Kerner. When Mrs. Eslinger was sent to prison, "Anton" seemed to have followed her and he appeared night after night, urging her to pray for him, hampering her breath, and causing the described disturbances. As a result, the fellow prisoners in her cell became distressed, as did Mr. Mayer, the prison's guard, and his family. The reported phenomena and Mrs. Eslinger's explanatory claims led to the court's decision to subject the latter to an examination by a physician, namely Kerner, on September 12, 1835.

Kerner duly visited Mrs. Eslinger in the prison, interrogated several other prisoners, and let other prisoners be interrogated by the pastor from their home community when they had returned home. He concluded that Mrs. Eslinger was mentally sane, and that the reported observations related to facts. After eleven weeks, he wrote his first report to the court, dated November 21, 1835, and further investigations were pursued. In the following, I will present translated excerpts from Kerner's book, beginning with his own observations during the second evening he visited Mrs. Eslinger in her cell to examine the supposed occurrences in person.⁵

On October 18, I went again into the prison without light, from 10 p.m. until midnight, together with my wife and the wife of the prison guard. When the woman [Mrs. Eslinger] fell again into her stertorous breathing, I laid my hand upon her again and kindly asked the apparition not to trouble the woman. Thereafter, the same rolling and sizzling as of paper commenced on the walls. It moved much slower and smoother than last time along the walls of the prison towards the

5 In the following reports, many of the witnesses referred to rather exact times of the night when describing their experiences. They knew these times because in Weinsberg in 1835 and 1836, several night watchmen (most likely four) announced the time during the night (Susanne Schmehl, personal communication, November 25, 2017).

window. Yet, in the corridor, a noise resounded, just as if a strong wind blew into a dress of stiff linen or paper. These sounds moved along the entire corridor, in which nobody was present, and they were heard by all of us with utmost distinction (Kerner, 1836a: 21f).

Mrs. Catharina Sinn, who stayed in the prison for two weeks (the exact dates are not given), reported the following to Pastor Binder of Mayenfels, the pastor from her home community, after her release:

I stayed in a prison cell that was located close to the cell in which Mrs. Eslinger of Baurenlautern was staying. Both cells were connected with a corridor. I didn't know anything particular about Mrs. Eslinger and her apparition. Nevertheless, usually after the bell for the night prayer had rung [...], I heard a swooshing at the bars in front of the window and in the cell itself, where I stayed all by myself. This swooshing resembled the swooshing of paper very much, but, there was no trace of paper, nowhere. More than I saw it, I felt and heard that something was always walking back and forth. This walking was always accompanied by this swooshing and by a blowing of cool air, when the windows and doors were closed and the room well secured (it is a thickly masoned house, paneled with massive planks). It went back and forth in my prison cell all the time. During one night, it sounded as if something like plaster was thrown from above the stove, but in the morning, I found nothing on the floor. On one occasion, I had the feeling as if my forehead was touched very gently by a hand. Also, in the corridor in front of the door, I heard a shuffling, a sound of plaster or something else being thrown, and a rumbling, cracking, etc.

I didn't want to stay in this prison cell by myself anymore, especially since I am pregnant, and I was relocated to a cell with others on my request. Yet there was no other cell apart from that of Mrs. Eslinger and Mrs. Föll. I was then relocated to them. When I stayed in this cell, however, it just went on as it did in my former cell. But I was not so afraid anymore, because I was not alone. The others told me now about this apparition, and I even heard it speak recurrently, slowly, rasping, not like a human voice, hollow, but I could hardly understand anything. [...] Each morning at five o'clock, it left the cell. Then, it frequently said, and we did understand this: "Pray!" (Kerner, 1836a: 30–32).

Mrs. Mayer, the wife of the prison guard, spent the night from December 8 to 9, 1835, in the cell of Mrs. Eslinger together with her niece and the maidservant, who both lived with the Mayers on the floor where the cells were located in the prison building. During this night, they occupied one of the two beds in the cell, which were large enough to carry more than one person. Mrs. Eslinger lay in her bed alone. Mrs. Mayer reported:

After 9 o'clock, we lay down in one of the beds in the cell of Mrs. Eslinger. At that time, the room was illuminated by the moon, and I stayed in an upright sitting position to be able to observe Mrs. Eslinger accurately. [...] Soon after, the three of

us saw how a chair that stood close to us and next to the stove was thrown backwards by itself, but in such a manner, that it remained standing upright. Meanwhile, we closely observed Mrs. Eslinger, and we noted that she lay calmly in her bed, praying silently. Later, the window opposite from us was thrust open and closed with such violence, that I feared that all its panes were shattered.

In the meantime, Mrs. Eslinger had told us that this had been done by the apparition which would now sit on the chair. We looked to it, but didn't notice anything. Shortly after, we heard a walking noise on the prison floor as if in slippers, a shuffling, but it didn't sound human. It came especially close to our bed. This lasted for half an hour, from midnight until 0:30 a.m. Then I sensed a strong gust of wind, and from out of this wind, I perceived a very peculiar hollow voice, which I had already heard one time before. [...]

Throughout the night, I frequently saw this [white] shadow, first sitting on the chair, then floating from here to there, and I convinced myself most satisfyingly that this was not an external light, and not the moon which had long disappeared; it also was of a very unique kind, it is impossible to describe it.

Mrs. Eslinger never slept but was always praying, and the more ardently she prayed, the closer moved this shadow, which often appeared to sit on her bed. When it approached us, we always felt a cool wind in the completely locked and warm room.

After 5 o'clock, when this shadow had moved close to me again and I felt his cool wind, I told him: "Go to my husband in his room, and leave a sign that you have been there." Hereupon it aspirated distinctly: "Yes." Then we heard the closed prison cell door open and close, and we saw a shadow float out, and then we heard a shuffling in the corridor. A quarter of an hour later, we saw the shadow coming again. This time, it entered through the other window, the closed window that led into the corridor. I asked: "Have you been to my husband, and what did you do there?"; whereupon I heard sounds like a hollow short laughter. We didn't hear the ghost shuffle anymore, but he floated noiselessly towards Mrs. Eslinger's bed, who always prayed; she also prayed when we heard the speaking sounds from the apparition. [...]

When I went to my husband, he told me with surprise that the door of his room, which he had securely locked with a locking bolt and the night lock, stood open in the morning (Kerner, 1836a: 60–65).

Mr. Mayer confirmed this occurrence and added that he had been in possession of the keys required to unlock the door locks (p. 153). Moreover, from then on, the supposed ghost frequently visited the Mayers' sleeping room, typically revealing its presence "through noises in front of our bed or inside the room that consisted of cracking, knocking, sounds as if sand or other granular substances were being thrown, frequently also of sounds that cannot be compared to anything" (p. 150). In December 1935, the

apparition seemed particularly active, and it was also very distinctly perceived by male prisoners who stayed in another cell on the same floor, most likely the cell indicated as such in Figure 2. They knew nothing about the hauntings, but asked Mr. Mayer for possible reasons for the frequent nocturnal disturbances. For example, 19-year old Christian Bauer reported the following:

On the second day of my arrest, December 11, I was wide awake at 3 o'clock. I didn't know anything about the incidents in the other prison cells, and had also neither heard nor seen anything before. Then, a sound commenced in the cell like a sizzling of paper, and it knocked, and suddenly a white shape stood in front of me. It said, so that my co-prisoner also heard it: "You need patience!" The voice was hollow, raspy, odd, and not similar to a normal human voice. I said that this might be my grandfather, whereupon my co-prisoner Strecker laughed at me. From that day on, I never again saw something throughout my arrest, but I heard various sounds together with the others, particularly around 3 o'clock each morning. For example, on the 3rd Sunday in Advent, we first heard a blow that made the entire house tremble, then something rustled and rattled along the corridor, and the windows sounded as if somebody was clattering on them. The sounds seemed to move towards the rearward prison cell, and then we heard a woman pray aloud. [...] At first, I was afraid, but since it came every night, I wasn't afraid anymore (Kerner, 1836a: 89–90).

Similarly, the above-mentioned prisoner Johann Strecker, 44 years of age, reported:

On December 10, I came into the prison together with Christian Bauer. We didn't know a syllable about what happened in the other prison or elsewhere. On December 11, at 3 o'clock in the night, I heard a swooshing and a knocking, and a peculiar voice that said: "You need patience!" [...] On the 3rd Sunday in Advent, at 3 o'clock in the morning, there was a rumbling as if a carriage was rolling in the corridor, and then there were three violent blows [...] that shook the entire house. These blows were of a kind that the strongest man could not have produced. [...] On Wednesday around the same hour, it cracked again, namely five times, and it rumbled terribly in the corridor. It buzzed and whirred in the corridor, three times back and forth. We didn't hear a trace of human footsteps, and we also saw nothing pass our window, all this was just like an incomprehensible rustling and rattling wind, but still not comparable to wind, as it was so unique (Kerner, 1836a: 91–92).

Likewise, Benz, a farmer, reported that during three of the four nights he stayed in the prison, he heard a "roaring and a blustering as if the entire house was to be destroyed" (p. 97).

As a result of these and other testimonies, Kerner wrote to the court again on December 20, 1835, stressing that the witnesses would be willing to repeat everything they said

under oath.⁶ Moreover, he recommended that other trustworthy persons and scientists apart from prisoners and the Mayers should be involved in the investigation and the documentation of the phenomena, to which Mr. Heyd, the chief of the court, consented.

First, with permission of the court, Justinus Kerner's son Theobald Kerner (1817–1907)⁷ spent the night from December 26 to 27 in the men's prison cell, which was still occupied by Johann Strecker, and another occupant, Ludwig Gräter, who was 50 years of age. These were Theobald Kerner's main observations:

[...] Now there was dead silence and I only heard the snoring of my sleeping companions, but I kept myself completely awake. At about 11 o'clock, I heard the slamming of heavy doors with locks. Sometimes it seemed to be quite close to us, the two men awoke, and sometimes, it was further away. Then again, there were blows as if heavy weights fell on a floor of planks. And all of a sudden, it came to the window which was less than one shoe's distance from where I lay, and it sounded as if a march was being drummed on this window, but the sounds were much louder than one could produce on a window without smashing the glass. Moreover, it sounded as if it came from the entire window surface, not as if a person would act with only two hands. Also, the tone was frequently like pattering, and then muffled, trailing away into the distance. It seemed to pass us by, and then I and the others heard the door of Mrs. Eslinger's prison slam open and closed, and soon after, she prayed. We heard this praying for one hour. Then it was silent and the men said that on other occasions, it had returned audibly, but that didn't happen this time. It remained silent until 3 o'clock. Then it came with even greater noise, one could hear it slamming doors, it came to our window again, it sounded again like drumming, and it did often sound as if a very sonorous drum roll was beaten in the distance. Now, it knocked three to four times at our door, roared into the corridor, and soon, we heard the woman praying aloud again—with an almost suffocated voice towards the end, as if she was heavily oppressed by something. Her prayer lasted from 3 to 6 o'clock. Then, it was silent, and we didn't hear it return, as was usually the case (Kerner, 1836a: 104–105).⁸

6 Kerner's letter to the court is dated February 20, 1836 (Kerner, 1836a: 109), but this is a mistake (see p. 106).

7 Like his father, Theobald Kerner became a physician, writer and poet. He founded a noted doctor's office in Stuttgart and even became personal physician of the King of Württemberg (Liebig, 2017). However, after the death of his father, Theobald returned to Weinsberg and continued the former's medical practice.

8 Theobald Kerner added additional comments about his night in the prison in his book about the life at the Kerner family's house (T. Kerner, 2005/1894). At the time of the prison spook, he was 17 years old. He hoped that people would greatly admire him if he were able to unmask potential fraudsters, and thus proved to be more critical than his dupable father. For this purpose, Theobald even brought a loaded gun into the prison cell. Yet, when the noises

The next day, on December 27, four men of reputation spent the night in the Weinsberg prison. Heinrich Christian Kapff (1794–1844), a professor of physics and mathematics in Heilbronn, the nearest large city to Weinsberg, about 5 km away, and Christian Friedrich Duttenhofer (1778–1846), a noted copper engraver from Heilbronn, stayed in Mrs. Eslinger's cell. Simultaneously, Pastor Johann Stockmayer from Lehensteinsfeld, who had already interrogated some prisoners from his home community after their return, and Josef Wagner, a painter from Heilbronn, spent the night in the cell of Mr. Strecker and Mr. Gräter, taking the position of guards who could observe the two imprisoned men during the night, and overlook parts of the corridor that ran from the men's cell to the women's cell with Mrs. Eslinger. All four prison guests reported congruent observations. Strange noises moved along the corridor into Mrs. Eslinger's cell, and the spook also produced the usual sounds inside her cell and at its windows: Noises that resembled electric discharges, drops dripping into water, throwing of plaster, paper being drawn along a surface, very violent rattling and shaking of a window so that the panes must have broken if it were happening physically, a carriage moving, etc. Inside the cell with Mrs. Eslinger, Kapff and Duttenhofer also noticed a bright shape every now and then, as well as a cool wind when it came close. On one occasion, when Mrs. Eslinger confirmed that the apparition was inside the cell, Kapff lit a light, but they were not able to see anything in particular, although Mrs. Eslinger maintained that "Anton" was still there, standing at a wall. Kapff held out his arm to where the apparition's body was supposed to be, but he did not feel anything. In the other cell with the male prisoners, Stockmayer and Wagner perceived the same noises in the corridor as described by Kapff and Duttenhofer. Yet they never saw or heard somebody human move in the corridor, and the two prisoners in their cell remained quiet throughout the night. The supposed ghost did not seem to enter their cell (Kerner, 1836a: 111–122).

The following day, the physician Dr. Philipp Friedrich Sicherer (1803–1861) from Heilbronn and the legal adviser Karl Franz Fraas (1802–1877) from Weinsberg spent the night on the second bed in Mrs. Eslinger's prison cell. When they arrived at the main entrance of the prison wall at 8:30 p.m. and awaited its opening, they could already hear a drumming sound at one of the barred windows, but the sound was much louder and more complex than anything possibly produced by human hands. After admission, they were shown the entire locality, and after searching the cell without finding anything sus-

swooshed through the floor, and violent banging occurred right on the window and its bars one foot in front of his face, he saw nobody in the corridor that was lit by an oil lamp. When he heard loud knocks on the cell door, he exclaimed "Come in!", but nobody came in. Yet, the two prisoners who also stayed in the cell stated that in previous nights, the usually locked door had opened and closed as if moving by itself. Throughout his life, Theobald remained convinced that he had witnessed something ghostly and inexplicable.

picious, they awaited the night. Indeed, they reported several typical sounds, including the fierce throwing of coarse sand or plaster. In the morning, however, they found no substance in the cell that might have produced such noises. Among other observations, Sicherer reported a

rattling of the windows, quasi a shaking of the entire house, a massive bluster as if the girders of the prison's roof were about to fall down on us. Meanwhile, we heard three steps in the room and a seeming opening and slamming of the cell's door, and a general noisiness, after the ceasing of which I felt quite disordered (Kerner, 1836a: 129f).

The subsequent night from December 29 to 30, Baron Albert von Hügel (1803–1865), a chamberlain and royal cavalry captain who lived in Eschenau, and Pastor W. Megnin from Willsbach shared the room with Mrs. Eslinger. They witnessed the usual phenomena, including a floating bright yellowish shape and the apparent shaking of the window close to their bed and head (opposite from Mrs. Eslinger's side of the cell) with a "terrible noise and clang, as if all panes were shattered", although the window itself appeared to remain unmoved and nobody seemed to be in the corridor outside. When they tried to replicate such sounds by shaking the window and its bars, they found them to be unmovable and they were unable to produce even slightly similar sounds (p. 138f).

On the evening of December 30, Justinus Kerner visited Mrs. Eslinger's cell together with the physician Dr. Johann Friedrich Seyffer (1777–1852) from Heilbronn. To avoid irritations from the moonlight, they covered the two cell wall windows with clothes. The cell was utterly dark. At about 8 o'clock, however, a yellow light appeared inside the cell and shone on Dr. Seyffer. Kerner reported:

I stood very close to Dr. Seyffer, but this light did not fall on me. I remained completely invisible to Dr. Seyffer, entirely black, like the night that prevailed elsewhere inside the prison. Yet I saw his feet, his arms, his body and his silver box, which he held in his hand just then, in full brightness (p. 140).

The light floated back and forth three times and was visible for about seven minutes. Mrs. Eslinger assured them that it belonged to the apparition, whom she claimed to see. Thereafter, Kerner and Seyffer quickly went down into the courtyard of the prison, and found the sky covered with clouds. The moon was not visible. At 9 o'clock, Mr. Heyd, who had already spent the night from December 17 to 18 inside the cell, came to stay the night inside the prison with Dr. Seyffer, and Kerner left the building. The two men witnessed the usual phenomena, but no further lights and none of the violent rattling at the cell windows.

Mrs. Eslinger was discharged from the prison on January 12, 1836. Even thereafter, in her absence, several prisoners who were unaware of the previous occurrences reported the typical disturbances.

In general, Kerner considered the ability of the ghostly phenomena to visit people at distant locations one of the most important features of the case (see also Kerner, 1842, 1847a, b). Hence, he presented several testimonies of witnesses who reported respective observations from their homes. For example, during the initial interrogation of Mrs. Eslinger concerning the reported disturbances, Mr. Theurer, an assessor of the Weinsberg court, asked her to send the alleged ghost into his home. He stated:

Soon after, I awoke one night because of an audible walking sound, as if somebody was walking through the room in front of my bedroom in socks. I jumped out, but found nobody, and also no other plausible cause for these sounds. Yet I smelled an inapprehensible, terrible scent of decay. From then on, the apparition was audible to us on different nights, but never visible. The sounds consisted of cracks, sand being thrown, and other noises impossible to describe. A cat that was in the room frequently walked towards these sounds when they commenced, but it immediately jumped back terrified, and anxiously hid under something (Kerner, 1836a: 159f).

Interestingly, the persons living in the floors above and below Mr. Theurer were apparently also visited by the spook. Mr. Neusser, a teacher who lived on the floor below, was largely unaware of the occurrences in the Weinsberg prison, and thus had difficulties interpreting the strange nocturnal happenings in his home at first. However, Mr. Bürger, who lived in the upper floor, was well acquainted with the case. He had already spent a night in the prison on December 18, but remained in doubt regarding the nature of what he observed. Apparently, Mrs. Eslinger learned of his doubts, and she asked “Anton” to convince Mr. Bürger of his reality. The latter reported:

[...] Now it came at different nights in most conspicuous ways, usually at about 3 o'clock. For instance, I was once awakened out of very tranquil sleep, and I heard a tremendous noise as if solid objects were falling down the chimney. This was, however, not the case, as I ascertained in the morning. Then a bottle that stood freely and firmly on my table began to clink as if it were hit with something. The most remarkable phenomena occurred in the night from January 13 to 14. [...] Again, I was somehow awakened from very tranquil sleep at 3 o'clock in the morning, and was fully awake. When I looked into the area from where the noises usually originated, I saw the wall entirely illuminated in a sulfur yellow, and in the middle of this light, I saw a white stripe the size of a man that was much brighter than the illumination. This light lasted for several minutes. Then it sounded as if wallpaper was being rolled along the wall where the illumination was, and as if it would leave together with the illumination through the window. Simultaneously, it was as if a small carriage, for example a wheelbarrow, was rolling around the room, and then something walked as if with human steps in front of my door in the corridor—in a house where everybody was still lying quietly in bed. This illumination could not have been a misapprehension caused by the moon. The moon shone only later, and

the illumination didn't throw the outlines of the window frame and the window lead onto the wall (Kerner, 1836a: 164–166).

The haunting phenomena were also perceived in the homes of several other people, including Professor Kapff and Baron von Hügel, whom the supposed ghost seemed to have visited in Heilbronn without being encouraged to do so by Mrs. Eslinger or by anybody else (see Table 1). Independently, all reported the typical phenomena such as cracking, shuffling or walking, sounds resembling electric discharges and the rustling of paper, cool breezes, a terrible and almost unbearable stench of decay, and on occasion, a yellowish glow. Kerner put particular weight on the testimony of the noted painter and landscapist Carl Dörr (1777–1842) from Heilbronn, who had always been skeptical regarding phenomena from the night side of nature. He had expressed his wish that the alleged ghost should visit him in Heilbronn, although he expected nothing to happen. Nevertheless, after he had perceived a number of inexplicable sounds and breezes in his bedroom in Heilbronn during three nights, he became convinced that something invisible caused these phenomena. According to Dörr, the bedroom was bright enough to recognize any mice that may have caused these noises, although he had never noticed mice in his house, and the different baits that he placed in his room for eight days remained untouched.

Moreover, the spook apparently also visited the Kerners in their own home, the Kernerhaus, about 450 m away from the district prison as the crow flies (Figure 3). Kerner stated that the apparition came almost every night for many weeks, causing the known noises and luminous appearances, and he related the remarkable occurrences of six nights. In the night from December 19 to 20, for example,

we heard the known noises at 3:15 a.m., similar to those that are produced by the discharging of electric bottles [presumably, Kerner refers to Leyden jars], and then it came in front of my wife's bed and twitched at her blanket. She looked around, and all of a sudden, there was a shot in the middle of our room, so that both of us jumped out of our beds and shouted almost simultaneously: "This was much too rude!". Thereafter, there was complete silence, and we also didn't see anything (Kerner, 1836a: 179).

In the night from December 26 to 27 (in the same night in which my son slept in the prison), we lay sleeping in our beds at around 3 o'clock, and were suddenly somehow awakened. We then heard sounds of cracking, knocking, and the known sizzling noises, and then several times a sound as if sand was being thrown in the room, and finally, there was a peculiar screeching sound, as if somebody was making an effort to speak, but could not accomplish it. We looked around, but didn't see anything.

From this December 27 on, we didn't hear or see anything until the night from January 1 to 2. In this night, the sounds of knocking, throwing, sizzling, etc. arose

again. It came again to my wife's bed and knocked on it, and as she looked up, she saw that bright figure again in front of her, but not as large and distinct [as in the night from December 21]. She wanted to brace herself and speak to the apparition, but as she tried to move her mouth and tongue to speak, they turned stiff and bound. She became anxious and turned around. After one hour, the same things happened again, but to a lesser degree.

In the night from January 24 to 25, when we lay in bed at 10 o'clock, the familiar throwing noises commenced. I called to my wife: "The apparition is here!"; and as I called, there was a bang. After one hour, there were noises as if pigeons flew through the room, and as I slept at midnight, I was awakened all of a sudden, and I saw a sulfur yellow glow the size of a small plate on the wall at which my bed stood, and through this glow, I saw brighter stripes flit, like flashes. This took several minutes. I wanted to call, but could not, my breath was as if cramped and the tongue paralyzed (Kerner, 1836a: 182–184).

The last of the personally witnessed phenomena described by Kerner even involved their horse. After the usual sounds commenced and a bright shape appeared on the night of January 27, the Kerners heard a bang, and then they noted sounds as if their horse was moving out of its stable, which was located on the floor below. In the morning, the horse was indeed found in the room in front of the stable, although all doors were closed and could not have opened and closed by themselves. Moreover, the horse's headstall was still intact, although the chain with which it was usually fastened to the trough in the stable had inexplicably been removed from it.

Kerner's sister Wilhelmine Steinbeis (1782–1864), who had allegedly always been very skeptical of the mysterious topics her brother was occupied with, also related typical experiences of the spook when she stayed in Kerner's house as a guest for two nights from January 20 until 22 (Kerner, 1836a: 186–188).

As mentioned earlier, Mrs. Eslinger was discharged from the prison on January 12, 1836. However, anomalous experiences both inside the prison and in external locations continued to be reported. "Anton" finally left Mrs. Eslinger on February 11, 1836, and the spook never appeared again after this date. Contrary to his former insistence that Mrs. Eslinger must pray for him in a particular cellar in Wimmmental, "Anton" had now stated that praying with him on the outskirts of Wimmmental would also help to free him from his ban. Hence, following the recommendation of Kerner, Mrs. Eslinger consented to try what her inseparable ghostly companion demanded. To his regret, Kerner was unable to attend this event owing to official duties. It took place just outside Wimmmental at 3 o'clock at night, the time when "Anton" was usually acting most powerfully. Kerner sent a woman from Weinsberg he considered trustworthy, Christiane Wörner, to the location to observe what happened. After she reached the designated location with Mrs. Eslinger and others,



Figure 3: The home of Justinus Kerner and his family in Weinsberg, the *Kernerhaus*. According to Kerner, the typical haunting phenomena reported from the district prison also occurred at this location, especially in December 1835 and January 1836. The picture is taken from the *Geisterturm* [*Ghosts' tower*] in the garden of the Kerner property (Photo: M. Nahm; printed with kind permission of the *Justinus-Kerner-Verein*).

she waited at about 30 m distance from Mrs. Eslinger with two sisters and some friends of hers. Mrs. Wörner reported that when Mrs. Eslinger began to pray, a bright apparition approached her, and that a light flashed once. Then something like a white cloud hovered near her, and finally floated upward and away. After ca. 15 minutes, they approached Mrs. Eslinger and found her lying cold and unconscious on the ground. When she recovered, she reported that the ghost had reached out his hand to her as a farewell. She had wrapped her hand inside a cloth before he touched it, but a flame that flared up in that moment left burn marks in this cloth, which, according to Mrs. Wörner, were plain to see.⁹

Although Kerner regretted that he was not able to attend the final departure of the supposed ghost, he considered his collation of witness accounts a unique example of

9 Strange as it seems, burn marks caused by supposed ghosts were not unusual in historical haunting reports. Grabinski (1922) has provided a review on the phenomenon of the "burned-in hand" in hauntings.

how to document and report cases of hauntings. In a letter to Sophie Schwab, he wrote that a “ghost story” had never before been substantiated so well (T. Kerner, 1897, vol. 2: 104). Figure 4 shows Kerner’s bureau in the *Kernerhaus* and the desk at which he wrote many of his publications, including the case study discussed here.



Figure 4: Justinus Kerner’s bureau in the *Kernerhaus* and the desk at which he wrote the report on the prison spook, and numerous other publications. The cupboard in the background is Kerner’s former medicine cabinet (Photo: M. Nahm; printed with kind permission of the *Justinus-Kerner-Verein*).

Kerner’s Interpretation of the Case

In his earlier writings on medical topics, such as his seminal studies of food-borne botulism (e. g. Erbguth, 2004), Kerner had already begun to emphasize observing and documenting facts. In his first book about contaminated sausages, for instance, he justified writing lengthy documentary passages as follows:

Only facts can lead to progress, and only facts exist. Hypotheses pass by, but true observation stands firm forever, useful through all changes of systems, an acquisition for all days to come (Kerner, 1820: 38f).

Similarly, Kerner put much weight on reporting observations and facts in his writings about the night side of nature. For example, his emphasis of the importance of “true

observation" that is not yet spoiled by being tailored for a specific theory can be found again in his treatise on two somnambulant women he treated in his home (Kerner, 1824: V), and in the preface of the journal *Magikon* from the year 1840 (p. IV). The documentation of the prison spook is written in the same spirit, although it is also apparent that Kerner's treatises on anomalistic matters were not as neutrally formulated as he claimed, but tinted with his personal perspective. Nevertheless, Kerner stressed repeatedly, especially in the preface of the work considered here (Kerner, 1836a), that the documentation of the phenomena was his foremost aim in order to establish their objective reality, and to stimulate future investigations into such occurrences. He considered the interpretation of the case a separate and, for his present purpose, negligible topic. Nonetheless, Kerner also did not hesitate to offer his own opinion: He thought it most likely that the cause of the documented disturbances in the Weinsberg prison was a deceased entity. His main argument for this interpretation was that the spook seemed completely independent of Mrs. Eslinger, as exemplified in particular by the nocturnal visits to people and houses unknown to Mrs. Eslinger, which in addition, seemed to take place even without her knowledge. Moreover, Kerner stressed that these "spooky actions at a distance" and the other disturbances occurred while Mrs. Eslinger was fully awake, and not in a trance-like state of whatever kind, as was the case with somnambulant individuals such as the seeress of Prevorst (Kerner, 1829), whom he thought able to perform similar actions via her "nerve spirit", but only while resting in trance.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Kerner remained open to other explanations. In fact, several years later, he deemed it more likely that the prison spook had been of demonic nature (Kerner,

10 In his book about the seeress of Prevorst, Kerner related several instances that involved seemingly inexplicable affections of physical objects that occurred in his home (Kerner, 1829), and he witnessed other instances, for example, with the poet Nikolaus Lenau (1802–1850), who sometimes seemed to slip into a trance-like state (T. Kerner, 1897, vol. 2: 342f). Kerner attributed these effects to their "nerve-spirit", which he believed to become loosened from their bodies during such trance-like states. Similarly, when the spiritualistic practice of table tilting reached Germany in 1853, he experimented successfully with it. He attributed the table movements and raps to the nerve-spirit of the sitters, not to influences of deceased spirits (Kerner, 1853; see also Alvarado et al., 2012). The precise properties of this supposed nerve-spirit were interpreted differently by Romantic and post-Romantic authors, but some agreed that it could provoke physical actions. This was also the opinion of Karl von Reichenbach (1788–1869), who developed his influential concept of "Od" as an all permeating vital force around the middle of the 19th century (Nahm, 2012b). Kerner commented waggishly that Reichenbach's newly invented term Od did not say anything, and thus, at least, could also not say something wrong (Kerner, 1853).

The phrase "spooky actions at a distance" is used with reference to Albert Einstein's famous quote that "physics should represent a reality in time and space, free from spooky actions at a distance" (Born, 1971: 158).

1847b). Kerner also admitted that an as yet unknown factor to be identified in future research might be responsible for the phenomena associated with Mrs. Eslinger. Among the closing words of his book, after referring to the consistent phenomenology of the various haunting reports he presented, he stated:

It takes a peculiarly stubborn and glassy mind to deny that there is an objective reality at the bottom of all these stories, not deceit and illness [...]—regardless of whether one views this objective reality as an earth-bound spirit of a deceased person, or as a different objective reality which is as yet unknown, and for which there is at present no name. But obviously, it is now time that these phenomena of nature are recognized and investigated further by natural scientists (Kerner, 1836a: 304f).

Kerner's Methods of Investigation in Comparison to Modern Approaches to Performing Single Case Studies

In a tribute commemorating the 150th anniversary of Justinus Kerner in 1936, and 100 years after Kerner's publication on the prison spook, the German writer on parapsychological matters Emil Mattiesen called readers' attention back to this investigation (Mattiesen, 1937). He emphasized that Kerner recognized the importance of recording witness reports directly after observations of phenomena that were typically fleeting; and that prior to the development of special scientific research methodologies, "the healthy common sense of a natural born researcher created a work that can even today serve as a prototype for others who have the luck to be able to observe related phenomena" (p. 92).

Now, about 80 years after Mattiesen's appraisal, I will highlight the methods that Kerner used with the support of the prison's principal Karl Heyd in the investigation of the prison spook, and compare them to more contemporary recommendations regarding investigations of hauntings and single case studies. To begin with, Hans Bender (1907–1991) proposed the following methodological approaches for the study of haunting phenomena in his presidential address at the congress of the *Parapsychological Association* in 1969 (Bender, 1969: 86).

1. The questioning of witnesses
2. Written reports of witnesses
3. Reconstruction of the alleged phenomena by the use of photographs and/or film with a view toward controlling the witnesses' statements.
4. Personal observations of the researcher.
5. Taped and filmed records of poltergeist occurrences.
6. Experimental controls such as the sealing of boxes and cupboards containing frequently moved objects.

7. Use of criminological methods to reveal trickery.
8. Attempts to provoke poltergeist occurrences through posthypnotic suggestion.
9. Psychodiagnostic examination of poltergeist agents and witnesses.
10. Analysis of motivation.
11. Laboratory experiments with the agents.

Bender added that the possibility of applying these approaches of investigation must be adjusted to the individual characteristics of the case under examination. If Bender's propositions are applied to Kerner's investigation of the prison spook, it is apparent that the methodological approaches 3 and 5 (*using photographs, tapes, and films*) were simply impossible for Kerner as the required instruments were neither known nor available at his time. Bender's 8th approach (*provocation of haunting occurrences through posthypnotic suggestion*) is rather special and difficult to realize, and in Kerner's case, it was not even necessary because the haunting activities could be observed several times during almost every night, for weeks. Moreover, given the psychological knowledge at his time and the prevailing circumstances of the occurrences, it also appears understandable that Kerner did not pursue approaches 9 and 11 (*psychodiagnostic analyses of the agents and witnesses; laboratory experiments with the agents*). Nevertheless, he examined Mrs. Eslinger's physical and psychological condition regarding a possible pathological nature of her claims as requested by the court. After he observed her and conversed with her for several weeks, he concluded that Mrs. Eslinger was mentally sane, and also did not appear to be attempting deception.

However, regarding approaches 1, 2, and 4 (*questioning of witnesses; written reports of witnesses; personal observations of the researcher*), it is obvious that Kerner made ample use of them. As shown above, Kerner interrogated numerous witnesses of the case in person, and let others be interrogated by other authorities such as Mr. Heyd and several priests. All interrogated witnesses and interrogators related largely congruent reports. Typically, Kerner collected them as written testimonies, and very often, these witnesses ascertained that they were willing to confirm their testimonies under oath. The prison guard, Mr. Mayer, indeed confirmed under oath that the prison and its doors were always securely locked, and that nobody was able to enter the prison without his knowledge. Kerner also instructed Mrs. Leibesberger to write a diary about the strange phenomena during her stay inside the prison, and demanded that additional individuals, if possible with a scientific and educated background, should be included in the investigation. Finally, he collected and ordered all written reports, and he reproduced them truthfully in his publication.¹¹ Moreover, Kerner tried to observe the described phenom-

11 The original accounts of the witness testimonies still exist in the archives of the Criminalsenat

ena in person at the beginning of the case study, and he found that the claims regarding the spook were apparently true—first, in the prison, and then also at home, and together with other family members.

Bender's approach number 6 (*experimental controls such as locking objects into sealed boxes or cupboards*) was not pursued by Kerner, but apparently, the strange occurrences attributed to "Anton" only rarely involved macropsychokinetic incidents. The only incidents of this kind that were reported repeatedly in the prison concern the pulling at the blankets of the prisoners and their ghost-hunting guests, which at times was described as quite violent, and perhaps, bodily touches by the supposed ghost. Apart from that, such occurrences include the moving of the empty chair in the prison cell reported by Mrs. Mayer, the seemingly inexplicable opening of the locks on Mr. Mayer's door and cell doors, and, possibly, the opening and closing of Kerner's stable door when his horse moved into the room in front of the stable during the night. Hence, because macropsychokinetic effects were not prominent in the occurrences he intended to document, Kerner might not have thought of performing deliberate experiments in this regard. Nevertheless, he could, for example, have tried to find out if "Anton" was indeed able to open and close locked doors. Kerner thought that, typically, the prison and the cell doors would in fact remain closed when the ghost entered and left, although it sounded as if they were opened and closed. He thought so because a variety of sounds was produced at the cell windows that obviously could not have been produced by physical means without destroying them, such as raucously rattling or drumming on their glass panes, noises of opening and closing them with utter violence, etc. However, some prisoners reported that they were able to see into the corridor when the cell door seemed to open as "Anton" entered, and the two incidents relating to Mr. Mayer's door and Kerner's own stable door might point to the possibility that the doors did actually open, at least sometimes. Nevertheless, occasional experimental elements were applied in the case study, although they lacked a systematic procedure and do not seem to have been initiated by Kerner. The apparently successful requests by some of the involved persons to let "Anton" visit them at their home could be named here, as well as other attempts to establish the objective nature of the disturbances: On two nights, Mr. Mayer put a cat inside Mrs. Eslinger's prison cell to observe its behavior. On each night, when the apparition entered, the cat tried to escape, jumping up and down along the cell walls, and finally hid tremblingly under a blanket. After the second night, however, the cat refused to eat and eventually died (Kerner, 1836a: 16).

in Esslingen, Germany. Apart from minor and apparently usual editorial changes, these original accounts conform to those printed in Kerner's book (Brüning, 1998).

Regarding Bender's proposal number 7 (*criminological methods to reveal trickery*), Kerner was lucky in that the disturbances occurred, as mentioned, in "a prison inside a prison", and were witnessed by lots of people. Thus, the possibility that the phenomena were staged via fraudulent manipulations was limited from the start, and potential suspicions rested primarily on Mrs. Eslinger. To exclude the possibility that she produced the phenomena herself, the following observational means and methods were applied by Kerner and others:

- As usual in prisons, all cell doors were constantly locked from the outside except when somebody was entering or leaving the cells. Even when visitors stayed the night inside a cell, its door was securely locked from the outside by Mr. Mayer. The doors that led to the Mayers' rooms and the corridor, which was lit by an oil lamp, were also locked.
- The people that were to observe Mrs. Eslinger frequently talked with her in the dark and quite narrow cell (see Figure 2), so that they knew where she was due to acoustic localization. In general, it was easy to tell that she always rested on her bed, which was also confirmed by her constant audible praying during the supposed presence of the apparition. Female witnesses, especially prisoners, even lay next to Mrs. Eslinger in the same bed while she remained unmoved, constantly praying or talking, but even then, the phenomena in the cell took place. Sometimes, frightened prisoners also held Mrs. Eslinger's hands as the disturbances occurred. Moreover, each movement she made could be noticed in the cell because the straw inside the mattress of her bed would produce crackling noises every time she moved.
- Frequently, other female prisoners were promised an easing of their imprisonment conditions if they were able to detect and report indications of fraudulent actions made by Mrs. Eslinger. However, nobody ever reported such indications. On the contrary, all reported that she always lay on her bed, hardly moving even when the most boisterous noises were heard.
- The cell was searched repeatedly for means that might be used to produce the phenomena fraudulently, but nothing was found. For example, when it sounded as if somebody was throwing sand, plaster or other small objects in the cell during the night, no suspicious objects were found in the morning. The straw in Mrs. Eslinger's mattress was frequently changed to exclude the possibility that she hid objects or devices in there. And apart from the mattresses, there were no other possibilities to hide objects in her cell.
- As described in the case summary, four people who followed Kerner's request to examine the phenomena stayed in the prison on the night of December 27, 1836. Whilst Mr. Kapff and Mr. Duttenhofer spent the night in Mrs. Eslinger's cell, Mr. Stockmayer and Mr. Wagner acted as guards in the male prisoners' cell, where

they could observe the corridor leading to Mrs. Eslinger's cell and also the male prisoners. Nevertheless, the usual phenomena commenced without the four men noticing even the slightest hint of cheating by any of the prisoners.

- To exclude the possibility that potential luminous phenomena were produced by fraudulent means, some observers made particularly sure that no sources of light were present inside the cell when they entered it to stay the night in there. Kerner and Dr. Seyffer even covered the two windows in the cell walls with cloth to prevent light from entering; and Kerner, in particular, made sure that certain luminous observations could not have been caused by the light of the moon that still might have shone through the small window in the cell roof. He excluded this possibility because the moon was simply not shining on certain disputed occasions, and when it shone, it projected a quite different light into the cell that included a projection of the shadow of this window's bars.
- Some of the observers, such as Prof. Kapff and Dr. Seyffer, brought their own lights with them to be able to illuminate the cell on given occasions. However, Kapff reported that when he lit his light while the apparition was supposed to be in the cell, they saw nothing unusual. Likewise, when Mr. Mayer tried to identify the reason for the nocturnal disturbances in his prison, he frequently used a light to trace the origin of the noises. However, he never saw or found anything that might have caused the phenomena, but was "bantered a hundred times" (Kerner, 1836a: XXXVIII).
- To test whether the rattling noises from the cell windows' panes and bars could be reproduced with human force, several individuals tried to re-enact these sounds. All failed. Even when six people shook the iron bars, they were not able to produce a sound. Yet, the rattling noises seemingly produced by the spook with the window bars were utterly raucous at times.

Finally, it should be mentioned that Kerner also considered the possible motivation for Mrs. Eslinger to produce fraudulent haunting phenomena (approach 10 proposed by Bender, *analysis of motivation*). After becoming acquainted with her for several weeks, Kerner stated that she claimed that "Anton" had already tortured her at home before she was sent to prison, which one of her daughters confirmed to Kerner. Moreover, it was obvious to Kerner that she received no benefits from the alleged and witnessed phenomena. In fact, because she hardly ate or slept for several months, she became increasingly emaciated. Kerner, nevertheless, was well aware that Mrs. Eslinger had tried to deceive others by drawing them into a fake treasure hunt, and therefore possessed criminal tendencies. He thus stressed that everything she said must be regarded with caution, and that an opinion about the nature of the reported phenomena must rather be based on the testimonies of the numerous other witnesses, and not on her own claims (Kerner, 1836a: XIX; 1847a, b).

Regarding a more general scientific approach to performing single case studies, Heiligenmann (1989) proposed four main stages:

1. Performing field studies to collect material.
2. Processing the obtained information to create a case record.
3. Analyzing and interpreting the case record.
4. Making a comparison with related cases.

It is apparent without going into details that Kerner followed these main stages in his investigation and publication of the case. Basically, the same applies to the research stages for educational case studies outlined by Bassey (1999):

1. Identifying the research as an issue, problem or hypothesis.
2. Asking research questions and drawing up ethical guidelines.
3. Collecting and storing data.
4. Generating and testing analytical statements.
5. Interpreting or explaining the analytical statements.
6. Deciding on the outcome and writing the case report.
7. Finishing and publishing.

However, as the structural outline of Kerner's book presented at the beginning of the overview section of this chapter shows, he was comparably sparing with regard to analyzing and interpreting the case record. Moreover, the list provided by Bassey (1999) contains a mention of ethical guidelines. In this respect, it remains unclear whether Kerner followed current research principles. Aiming at establishing the reality of the witnessed occurrences, he was well aware that presenting anonymous witness accounts would most likely undermine their credibility (Kerner, 1840). Hence, he published the names, ages, and domiciles of all relevant witnesses included in his case report. But especially regarding the prisoners, it remains doubtful whether he always asked for written consent to do so. As it will become apparent below, the prison spook was already vividly disputed before Kerner's book was published, and not every witness might have been pleased to be personally identifiable in the spook report.¹²

12 Perhaps this applied to Kerner's brother Karl, who held respectable positions in the political scene in Württemberg, and enjoyed an impeccable reputation. The two brothers were very close to each other and it appears peculiar that Karl's spook testimonies were not included in Justinus' book.

Limitations of Kerner's Investigation

The section about the research and documentation methods applied by Kerner demonstrates that he proceeded in a comparably thorough manner. Nevertheless, he could have improved his investigation in several respects. As mentioned already, an experimental aspect was almost completely lacking, and a systematic research plan seems to have been absent. In fact, this was noted even before Kerner's book was published. According to Kerner, the witnesses of the spook were criticized because they were regarded as being too passive. For example, it was suggested that they should have hit the luminous appearances and the potential sources of noises with sticks, should have lit a light more often, should have used guards, and should have stayed constantly awake during the entire night they spent inside the cell. However, as described before, Kerner's witnesses did make use of lights and guards on occasion, but nonetheless, no indications of fraud were discovered. Moreover, Kerner had already realized what parapsychologists confirmed much later after accumulating the same experiences over and over again: Spook and poltergeist phenomena are inherently evasive and elusive, and the more rigid a method of investigation becomes, the more difficult it becomes to control and document their occurrence. Their tendency to escape rigorous documentation through, for example, recording devices seems so characteristic that it has become an integral part of contemporary theories concerned with hauntings (Lucadou, 1995; Lucadou & Zahradnik, 2004; see also Bauer, 1989/1990). As Kerner expressed it:

Such phenomena are phenomena of the night life of nature, and whoever sets out to seek them in sunlight, or with the lantern, will never find them. [...] I am convinced that, if a company of soldiers were stationed in the prison building and its corridors (which an officer offered to do), all that swooshing, shaking, glowing, etc. would certainly not have occurred. But not because [Mrs. Eslinger] would have been hindered in continuing with her faked spook, [...] but because a phenomenon that belongs to the night life of nature manifests only very rarely in its waking day life (Kerner, 1836a: XXXVf).¹³

13 Apart from his own experiences, Kerner's opinion might have been influenced by respective statements of Mrs. Eslinger (Kerner, 1836a: 74), the seeress of Prevorst (Kerner, 1829) and others, but also by what was reported about massive poltergeist phenomena that occurred in the monastery of Maulbronn in 1659–1660. When Kerner was a child, his family lived in facilities of this monastery from 1795–1799. In autumn 1659, the then government stationed a company of soldiers inside the monastery to trace the origins of the disturbances. But according to the documents of the investigation, they were unable to find them – just like the civil guards before them. Nevertheless, some of the soldiers did observe inexplicable phenomena, and thus, at least, bore testimonies to the haunting (see the second haunting case in Kerner, 1834a, and pp. 128–130 in Kerner, 2005/1849).

However, Kerner's report raises the impression that a more systematic approach of investigation would indeed have been possible, especially as "Anton" seemed unusually reliable in appearing almost every night, often repeatedly, and in reacting positively to requests of witnesses. The impression that the phenomena were somewhat opportunistically documented in the course of their occurrence is mirrored in the layout of the book's text, which is not visually structured apart from being divided into the preface and the main text. It contains no further divisions into chapters and subsections. Important background information, e.g. on the controls applied, is scattered loosely throughout the text, and it is difficult to keep track of it.

Moreover, especially from today's perspective, most of the witness reports are unduly short and lack detail. Apparently, the witnesses were usually only asked to report their observations, and specific interviews to carve out the reasons exactly why their observations could not be explained by normal means were barely performed. Also, no detailed comparison of the witness reports appears to have been made. On three occasions, slightly different dates were reported for a particular occurrence. One of these inconsistencies was based on a misunderstanding, and it was later corrected by Kerner (1837b). It seems likely that the other two inconsistencies could also have been solved easily upon follow-up inquiries.¹⁴ The interrogation of another witness, who stayed in the prison cell with Mrs. Eslinger for eight weeks and who was reported to have observed a particularly large number of spook phenomena, was supposed to be conducted "later" because she had already been discharged from the prison (Kerner, 1836a: 28). However, her testimony was not included in the book, and it was also not mentioned by Kerner in later publications—had the interrogation ever been performed? In addition, Kerner related very little information about the prisoners and witnesses apart from their names, ages, domiciles, and, sometimes, their professions. The readers do not even learn whether all prisoners who stayed in the prison during the time Mrs. Eslinger was there were interviewed, although it seems quite likely from reading between the lines. Also, the descriptions of the prison and the cells are only scant, and make it difficult for readers to imagine the structural design of the building and its cells (but see Figure 2).

In general, Kerner's treatise raises the impression that it was compiled somewhat hastily. This might in part be due to his attempt to counter negative appraisals of his investigation as soon as possible, and to convince the Ministry of Justice in Stuttgart of the integrity of his investigation (see below and Kerner's letters to Sophie Schwab, the sister-in-law of the Minister of Justice, in T. Kerner, 1897). Moreover, the described

14 Two different witnesses referred to the same occurrence on different, but neighboring days (Kerner, 1836a: 2 and 34f, 54 and 58).

limitations might also be due to time constraints because of the manifold other occupations Kerner pursued. In addition to following a busy life as district physician, which included the care of a seemingly possessed woman in his home whose condition made considerable demands on his time (Geiger, 1905), he was also working on other literary and medical/parapsychological treatises, corresponding at length, and, together with his wife, playing host to scores of guests in his home, the *Kernerhaus*.

Technically, Kerner's main focus during the investigation lay on collecting witness reports to establish the reality of the phenomena, and he put less weight on documenting and describing the accompanying circumstances of the spook. This approach seems characteristic for early investigations of hauntings, for which Kerner's case study can be regarded as an elaborate prototype. It was only later that psychological, psychodiagnostic, and psychotherapeutic aspects of hauntings and potential focus persons were increasingly taken into account, especially in the tradition of Hans Bender and other researchers of the frontier areas of psychology in Freiburg, Germany (Mayer & Schetsche, 2019). Nevertheless, Kerner's investigation also already entailed a psychotherapeutic dimension. First, he ascertained that Mrs. Eslinger was not insane and apparently not cheating, but he acknowledged that she suffered from remarkable extraordinary experiences. Later, when it seemed apparent that "Anton" was not willing to leave her unless she fulfilled his wish to pray with him at a predetermined location, which she constantly refused to do, Kerner urged her to give it a try. Judging from a similar case in which he was involved previously (Kerner, 1834b; see also Peter, 2011 and especially Gehrts, 1966a), he thought that she might indeed get rid of "Anton" if she gave in to him—and he proved to be right.

Reactions to Kerner's Investigation of the Prison Spook

Reactions to the Prison Spook Before Kerner's Book was Published

Even before the book about the prison spook was published, Kerner and members of the Weinsberg court were drawn into fierce controversies about the phenomena associated with Mrs. Eslinger, and about how to deal with them. Some of these controversies were carried out away from public view, and some of them in the printed media. To begin with, rumors about the ghostly activities inside the Weinsberg prison reached the public during the time that Mrs. Eslinger was staying there. Hence, when she moved to Heilbronn after her release from the prison in January 1836, she was beset by people who desired to know more about "Anton" and the prison spook, and who approached her for fortune telling and for finding lost treasures, etc. According to Kerner, she then turned to creating fantasies, hoping to satisfy these people and to be left in peace again. In addition, people whom she refused to answer felt rejected, and started to circulate defaming

fabrications about her in revenge; others also considered her a witch (Kerner, 1836a: XLIIIff; Geiger, 1905). All this resulted in a controversial jumble of stories that rendered it impossible for uninvolved people to form a well-founded opinion of the case.

Alarmed by the rumors about Mrs. Eslinger and the spook that had also reached the capital of Württemberg, Stuttgart, the Minister of Justice demanded an exact report from Heyd, the judge, about what had happened inside the prison on February 1, 1836. A few days later, the latter duly replied, and stressed that the possibility of a fraudulent production of the phenomena must be excluded (Brüning, 1998). Nevertheless, the priest and theologian Johann Wirth (1810–1879) claimed that Mrs. Eslinger had been caught cheating, and that the phenomena reported could easily be explained by fraud perpetrated by Mrs. Eslinger and self-delusion of the witnesses (Wirth, 1836a). Wirth was working on a book manuscript in which he expounded on why states of somnambulism must be regarded as pathological and inferior to waking consciousness, and why the existence of ghosts must be regarded impossible. However, he was allowed to stay in the Weinsberg prison after Kerner desired that other educated individuals should participate in witnessing the phenomena, and Wirth did so on the night from December 28 to 29, together with Dr. Sicherer and Mr. Fraas (Wirth, 1836a; Kerner, 1842). Wirth came to a negative appraisal of the phenomena he observed, but he did not substantiate his opinion with facts.¹⁵ As a response to the publication of Wirth's book in July 1836, an anonymously written note in a Swabian newspaper stated that the Weinsberg court was willing to confirm the truth of the reported phenomena at any time upon request (Anonymous, 1836a). The author of this note was most likely Kerner (Brüning, 1998). However, the members of the Ministry of Justice in Stuttgart became increasingly upset by the developments surrounding this case, and strictly forbade the members of the Weinsberg court to respond to any inquiries, accusing them of transgressing their competences by participating in an investigation of alleged hauntings. The latter, however, strongly opposed this appraisal, stressing that such investigations were indispens-

15 The only substantial claim of Wirth consists in his assertion that he found sand inside the prison cell in the morning, close to the bed of Mrs. Eslinger, in "small heaps like they form when thrown by hand" (Wirth, 1936a: 297). Apparently, he assumed that the sand was somehow smuggled into the cell by Mrs. Eslinger, and that she then threw it on the floor next to her where it remained in heaps which she did not even destroy or remove. Moreover, he did not explain how Mrs. Eslinger might have smuggled the supposed sand into her cell, or how she was provided with it. In fact, nobody else had ever found sand in noteworthy amounts during the night or when the cell was searched in the morning, let alone plaster, beans, stones, or pellets, as indicated by the manifold noises of objects being thrown perceived by the spook witnesses. Also Sicherer asserted that there was no sand in the cell apart from traces attributed to the cleaning of the cell with sand (Kerner, 1836a: 130). Consequently, Kerner (1842) stated that Wirth's claim was a simple fabrication.

able with regard to judging Mrs. Eslinger and her crime, and for the security of the prison (indeed, unexplained sounds of opening and closing doors, gun shots, house-shaking blows, and of movements in locked corridors are not supposed to occur inside a secure prison). However, Heyd received an unmistakable order to stay silent in public. Wirth, on the other hand, claimed in a reply to Kerner's note that it was already widely known among the population of Weinsberg that Mrs. Eslinger had cheated, and how she did it (Wirth, 1836b). Yet, when the supposed witnesses of her cheating were interrogated by members of the Weinsberg court, their claims were found to be untrue, as predicted by Kerner (Brüning, 1998).

Similarly, when another critique of Kerner's investigation was published in June 1836, in which the author also advanced the notion that the phenomena were produced fraudulently (Anonymous, 1836b), Kerner defended his investigation and the observations made, and announced the publication of his forthcoming book (Kerner, 1836b). However, after several weeks, another newspaper article claimed that the phenomena produced by Mrs. Eslinger had been exposed as fake, and that the book announced by Kerner was about to be retracted. In response, the latter launched a campaign in numerous newspapers in September 1836, publishing a message in which he rejected the claims of fakery again, and confirmed that his book was indeed to be published soon (e.g., Anonymous, 1836c). Nevertheless, Kerner expected that negative reactions and accusations would increase further after the publication of his report. In a private letter, he complained that the whole affair was already seriously affecting his health (T. Kerner, 1897). On the other hand, Kerner eagerly awaited the publication of his book, which seemed to be held back by the authorities in Stuttgart (Brüning, 1998). He feared that claims such as those advanced by Wirth, which Kerner considered "dastardly claptrap" and "malicious slugging", would increasingly shape public opinion regarding his investigation before his book was available. In August 1836, he asked his publisher to advance its publication (Schiller, 1934), and around the middle of September, it was finally published.

Reactions to the Prison Spook After the Publication of Kerner's book

As anticipated by Kerner, further negative appraisals of his investigation were indeed issued after his book was available, both in numerous newspapers and in books. For example, another theologian, Heinrich Paulus (1761–1851), who also deemed the existence of ghosts as allegedly depicted in Kerner's book impossible, composed a polemical and negative review (Paulus, 1836). Like Wirth, he argued that Mrs. Eslinger must be a fraud, and he assumed that she produced the mysterious voices of "Anton" via ventriloquism. Regarding the instances in which the opening of prison doors, etc., were reported, and for the alleged spook actions at a distance from the prison in other houses,

he assumed that Mrs. Eslinger had helpers, and that the less physical spook experiences were the result of self-deception of the witnesses. Similarly, Kuno zu Rantzau (1805–1882) attributed all reported phenomena to purposeful deception and self-delusion, and he accused Kerner of deliberately leading the public back into darkness and superstitious beliefs by blinding them with alleged facts, blocking scientific progress and true Christian belief (Rantzau, 1836). It is conspicuous, however, that the authors of these types of critiques did not consider the details of the witness reports, such as the blows that seemed to shake the entire prison, the violent rattling on the windows, or certain observations in the homes of the witnesses, which, according to numerous testimonies, could not have been produced by human means.

Nevertheless, more benevolent appraisals of Kerner's report were published as well. After careful pondering of the details and the circumstances of the reported phenomena, Strauss (1836), Menzel (1836), and Anonymous (1837a) concluded that something unusual, but objective, must indeed have taken place in the prison and elsewhere. The last two of these authors, however, preferred an energetic explanation of the phenomena to a spiritualistic explanation, and Strauss merely recommended further studies. Other even more positive reactions were published for example by Anonymous (1836d) and Nürnberger (1836), and in Kerner's own journal *Blätter aus Prevorst*, by Baader (1837) and Meyer (1837). Duttenhofer contributed a report about how he was also visited once by "Anton" in Heilbronn; his report is printed in Kerner (1837a). Moreover, Baron von Hügel, Megnin, Stockmayer, Fraas, Kapff, Sicherer, and Duttenhofer published a joint statement in several newspapers (e.g., Hügel et al., 1837) in response to yet another article in which Kerner was accused of purposefully deceiving the public. In their reply, the authors stressed that the reports contained in Kerner's book conform to the truth, and that Kerner provided an important contribution to the scientific documentation of haunting phenomena, whilst leaving it to the readers to interpret the case. Even friends of Kerner, who did not participate in the investigation and did not share his opinions regarding the prison spook, felt obliged to publicly defend his personal integrity (Rümelin, 1836). Nevertheless, fabricated claims continued to be published. For example, in early 1837, several newspapers printed a note in which it was claimed that a healer with whom Kerner collaborated in treating seemingly possessed patients (Kerner, 1834b, 1836c; see also Gehrts, 1963/2015) had been arrested, and that he admitted that the prison spook was a hoax (e.g., Anonymous, 1837b). This was, however, not true (Gehrts, 1963/2015).

As for himself, Kerner largely abstained from further public discussions after the publication of his book. He only wrote in his own journals, presenting either supplementary information written by other authors, or briefly stressing that especially the

haunting phenomena at a distance could not have been produced by fraudulent means (Kerner, 1837a, b, 1842, 1847a, b).¹⁶ In particular, Kerner left it to a friend of his, the priest Nikolaus Gerber (1796–1861), to write a detailed rebuttal of the claims advanced by Wirth and others in the latter’s voluminous book *Das Nachtgebiet der Natur* [*The night domain of nature*] (Gerber, 1840; the relevant book excerpt was reprinted in Kerner, 1842).¹⁷ Throughout the years, several other authors commented on the prison spook. Some provided negative, some positive appraisals; and Kerner stressed the significance of his investigation again in his publication about table tilting (Kerner, 1853).¹⁸ Nevertheless, around the middle of the 19th century, the case seemed to have been abandoned by the public interest.

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- 16 Kerner often reasoned about how to deal with critique and accusations regarding his work, especially since his publication about the seeress of Prevorst (Kerner, 1829). He was not keen to become involved in newspaper arguments that would chiefly “entertain the public” (Fröschle, 1976). Regarding the prison spook affair, he even stated that he would not read newspaper articles about him any more (Geiger, 1905). Also, a close friend of Kerner, Johann Friedrich von Meyer (1872–1849), who was a driving force in publishing Kerner’s journals *Blätter aus Prevorst* and *Magikon*, recommended simply staying silent, or at best, publishing short and concise replies to rectify fabrications (Fröschle, 1976).
- 17 Kerner had known Gerber a long time, but the friendship deepened during their involvement in another case that seemed to comprise poltergeist and possession-type phenomena (Kerner, 1834b; see also Peter, 2011, and especially Gehrts, 1966a, 1966b/2015). Gerber’s book (1840) is a noteworthy treatise of about 650 pages. Like Kerner, Gerber approached subjects belonging to the night side of nature from a rationalistic perspective, and he urged scientists to study them—as exemplified by the following statement that he directed against the notion that the study of ghosts would throw humanity back into the darkness from before the age of Enlightenment (Gerber, 1840: 552): “What an abject thing would our Enlightenment be, if the first ghost who would appear indisputably would bring it to an end and chase it away?” Gerber already stressed that haunting phenomena resembled dream-like activities and the behavior of sleepwalkers. He thus assumed that these phenomena were caused by deceased spirits who were not fully aware of their condition, but had become stuck in a more or less dull, dream-like state, sometimes exerting repetitive actions that followed fixed ideas.
- 18 For example, Johann Friedrich von Meyer visited Weinsberg in 1838. He inspected the prison and its cells, and interviewed Justinus Kerner, Mr. Heyd, Dr. Sicherer, Mrs. Mayer, and her niece regarding their observations; and he found their accounts to be trustworthy (Meyer, 1838). Similarly, Karl Sederholm from Moscow visited Weinsberg and its prison, and he interviewed Kerner, Mr. Heyd, Mrs. Mayer’s niece, Mr. Fraas, Mr. Duttenhofer, and Prof. Kapff. He was especially impressed by Prof. Kapff’s account, who insisted that a fraudulent production of the phenomena must be excluded, but who preferred an “electro-magnetic” explanation to the spiritualistic view. Sederholm’s account was printed in Kerner (1842). Other negative appraisals were advanced by Reichlin-Meldegg (1837–1838) and Fischer (1839) who, like most other critical authors, considered Mrs. Eslinger a fraud, and attributed the phenomena that occurred at a distance from her to self-deception.

The Reception of the Prison Spook Since 1900

As other chapters in the present book demonstrate (Evrard, 2019; Mayer, 2019), the imbroglions and accusations Kerner experienced are still characteristic for case studies into anomalous phenomena such as hauntings. As soon as the public and the media participate in judging upon the reported phenomena, and upon the reliability of witnesses as well as of researchers, it is still likely that numerous controversial opinions will be advanced, which are often not well-founded and include (fictitious?) reports of confessions, and even (false?) confessions of focus persons.

From today's perspective, however, it appears peculiar that practically all critical commentators of Kerner's book believed in the reality of phenomena such as telepathy and clairvoyance. In their opinions, the ample studies and publications in the field of somnambulism and animal magnetism had sufficiently proven their reality.¹⁹ Rather, the main concern of Kerner's critics was that he appeared to promote a world view in which the existence of ghosts was taken for granted. Indeed, the authors who participated in discussing Kerner's spook report were predominantly theologically motivated or spiritually interested. Natural scientists seemed to ignore it entirely. In this respect, the situation has now changed. Throughout the last century, apparent parapsychological phenomena have been dealt with in scientifically rather than theologically orientated circles, as exemplified by numerous organizations and institutions with a focus on assessing anomalistic phenomena, including organizations of so-called skeptics.

Consequently, Kerner's spook report continued to be mentioned occasionally but regularly in Germany, but chiefly by authors concerned with parapsychological matters. For example, since around the turn of the 19th century, Kaindl (1910), Peter (1912), Grabinski (1922), Illig (1924), Mattiesen (1925, 1926), and Straumann (1928) have referred to it in various contexts. Whilst these authors usually mentioned the book only casually and briefly among numerous other spook reports, others explicitly highlighted the exceptional quality of Kerner's collection of witness testimonies. For instance, Max Rahn (1901), editor of a noted German journal concerned with spiritualistic matters, reprinted the entire book text in his journal, split into numerous parts throughout the volumes of 1901 and 1902. Rahn regarded Kerner as the "Darwin of occult psychology", and his aim was to save Kerner's treatise, which had apparently become quite rare, from

19 The existence of parapsychological phenomena was widely accepted during the first part of the 19th century in Germany—at least among people who were familiar with the literature about animal magnetism and somnambulism. This is exemplified by a famous quote from the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who stated: "Whoever at the present time doubts the facts of animal magnetism and its clairvoyance should be called not a sceptic but an ignoramus" (Schopenhauer, 1974/1851: 229).

oblivion. Decades later, Emil Mattiesen (1937, 1936–1939, vol. 3: 43–52) brought its contents to a wider audience, as well as the pioneering role that Kerner played as a researcher of psychic phenomena in general. Similarly, Fanny Moser (1980/1950: 292–295) stressed the pioneering role of Kerner in the prison spook investigation, and the importance of the witness reports collected by him, in her renowned treatise about poltergeist hauntings. Several years later again, Eberhard Bauer (1989/1990) highlighted the significance of Kerner’s investigation once more, as it still seemed that it had not caught the attention of the next generation of parapsychologists and students of Kerner (see also Bauer, 2010; Lucadou, 1995; Mayer & Bauer, 2015; Nahm, 2009). As described in the beginning of this text, explicit references to the prison spook in Weinsberg and its significance are practically absent from the English literature. Apart from renewed editions of Crowe’s *Night Side of Nature*, rare exceptions are represented by Kaindl (1908) or by Puhle & Parker (2004).

Nevertheless, Kerner’s prison spook report always constituted an irritating treatise that was apparently difficult to deal with, also in Germany. According to Kerner’s first biographer, it was the most assailed of his publications during his lifetime (Reinhard, 1862). But also in the years that followed, it was the book that received the least attention among Kerner’s major works. It remains among the very few texts by Kerner that have never been reprinted. Even in the circles that sympathize with Kerner’s lifework, the members of which usually focus on his literary and medical achievements and impulses, it has hardly received any attention. An illustrative example is represented by the only fully fledged biography of Justinus Kerner available, written by the neurophysiologist Otto-Joachim Grüsser (1987). The author described numerous stations in Kerner’s life and his works in meticulous detail, and he also introduced four treatises of Kerner’s quintet of major publications concerning personally witnessed experiences pertaining to the night side of nature (Kerner, 1824, 1829, 1834b, 1836c). Yet, writing from the perspective of a modern physician, Grüsser dismissed Kerner’s psychical and spiritual interpretations of these case studies, and the field of parapsychology as a whole (but obviously, without being acquainted with it). Most conspicuously, however, Grüsser disregarded Kerner’s fifth work of this quintet, the book on the prison spook, almost completely. Although Kerner’s dealing with this case constituted an important and troublesome episode of his life, Grüsser only mentioned it casually on three occasions. In addition, he related erroneous and misleading information about it in all three instances, which suggests that he was not really familiar with its content—in contrast to the content of numerous other works of Kerner, which he apparently knew very well.²⁰

20 On the first occasion, Grüsser (1987: 218) listed Kerner’s report on the prison spook in a footnote as one example among several others that would show how his writings on parapsy-

Conclusion

Since 1836, the little town of Weinsberg, towered over by beautiful castle ruins that Kerner managed to save and restore, has changed a lot. In former times, Weinsberg was known as a Swabian idyll that attracted countless travelers and visitors with a Romantic inclination from near and far, who arrived in carriages, on horses, and by foot, aiming to visit the *Kernerhaus* and its inhabitants. Today, Weinsberg has become a small, but still attractive city of about 12,000 inhabitants. Yet, its name is chiefly known in Germany from the radio traffic service, owing to the motorway crossing that now embraces Weinsberg's vineyards and gentle hills. The former prison building in which Mrs. Eslinger stayed (Figure 5) was demolished in the late 1990s and replaced by a new edifice.

Despite all these changes, the castle ruins and the *Kernerhaus* have stood the test of time. The latter has been turned into a lovely museum depicting the life of Justinus Kerner and his family, and the time that the seeress of Prevorst stayed in this house. Likewise, numerous aspects of Kerner's work have survived, including parapsychological aspects. For example, Emil Mattiesen stressed that Kerner's investigation into the prison spook belonged to the best authenticated case studies that he was aware of. He reasoned that it cannot be dismissed simply because the occurrences described therein occurred a long time ago—"as if healthy senses, sober reasoning, memory of just occurred events,

chological matters increasingly consisted of proliferating fantasy and uncritical speculations, whereas empirical observations had become a negligibility. This, however, clearly does not apply to the present treatise, which largely consists of witness testimonies. On the second occasion, Grüsser (p. 248f) tried to find an answer to the question of whether Kerner's wife Friederike also believed in ghosts. He mused that Kerner did not allow her to spend a night in the Weinsberg prison after she uttered the wish to do so, because he might have feared that Friederike, possibly being a better observer than her husband, would criticize his belief in the prison spook and in ghosts. Grüsser then referred to an inappropriate text passage of Kerner's book to support his notion. Kerner, however, stated that he simply feared for Friederike's health which was known to be delicate. Also, he had already taken her into the prison on October 18, 1835, from 10 p.m. until midnight. Both of them witnessed the characteristic acoustic haunting phenomena. Moreover, judging from other text passages of Kerner's testimonies, especially those regarding "Anton's" later visits to their home, it seems quite likely that Friederike shared her husband's belief in ghosts, and especially in the reality of the spook phenomena. Similarly, in the context of the seeress of Prevorst, Kerner explicitly stated that both of them believed in ghosts (Straumann, 1928). On the third occasion, Grüsser (p. 252) stated that Kerner's son Theobald, whose narrations Grüsser generally considered unreliable (p. 162), spent two nights inside the Weinsberg prison, and that Theobald observed how the bars of the cell window were bent by the spook under "moaning and groaning" noises. However, Theobald spent only one night in the prison, none of the 50 spook witnesses ever reported that window bars bent, and nobody ever reported "moaning and groaning" noises. For other critiques of Grüsser's treatment of parapsychology and Kerner's activities in this field of research see Bauer (1989/1990, 2010) and Gehrts (1989b/2015, 1989c).



Figure 5: The district prison in which Mrs. Eslinger stayed in 1835/1836 was located on the first floor of the large house in the front. The picture was taken around 1935. It shows the west face of the building and a small part of its south face (compare Figure 2; reprinted with kind permission of the *Archiv Stadt Weinsberg*). The five northernmost windows of the first floor belonged to the apartment in which the prison guard and his family lived. The building was demolished in the late 1990s and replaced by a new edifice. The *Kernerhaus* is located 200m east of the church in the background.

and truthful accurateness of witnesses' testimonies didn't exist in days prior to ours" (Mattiesen, 1936–1939, vol. 3: 40; see also Mattiesen, 1937). Judging upon the number of witness reports, this appraisal is valid even today. Notwithstanding methodological limitations, Kerner's spook document remains a pioneering milestone of early studies into haunting phenomena. Sweeping repudiations and non-considerations such as Grüsser's (1987) fail to recognize the significance of Kerner's studies into phenomena of the night side of nature. Rather, as Bauer (1989/1990) dryly remarked: They only highlight how little the reception problem concerning such kinds of phenomena has changed since the days of Justinus Kerner.

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THE CASE HISTORY AS AN EXEMPLAR

THE RECURRENT APPARITIONS OF EMÉLIE SAGÉE

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[R]esearch in parapsychology is very similar to research in any other subject, whether literary, historical, or scientific ... [M]uch of its fascination lies in attention to detail – following up every trail, however unpromising – and [...] much of its satisfaction comes either when a long-shot pays off or when a painstaking assembly of fine detail leads to the resolution of a point at issue. Indeed, research in parapsychology is akin to research in criminology and forensic medicine.

(Denys Parsons: „Detective work in parapsychology“, 1985: 599)

In the human sciences a variety of cases have been of great importance for the development of concepts and theories about particular phenomena or processes. There are many examples of this in psychology and psychiatry, where the construction of ideas about the subconscious mind, dissociation, and hysteria, for example, has depended on observations and interpretations of the phenomena of clinical cases such as those of Félicité X., Blanche Wittmann, and Anna O. (Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970). As stated by historian of psychiatry Mark Micale (1993), cases “allow us to see the ways in which particular medical theories have emerged from specific clinical situations” (p. 72). And Mannebach (1996: 198) mentions the significant role of good case studies for the ontology of a knowledge domain and emphasizes the value of casuistry as method for acquiring and consolidating knowledge (“Kasuistik als Erkenntnismethode”).

Similarly, the literature of psychical research is full of specific accounts of phenomena such as telepathy, apparitions, and poltergeists, as well as accounts of the performance of specific somnambulists, mediums, and psychics that have become exemplars of particular type of manifestations. Examples of the first are some of the cases reported in classical books such as *Saducismus Triumphatus* (Glanvil, 1682), and *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886), which are still being discussed in the contemporary literature, and which illustrate how cases can be used to defend particular world-views and theoretical constructs. Some studies have suggested that the performances of specific mediums (which, like clinical cases, may be considered to be cases of recurrent phenomena) have provided the means to defend conceptual perspectives of different

sorts such as ideas of psychic forces (Alvarado, 1993), and the concept and functioning of the subconscious mind (Shamdasani, 1994). The cases are more than raw data, they are the means by which some conceptual paradigms are constructed and maintained, particularly when many authors give them the status of exemplars through repeated argument and citation.

The present paper centers around descriptions of an unusual phenomenon, a case of recurrent apparitions of a living individual first reported in 1860.¹ The case in question consisted of apparitions of a young school teacher named Emélie Sagée. In addition to presenting a reprint of the original report and commenting on its authenticity and evidential value, we will show how the case was used by several writers to support ideas of subtle bodies assumed to explain apparitions of the living, thus illustrating some aspects of the role of cases to develop and maintain belief in particular theoretical constructs.

Nineteenth-Century Apparitions of the Living

While cases of apparitions of the living were popularized by the work of the London-based Society for Psychical Research (SPR, e. g., Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886), there were discussions of these cases before the Society was founded. Leaving aside cases from antiquity (Tacitus, 1876: 189), and from other time periods (Baxter, 1691: 147–151), a variety of pre-SPR nineteenth-century authors discussed apparitions of the living. Examples of these authors included Brittan (1864), Crowe (1848), Harrison (1879), Jung-Stilling (1808/1851), Kardec (1863), Owen (1860a), and Perty (1861, 1872, 1877).²

Some of the discussions took place in the context of speculations about spirits or subtle bodies coming from antiquity (Mead, 1919; Poortman, 1954/1978). One nineteenth-century author referred to cases suggesting that the experiencers “have parted with what we may call a spiritual portion of itself [...] which portion, moving off without the usual

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- 1 Recurrent apparitions are one of the rarest forms of apparitions of the living. Most apparitions of the living are “crisis” cases in which the person represented by the apparition is close to death, sick, or involved in an accident or a highly stressful situation when a second party perceives them. Other less common cases are: “arrival” apparitions in which someone’s image precedes them in getting to a place; apparitions of a person before they die; and “experimental” apparitions in which someone has tried to appear at will, and the bilocations of saints or of individuals in religious contexts. A few of these apparitions seem to involve an out-of-body experience of the person represented by the vision, but most cases do not involve a conscious experience, or a recollection of the event (for examples of cases see Alvarado, 2003; Evans, 2004; Flammarion, 1922; Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886; Thurston, 1952).
 - 2 For discussions of selected aspects of nineteenth-century ideas of the projection of spirits and doubles from the physical body see Alvarado (2005) and Deveney (1997).

means of locomotion, might make itself perceptible, at a certain distance, to another person” (Owen, 1860a: 347–348). Brittan (1864) said that these apparitions occurred mainly in states of rest, illness and internal reverie, when “it would seem that the spirit, in some potential sense, leaves the body while it wanders in distant places, or is possibly intrmitted to other worlds” (pp. 462–463). Others have referred to subtle bodies or vital principles in addition to the spirit (e. g., D’Assier, 1887; Jung-Stilling, 1808/1851; Kardec, 1863; Kerner, 1829/1845).

The Sagée Case

The case was published by social reformer and spiritualist Robert Dale Owen in his well-known book *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860a), which attracted much attention at the time.³ The purpose of the book was to present a variety of phenomena, such as dreams, apparitions, and poltergeists, suggestive of “interferences from another world,” phenomena that “appear in groups, and lend themselves, like all other natural phenomena, to classification” (p. 18). Owen’s account, which was second-hand, reads as follows:

WHY A LIVONIAN SCHOOL-TEACHER LOST HER SITUATION

Habitual Apparition of a Living Person

There existed in the year 1845, and is still continued, in Livonia, about thirty-six miles from Riga and a mile and a half from the small town of Wolmar, an institution of high repute for the education of young ladies, entitled the Pensionat of Neuwelcke.⁴ [...]

There were, in that year, forty-two young ladies residing there as boarders, chiefly daughters of noble Livonian families; among them, Mademoiselle Julie, second daughter of the Baron de Guldenstubbé,⁵ then thirteen years of age.

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- 3 By the time the book was published Owen had been active in politics for many years and had been both the American ambassador to Naples and a member of Congress. There were many reviews of this book in the general literature of the time (e. g., Thompson, 1860). Owen discussed his spiritualistic activities in later publications (e. g., Owen, 1872, 1874). The account of the Sagée case also appeared in Owen (1883).
 - 4 There are two spellings of the location’s name in the literature: “Neuwelcke” and “Neuwelke”. The first may be due to an error of Owen, which was then taken over by other authors. We leave the respective spelling in the quotations, but otherwise use the correct form “Neuwelke” in the text, as it can also be found for example in an old prospectus of the boarding school from the year 1848.
 - 5 The Baron Louis de Guldenstubbé (1820–1873), Julie’s older brother, became known in spiritualistic circles for his book about direct spirit writing (Guldenstubbe, 1857), which

In this institution one of the female teachers at that time was Mademoiselle Emélie Sagée, a French lady, from Dijon. She was of the Northern type,—a blonde, with very fair complexion, light-blue eyes, chestnut hair, slightly above the middle size, and of slender figure. In character she was amiable, quiet, and good tempered; not at all given to anger or impatience; but of an anxious disposition, and, as to her physical temperament, somewhat nervously excitable. Her health was usually good; and during the year and a half that she lived as teacher at Neuwelcke she had but one or two slight indispositions. She was intelligent and accomplished; and the directors, during the entire period of her stay, were perfectly satisfied with her conduct, her industry, and her acquirements. She was at that time thirty-two years of age.

A few weeks after Mademoiselle Sagée first arrived, singular reports began to circulate among the pupils. When some casual inquiry happened to be made as to where she was, one young lady would reply that she had seen her in such or such a room; whereupon another would say, “Oh, no! she can’t be there; for I have just met her on the stairway;” or perhaps in some distant corridor. At first they naturally supposed it was mere mistake; but, as the same thing recurred again and again, they began to think it very odd, and finally spoke to the other governesses about it. [...]

But, after a time, things much more extraordinary, and which could not be set down to imagination or mistake, began to occur. One day the governess was giving a lesson to a class of thirteen, of whom Mademoiselle de Guldenstubbé was one, and was demonstrating, with eagerness, some proposition, to illustrate which she had occasion to write with chalk on a blackboard. While she was doing so, and the young ladies were looking at her, to their consternation, they suddenly saw *two* Mademoiselle Sagées, the one by the side of the other. They were exactly alike; and they used the same gestures, only that the real person held a bit of chalk in her hand, and did actually write, while the double had no chalk, and only imitated the motion.

This incident naturally caused a great sensation in the establishment. It was ascertained, on inquiry, that every one of the thirteen young ladies in the class had seen the second figure, and that they all agreed in their description of its appearance and of its motions.

Soon after, one of the pupils, a Mademoiselle Antonie de Wrangel, having obtained permission, with some others, to attend a *fête champêtre* [= out of doors party—the authors] in the neighborhood, and being engaged in completing her toilet, Mademoiselle Sagée had good-naturedly volunteered her aid, and was hooking her dress behind. The young lady, happening to turn round and to look in an adjacent mirror, perceived two Mademoiselle Sagées hooking her dress. The sudden apparition produced so much effect upon her that she fainted.

he claimed to have invented. For information about his spiritualistic activities see Podmore (1902, Vol. 2: 66–67 and 188–190).

Months passed by, and similar phenomena were still repeated. Sometimes, at dinner, the double appeared standing behind the teacher's chair and imitating her motions as she ate,—only that its hands held no knife and fork, and that there was no appearance of food; the figure alone was repeated. All the pupils and the servants waiting on the table witnessed this.

It was only occasionally, however, that the double appeared to imitate the motions of the real person. Sometimes, when the latter rose from a chair, the figure would appear seated on it. On one occasion, Mademoiselle Sagée being confined to bed with an attack of influenza, the young lady already mentioned, Mademoiselle de Wrangel, was sitting by her bedside, reading to her. Suddenly the governess became stiff and pale; and, seeming as if about to faint, the young lady, alarmed, asked if she was worse. She replied that she was not, but in a very feeble and languid voice. A few seconds afterward, Mademoiselle de Wrangel, happening to look round, saw, quite distinctly, the figure of the governess walking up and down the apartment. This time the young lady had sufficient self-control to remain quiet, and even to make no remark to the patient. Soon afterward she came down-stairs, looking very pale, and related what she had witnessed. [...]

One day all the young ladies of the institution, to the number of forty-two, were assembled in the same room, engaged in embroidery. It was a spacious hall [...] giving entrance to a garden [...]. There was a long table in the center of the room [...].

On this occasion the young ladies were all seated at the table in question, whence they could readily see what passed in the garden; and, while engaged at their work, they had noticed Mademoiselle Sagée there, not far from the house, gathering flowers, of which she was very fond. At the head of the table, seated in an arm-chair, (of green morocco, my informant says, she still distinctly recollects that it was,) sat another teacher, in charge of the pupils. After a time this lady had occasion to leave the room, and the arm-chair was left vacant. It remained so, however, for a short time only; for of a sudden there appeared seated in it the figure of Mademoiselle Sagée. The young ladies immediately looked into the garden, and there she still was, engaged as before; only they remarked that she moved very slowly and languidly, as a drowsy or exhausted person might. Again they looked at the arm-chair, and there she sat, silent, and without motion, but to the sight so palpably real that, had they not seen her outside in the garden and had they not known that she appeared in the chair without having walked into the room, they would all have supposed that it was the lady herself. As it was being quite certain that it was not a real person, and having become, to a certain extent, familiar with this strange phenomenon, two of the boldest approached and tried to touch the figure. They averred that they did feel a slight resistance, which they likened to that which a fabric of fine muslin or crape would offer to the touch. One of the two then passed close in front of the arm-chair, and actually through a portion of the figure. The appearance, however, remained, after she had done so, for some time longer, still seated, as before. At last it gradually disappeared; and then it was observed

that Mademoiselle Sagée resumed, with all her usual activity, her task of flower-gathering. Every one of the forty-two pupils saw the same figure in the same way.

Some of the young ladies afterward asked Mademoiselle Sagée if there was any thing peculiar in her feelings on this occasion. She replied that she recollected this only: that, happening to look up, and perceiving the teacher's arm-chair to be vacant, she had thought to herself, "I wish she had not gone away: these girls will be sure to be idling their time and getting into some mischief."

This phenomenon continued, under various modifications, throughout the whole time that Mademoiselle Sagée retained her situation at Neuwelcke; that is, throughout a portion of the years 1845 and 1846; and, in all, for about a year and a half; at intervals, however,—sometimes intermitting for a week, sometimes for several weeks at a time. It seemed chiefly to present itself on occasions when the lady was very earnest or eager in what she was about. It was uniformly remarked that the more distinct and material to the sight the double was, the more stiff and languid was the living person; and in proportion as the double faded did the real individual resume her powers. [...]

During the eighteen months throughout which my informant had an opportunity of witnessing this phenomenon and of hearing of it through others, no example came to her knowledge of the appearance of the figure at any considerable distance—as of several miles—from the real person. Sometimes it appeared, but not far off, during their walks in the neighborhood; more frequently, however, within-doors. Every servant in the house had seen it. It was, apparently, perceptible to all persons, without distinction of age or sex.

It will be readily supposed that so extraordinary a phenomenon could not continue to show itself, for more than a year, in such an institution, without injury to its prosperity. In point of fact, as soon as it was completely proved, by the double appearance of Mademoiselle Sagée before the class, and afterward before the whole school, that there was no imagination in the case, the matter began to reach the ears of the parents. Some of the more timid among the girls [...] evinced great alarm whenever they happened to witness so strange and inexplicable a thing. The natural result was that their parents began to scruple about leaving them under such an influence. One after another, as they went home for the holidays, failed to return; and though the true reason was not assigned to the directors, they knew it well. Being strictly upright and conscientious men, however, and very unwilling that a well-conducted, diligent, and competent teacher should lose her position on account of a peculiarity that was entirely beyond her control,—a misfortune, not a fault,—they persevered in retaining her, until, at the end of eighteen months, the number of pupils had decreased from forty-two to twelve. It then became apparent that either the teacher or the institution must be sacrificed; and, with much reluctance and many expressions of regret on the part of those to whom her amiable qualities had endeared her, Mademoiselle Sagée was dismissed. [...]

After she left Neuwelcke, she went to live, for a time, in the neighborhood, with a sister-in-law, who had several quite young children. Thither the peculiarity pursued her. Mademoiselle de Guldenstubbé, going to see her there, learned that the children of three or four years of age all knew of it; being in the habit of saying that “they saw two Aunt Emélias.”

Subsequently she set out for the interior of Russia, and Mademoiselle de Guldenstubbé lost sight of her entirely.

That lady was not able to inform me whether the phenomenon had shown itself during Mademoiselle Sagée’s infancy, or previous to her sixteenth year, nor whether, in the case of any of her family or of her ancestors, a similar peculiarity had appeared. (Owen, 1860a: 348–355).

In addition to Owen’s account, other authors report that, upon being dismissed from the school, Mlle. Sagée had claimed that this was the 19th time this happened to her (Aksákow, 1890; Hennig, 1906) or that, because of her recurrent apparitions, she had lost 19 employments before (Baerwald, 1925).

Unavoidable Notes on the Authenticity of the Sagée Case

The Sagée case has been cited many times over the years.⁶ The case was considered to be weak evidentially from the beginning. In the first edition of *Footfalls*, Owen had considered the narrative “the most conclusive of its kind it has ever been my good fortune to obtain” (Owen, 1860a: 348). He even stated: “In the course of my reading on this subject [...] I have not met with a single example of the apparition of the living so remarkable and so incontrovertibly authentic as this.” And he added the information—probably false, as we shall see—that “[t]he institution of Neuwelcke still exists, having gradually recovered its standing after Mademoiselle Sagée left it; and corroborative evidence can readily be obtained by addressing its directors” (Owen, 1860a: 355). Yet, in the second edition of *Footfalls*, published in England in the same year, Owen (1860b: 251, footnote) had changed his mind and stated that he removed the case from the book due to evidential problems found on further investigation. The account was reported from second-hand testimony, and no independent corroboration of events was presented.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, regarding the phenomena in question, Charles Richet (1923) wrote: “Other stories are told about Mlle. Sagée’s bilocations, on which I shall not dilate, for I do not believe them.” And he concludes: “[I]t seems to me impossible to take them seriously” (p. 554). Baerwald (1925) observed that “this famous narra-

6 Vieira (1986: 669) cites 39 examples of citations in different languages, and even that survey is far from complete.

tive is marred by the problem that it is dramatic rather than authentic” (p. 127).⁷ Hornell Hart published in 1956 an evidential evaluation of the case, based on the reprint by Shirley (1937: 64–69) [181 cases in total]. Using a scale with a theoretical range from 0 to 1.00, the case received an evidentiality rating of .08 (Hart & Collaborators, 1956: 180).

Although the authenticity of the Sagée case and the evidential value of the case report are not the major concerns of the present paper, some remarks on these aspects of the case are unavoidable. Trying to straighten out the record appears particularly important since much relevant information that was published between the 1870s and the 1920s apparently has gone unnoticed or was deliberately ignored by those eager to use the Sagée case for their theoretical reflections and the development of concepts. To the best of our knowledge, most of the details to be communicated in the following paragraphs were never before published in English (or any) literature, but probably had some effect on the discussions (and the neglect) of the case at the time when—and in the countries where—the relevant information was brought to light.

Julie von Güldenstubbe (1833–1888) – Habitual Ghost Witness

When a case depends on the narrative of a single witness, reliable knowledge about the life, personality and character of that person is essential. The case under discussion exclusively rests on the report of Julie von Güldenstubbe, who was a girl of thirteen years of age at the time of the events. Surprisingly, given the spectacular nature of the reported phenomena, none of the teachers at Neuwelke nor any of the other 41 young ladies (not even Antonie von Wrangel, descendant of a famous family, who is mentioned in the report) has ever produced a separate, independent account of the events or commented on Julie’s narrative. At least no such report has ever become publicly known.

In his reply to Aksákow (1889, 1890) and his presentation of the “Sagée case”, philosopher Eduard von Hartmann anyway distrusts the claim of multiple, and occasionally independent, testimonies of the reported apparitions:

The example of the habitual spontaneous *doppelgänger* “business” of the teacher Sagée [...] speaks strongly against the materiality of the phantom because it remained invisible for the medium herself [...]. That, by contrast, the apparition was visible for everybody except the medium is an obvious exaggeration; who would like to be the single person in a boarding school for about 13-year-old girls, who would like to confess not to have seen this apparition tremendously exciting for everybody! Where could be a more fertile base for hallucination contagion than in a boarding school for adolescent girls! (Hartmann, 1891: 95)

7 Throughout this paper, translations from languages other than English are our own.

No less unusual, at least at first sight, seems the fact that quite a few German authors who one would rather expect to have picked up the Sagée case remained completely silent about it. It is not mentioned in Fanny Moser's important two-volume *Okkultismus. Täuschungen und Tatsachen* [Occultism: Deceptions and Facts] (Moser, 1935), nor in any of Rudolf Tischner's books (e.g. *Geschichte der Parapsychologie* [History of Parapsychology], 1960 [2nd edition]) nor even in Emil Mattiesen's extensive treatment of apparitions of the living in his three-volume *Das persönliche Überleben des Todes* [The Individual Survival of Death] (Mattiesen, 1936–1939).⁸

Even more astonishing, or maybe characteristic, is the fact that German philosopher, anthropologist, entomologist and psychical researcher Maximilian Perty of the University of Berne in Switzerland, while quoting at length from Owen's *Footfalls*, completely ignored the Sagée case in the almost one thousand pages of his two-volume work *Die mystischen Erscheinungen der menschlichen Natur* [The Mystical Phenomena of Human Nature], major parts of which are devoted to apparitions of the living. Neither the first edition of that work (Perty, 1861) nor its considerably expanded second edition (Perty, 1872) devote a single line to the case even though, it may be noted, Perty was personally well acquainted with the entire Gùldenstubbe family and with Julie von Gùldenstubbe in particular, who visited him repeatedly for extended periods of time. The reason for this reluctance may become apparent from Perty's supplementary volume to his earlier work, *Der jetzige Spiritualismus und verwandte Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* [Current Spiritualism and Related Experiences Past and Present] (Perty, 1877).

In that volume, Perty (1877: 81–90) included extensive descriptions of his personal experiences with Julie von Gùldenstubbe and of the encounters his philosopher-friend Immanuel Fichte, son of famous philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, had with Julie. Based partly on Julie's tales during the various visits she paid him in Switzerland, often for several weeks or months at a time, and in part on his own observations, Perty described in considerable detail, though apparently unconvinced of the authenticity of most of the phenomena, many seemingly miraculous events that started in Julie's early childhood and lasted throughout her life (moving objects at a distance at the early age of three; a great number of apparitions on a virtually daily basis throughout her childhood, youth and adult life (but, again, the Sagée case is not mentioned);⁹ precognitive experiences;

8 Mattiesen only mentions the „Sagée case“ in an aside. He notes that a double, which was “experimentally” created by Durville, “initially imitated all postures and gestures of the experimental subject which is reminiscent of certain statements about ‘doppelgänger’, e.g. of the (surely not only fabulous) Mlle. Sagée” (1936–1939, volume II: 349–350).

9 However, Perty mentions the Sagée case in this volume with one sentence in another context: “A particularly remarkable doppelgänger is the French governess Emilie Sagée who therefore

long-term weather forecasts; traveling clairvoyance; out-of-body experiences; raps and table levitations; her long career as a direct-script medium; casting horoscopes, etc.). Immanuel Fichte, who met Julie in Stuttgart in 1870 and in Basle and Berne in 1876, was told by her that, for more than fifteen years, she “had been permanently accompanied by an invisible being in the shape of a child of about three years” (p. 83) who acted as her “protective spirit” and went by the name of “Muff”. After her brother’s death in 1873, Julie used to see his ghost, and to consult with him, on a more or less regular basis, repeatedly also in the presence of the two professors. Perty and Fichte both were in agreement about Julie’s “simple, good-natured and unassuming character”, and they felt sure that “an intention on her part to deceive” was “unthinkable”. However, “as far as her perceptions and imaginations are concerned, it is difficult to decide in this case, as in so many others, whether they are grounded in reality or in fantasy” (p. 88).

When Julie von Güldenstubbe died in Paris on June 11, 1888, at the age of 55, she left a huge specialized occult and spiritualistic library of more than 10,000 volumes (partly inherited from her deceased brother) and a fortune of more than 500,000 Francs. However, her will (drafted and signed on February 22, 1882) and her papers, as far as these have become accessible (Wittig, 1889b), did not contain any reference to the events that Julie claimed had taken place during her youth at the Pensionat of Neuwelke back in Livonia. Those who had been able to see her shortly before her death described her as “very frail, even blind at the very last, and bed-ridden”. For decades, she had been suffering from various nervous inflictions, and during the last twenty years of her life, i. e., from her mid-thirties, she “had appeared like a woman in her eighties” (Wittig, 1889a: 46). “Nevertheless, her gift of seeing ghosts remained with her until the very end of her earthly existence” (ibid.).

Whatever we may think of the varied psychic and spiritualistic experiences Julie von Güldenstubbe had (or claimed to have had) throughout her entire life, there can be no doubt, that the narrative of the events at Neuwelke during the years 1845 and 1846, that Owen published in 1860 for the first time, definitely was not received from an innocent, unprepared and spiritually inexperienced girl of thirteen years who just happened to be the witness of some strange apparitions and *doppelgänger* phenomena that occurred at her school.

Facts Regarding the Pensionat of Neuwelke and “Mlle. Sagée”

In two of his books, psychologist Richard Baerwald, the then soon-to-be editor-in-chief of the excellent, but short-lived *Zeitschrift für kritischen Okkultismus* [Journal of Critical

lost her job 19 times” (Perty, 1877: 145–146).

Occultism] (1926–1928), published brief but essentially correct summaries of the Sagée case (Baerwald, 1920: 99–100; 1925: 127, 129). He described it as “the most famous case of its kind, one that is especially cherished by the spiritists” (Baerwald, 1920: 99), but also as one of questionable authenticity “as both the British SPR and Professor Richard Hennig found through separate research” (Baerwald 1925: 127). Baerwald did not provide a specific reference to an SPR source, but probably was thinking of *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886: 78 fn). However, he explicitly referred his readers to Richard Hennig’s book *Der moderne Spuk- und Geisterglaube. Eine Kritik und Erklärung der spiritistischen Phänomene* [Modern Belief in Spooks and Ghosts: A Critique and Explanation of Spiritistic Phenomena] (Hennig, 1906). Hennig, in turn, presented a correct summary and a brief critical discussion of the case on pages pp. 312–314 of that book, but did not claim, at that point, to have done any research of his own. Instead, he flatly concluded:

If the facts reported here indeed were meticulously observed and established, they might be suited to lend remarkable support to the doctrine of the real existence of *doppelgänger*s. But, again, the source of the often-quoted Sagée case is as unreliable as it can possibly be: the whole story rests exclusively on the narratives and statements of a single 13-year-old girl [...] [A]s everyone will agree after what we have learned so far in this book, using children’s gossip as scientific data, is out of the question. The tale becomes even more suspicious as she [i. e. Julie] claims that Mademoiselle Sagée did not know and never even saw her own *doppelgänger*, whereas all other comparable spiritistic anecdotes agree that the medium herself is able to perceive her own materialized double, as also necessarily follows from spiritistic doctrines. Probably, this entire queer story is nothing more than another example of the frequent childhood suggestion epidemics that we have been confronted with on various occasions. (Hennig, 1906: 313–314)

Hennig concluded by describing the case as a wild mixture of “mass hallucination, defective memory and children’s fantasies [...]”. In any case, this story lacks any scientific value” (Hennig, 1906: 314). However, in fact, Hennig had done his own research and made inquiries of his own, but he only had done so a while after the manuscript of his book had been completed (hence, Baerwald apparently mis-remembered his sources). Hennig reported his interesting findings, arguably the most important ones that ever were made on this case, in an article “Zur Kritik des Doppelgängerproblems und des ‘Falles Sagée’ [Toward a critique of the *doppelgänger* problem and of the ‘Sagée case’]” in a German periodical for psychotherapy and medical psychology (Hennig, 1910).

One of the readers of Hennig’s 1906 book had indicated to him, that there might have been some relation between the Pensionat of Neuwelke and the so-called “Archiv der Evangelischen Brüderunität” [Moravian Archives of the Unitas Fratrum] in Herrnhut in the Saxonian Oberlausitz area, a worldwide church and missionary organization that



Figure 1: „Ansicht von Neuwelke“, Öl auf Blech, ohne Datum
Unitätsarchiv Herrnhut, GS 650

was founded in the year 1732 and that still exists today (since the 18th century, Moravian Archives also have existed in Winston-Salem, NC, and in Bethlehem, PA). The Moravian archivist, Dr. J. T. Müller, replied to Hennig’s inquiry in a letter of April 8, 1906:

This boarding school (Neuwelcke) was then a private institute of a certain Heinrich Buch, for what reason we do not have any official reports on it. However, Buch was friends with the department head for Livland within the directorate of the Unitas (Fratrum), whereof a correspondence gives evidence, which, however, has major gaps. Thus, from 1843 to 1846, no letter was exchanged between them. A letter by Buch dated May 1, 1846 begins: “Three years had passed since I wrote to you the last time.” In this letter, Buch explains that he made the decision to close down the institute. The reason for this is mainly the difficulty to obtain good teachers there, and that for lack of these the number of pupils decreases.¹⁰ He now reports

10 Those who have seen and remember the end of Peter Weir’s brilliantly dream-like movie *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Australia, 1975) will have more than a vague idea of what, in Victorian and Wilhelminian times, was going to happen to a private school for young ladies and its prosperity when it lost most of its noble pupils. There are a few striking similarities between the dramatic declines of the numbers of pupils in fictitious Appleyard College in 1900 Australia (in the movie) and in Pensionat of Neuwelke in 1846 Livonia (in Miss Guldensstubbe’s tale)—and both institutions had a young female teacher from France, Mlle. Dianne de Poitiers at Appleyard College and the alleged Mlle. Emélie Sagée at Pensionat of Neuwelke. Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is based on a novel of the same title by Joan Lindsay

of his experiences during the last years ... “As a French woman, we got a nice Christian person, Faehnlein, from our friends in Montmirail, who certainly would have been useful for us and our institution, if she would not have always been sick in bed during the first 1½ years—a nervous disorder with the most miraculous and unexplainable psychological phenomena—, so that my poor wife had to provide extensive nursing care instead of getting support. Since New Year it is better. However, she nevertheless would have to go back in summer even without closing down the institution” ... There is also nothing mentioned about this illness in the present correspondence by Baron v. Guldenstubbé from the 40s of the last century (Hennig, 1910: 48–49).

From Pensionat director Heinrich Buch’s report of May 1846, the only indisputably authentic document in this case, Hennig draws the conclusions that Julie von Guldenstubbé must have made up, or at least considerably embellished and dramatized, the whole story, that, due to her bad health, the French teacher probably did not give a single lesson, was not present at the dinner table and not in a position to gather flowers in the garden, and that therefore she could not possibly be seen with her double on any such occasion.

The *discrepancies* between the original report reprinted at the beginning of this paper and the information volunteered by director Buch are striking indeed.

1. *The protagonist’s identity*: In 1922, astronomer and psychical researcher Camille Flammarion wrote: “Finding myself near Dijon [...] in August, 1895, I took occasion to find out if a family by the name of Sagée had lived there and were there still [...]. This teacher was thirty-two years old in 1845. She was, therefore, born in 1813. The civic records of Dijon contain no family named Sagée; but they record the birth, on January 3, 1813, of a child named Octavie Saget—as a ‘natural daughter’¹¹. This name is so like that of the teacher that it is difficult to doubt the identity [...]. Could not Mademoiselle de Guldenstubbé’s memory have confused the given name, —a mistake slight enough, moreover—, as well as the spelling of

(1967). Arguably, Lindsay may have heard about the Sagée case. At least she was well aware of the work of the British Society for Psychical Research (which she briefly mentions in chapter 17 of her novel), and in her autobiography *Time Without Clocks* (Lindsay, 1962)—the title refers to the fact, that Lindsay had banned all clocks from her home because they used to stop when she came close to them (a motif that also has a dramaturgical function in *Picnic*)—she states that her novel was immediately inspired by the famous time-slip adventure of Anne Moberley and Eleanor Jourdain at Versailles (Moberley & Jourdain, 1911/1955). Incidentally, from 1886 Anne Moberley directed a college for young women, St. Hugh’s College in Oxford. Eleanor Jourdain, who had run a private school of her own before, became her assistant in 1901. —Here, case histories speak to each other—authentic, fictitious, questionable, and undecidable ones.

11 That means: illegitimate daughter (note of the authors).

the name? That is possible, in view of the fact that all these statements were made in foreign languages.” (Flammarion, 1922: 43)¹² Flammarion’s speculation that identified Emélie Sagée with a Octavie Saget, not very convincing by itself, has lost its relevance. The name of the (presumably only) French teacher at the Pensionat of Neuwelke was not Mademoiselle Emélie Sagée but Mademoiselle Faehnlein (Buch did not mention either the first name or the age of that woman; further research in birth registries therefore seems futile). “Faehnlein” is not a French but a German name (and, incidentally, a German word that translates to “little flag”). Therefore, it is not very likely that she originated from either Dijon or Montmirail, the place where Buch’s French friends lived. Rather, she may have come from some place in Alsace-Lorraine, a French area near the German border with a comparatively large German population, then and now.

2. *The protagonist’s health*: Robert Dale Owen, based on Julie von Güldenstubbé’s account, had assured his readers that Mlle. Sagée’s “health was usually good; and during the year and a half that she lived as teacher at Neuwelcke she had but one or two slight indispositions [...]. [T]he directors, during the entire period of her stay, were perfectly satisfied with her conduct, her industry, and her acquirements” (Owen, 1860: 348–349). Can there be a greater contrast between these statements and Buch’s authoritative account? Rather than being “usually” healthy, except for “two slight indispositions”, she seems to have been bed-ridden almost all of the time she spent at Neuwelke, and she was dependent on the care of “poor” Mrs. Buch.
3. *Closing of the institute*: Far from “having recovered its standing” (Owen, 1860a: 355), according to director Buch’s words, the fate of his institution was sealed. Buch was determined to close the school, but he made no excuse about dismissing Mlle. Faehnlein irrespective of the fate of the school. In Buch’s account there is not a trace of the scrupulous squirming described by Owen that only ended when the Pensionat had lost more than 70 per cent of its pupils.
4. *The aftermath*: Director Buch did not provide any information on the future fate of Mlle. Faehnlein. In particular, he did not mention that, “[a]fter she left Neuwelcke, she went to live, for a time, in the neighborhood, with a sister-in-law” (Owen, 1860a: 355). This part of the story also seems hardly credible, to say the least. Can we really accept the remarkable coincidence that Mlle. Faehnlein from

12 Flammarion also writes: “I knew, in former days (in 1862), Baron Güldenstubbé and his sister. They were most sincere, perhaps a little mystical, but of unexceptionable integrity.” (Flammarion, 1922: 42)

France who was recommended to Buch by friends in Montmirail¹³ just happened to have a sister-in-law in the immediate neighborhood of Neuwelke in a remote Livonian province?

5. *Hennig's reporting*: As a matter of fairness, it must be stressed that Richard Hennig's reporting of details and weighing of the evidence were not always fully reliable. For instance, he consistently misspelled Mlle. Sagée's first name "Emilie" instead of "Emélie", and he mistook the French city of Dijon for Lyon. More importantly, Hennig conveniently ignored Buch's statement that, since New Year's Day of 1846, Mlle. Faehnleins health had "improved", because that might have spoiled Hennig's assertion that "any teaching was impossible" for her (Hennig, 1910: 49). Conceivably, Mlle. Faehnlein, with improved health, did give lessons between January and May of 1846.
6. "*Miraculous Phenomena*": Heinrich Buch certainly had no reason to find excuses or to show pity for Mlle. Faehnlein's condition. Yet, he explicitly and deliberately draws attention to the fact that she suffered from "a nervous disease with the most miraculous, inexplicable psychological phenomena" (Hennig, 1910: 48–49). It seems clear, therefore, that there were some very peculiar and not readily explainable phenomena occurring around the French teacher, maybe even apparitions of a living person. Julie von Guldenstubbe may have used them as a starting point for her fanciful narrative, thus eventually spoiling a case of potential parapsychological interest.

Uses of the Sagée Case

As we stated before, the authenticity and evidential value of the Sagée case, weak as they were shown to be, are not the main focus of the current paper. Our basic interest is not on the "reality" of the apparitions nor on the quality of the testimony, but on how influential the case was, and how it was utilized by different observers to support their theoretical views or agendas. Essentially, the case has been used by many writers to illustrate what some described as a predisposition towards producing apparitions of oneself,¹⁴ and mainly, to support the existence of subtle bodies and the concept of an

13 Director Buch also does not mention any details about Mlle. Faehnlein's life before she arrived at Neuwelke in 1845. However, had she been known for having been dismissed from 18 or 19 employments before, as was repeatedly claimed in the literature (by Aksákow, Hennig, and Baerwald), it is difficult to understand that and why "our friends in Montmirail" should have recommended her to Buch.

14 Jung-Stilling (1808/1851: 229) referred to a "natural predisposition" towards the production of apparitions of the living, while Harrison (1879) wrote about "individuals [...] so physi-

exteriorization of some principle from the physical body. In what follows we will focus on such discussions.

Owen (1860a) was the first to discuss this case. He devoted a chapter to apparitions of the living, a topic that suggested to him that a

spiritual body [...] may, during life, occasionally detach itself, to some extent or other and for a time, from the material flesh and blood which for a few years it pervades in intimate association; and if death be but the issuing forth of the spiritual body from its temporary associate; then, at the moment of its exit, it is that spirit body which through life may have been occasionally and partially detached from the natural body, and which at last is thus entirely and forever divorced from it, that passes into another state of existence (pp. 360–361).

Owen believed that the Sagée case showed that “the apparition or counterpart of a living person may appear at a certain distance from that person” (p. 355), and that “such an apparition may have a slight, but positive, consistency” (p. 356). He noted that Sagée never saw the apparition and was aware of their existence only through the testimony of others. He observed that some appearances “took with it a certain portion of that body’s ordinary life and strength” (p. 356).

Summaries of the case appeared soon after publication (e. g., Gougenot de Mousseaux, 1864: 122–124; Salgues, 1861). The latter presented the case as an example of “*dédoubléments animiques*” [animistic doublings].

Adolphe d’Assier (1887) defended the idea of a fluidic body in his book *Posthumous Humanity: A Study of Phantoms*. This body was similar to the physical one in appearance as well as internally, because it “reproduces all the organs which constitute the framework of the human body” (p. 69). This body could pass through objects, and was believed to be “united with the body from which it emanates by an invisible vascular plexus” (p. 69). In rare cases the double could be projected in a visible form, such as the Sagée case (discussed on pp. 62–68). The tangible aspects of Sagée phantom, d’Assier commented, showed that the apparition “is not purely an optical image of our exterior form; it is a complete replica of the constituent parts of our organism [...] composed of material molecules” (p. 66). Regarding the school teacher’s exhaustion, he wrote that Emélie’s phantom “developed at the expense of her body, by drawing to itself, by a sort of aspiration, its constituent elements” (p. 68). Such process, he further speculated, “con-

ologically constituted that their spirits are not infrequently seen in the place to which their thoughts are directed” (p. 161). Years later Myers (1903, Vol. 1: xx, 264) and Delanne (1909: 187) commented on this predisposition, while upholding different models. More recently Zorab (1975) referred to a “phantom-forming predisposition.”

firmed the existence of a plexus of fluidiform capillaries connecting the phantom with the body from which it emanates” (p. 68).¹⁵

Italian spiritualists first learned about all the details of the Sagée case in 1889 when their main monthly review, *Gli Annali dello Spiritismo in Italia*, published a translation of Owen’s 1883 *Light* article (Bicorporeità, 1889). Some comments about odd features of the case appeared in the end of the article. It was mentioned that: (a) the double was seen near, or very near, the real body; (b) it acted both similarly and differently from the real Sagée; and (c) when it was seen, Sagée seemed “tired” and absent-minded, without falling into ecstasy or in catalepsy. These details (mentioned as well by later authors) were emphasized because they seemed clearly to point to the presence of the perispirit, a subtle fluidic body that bridged the physical body and the spirit, and a key concept in spiritism to explain phenomena such as apparitions, doubles of the living (Kardec, 1863). The perispirit, while lacking consciousness and intent, allowed the spirit to perceive in the physical world, as well as to act on the body and on matter, and to provide substance and visibility to apparitions, be they of the dead or of the living. Kardec, the founder of French spiritism, discussed in the same book phenomena of “bi-corporeality” of living beings, in which the traveling spirit of the living person became visible thanks to the semi-physical characteristics of the perispirit (Kardec, 1863: 142). The principle was also used to explain a variety of physiological and psychological manifestations (Delanne, 1897).

Allan Kardec (1890/1978) presented a short summary of the case in a posthumously published essay entitled “Les apparitions de personnes vivantes” [Apparitions of Living Persons]” (pp. 36–46). He wrote that: “Today it is a proved fact, and one perfectly explained, that the spirit, being separated from the living body, can appear at a place other than that which the physical body is through the help of its perispiritual covering” (p. 36–37). Kardec was defending the reality of the perispirit.

In an article on psychological foundations of *doppelgänger* phenomena and in his book *Die monistische Seelenlehre* [The Monistic Doctrine of the Soul] German philosopher Carl du Prel (1886: 240; 1888: 229–230) mentioned the Sagée case. This was in the context of du Prel’s discussion of the soul as a principle behind the body and other

15 Such ideas of processes dependent on the physical body’s vital forces were not limited to the double, and included other phenomena such as healing and physical manifestations of all sorts, as seen in the mesmeric and spiritualistic literatures (Alvarado, 2006; Crabtree, 1993). Writers such as B. W. Richmond (Brittan & Richardson, 1853) and Edward C. Rogers (1853) saw the human body as a generator of a biophysical force capable of accounting for the physical phenomena of spiritualism. Sagée’s physical depletion is paralleled by observations and discussions of mediums becoming weak after producing physical phenomena in the spiritualist literature (e. g., Crookes, 1874: 41).

manifestations. Regarding psychic phenomena this included materializations and out-of-body experiences. He wrote: “Well, the *doppelgänger* is empirical evidence that there is such an ethereal body within man himself, or that we have the potential predisposition to produce it at any time, and it is not understandable at all, why the organizing soul should only be able to build a body from organic cells, and not use its creative drive with other substances, as well as a sculptor can work with clay, plaster, and marble.” (du Prel, 1894–1895: 57)

Alexander Aksákow (1889: 381–389; 1890, Vol. 2: 593–602) published the first full German translations of Owen’s case report and discussed Sagée’s double as an example of the “extracorporeal” action of living beings. Aksákow used the term “animism” to refer to all phenomena produced by human beings, which consisted of effects distant from the physical body such as telepathy, telekinesis, apparitions of the double, and materializations. The latter, appearances of human forms in the séance room, indicated to him that the “organism of man possesses the faculty [...] of creating at its expense, and unconsciously, plastic forms, with a more or less likeness to the body of that same man, or, in general, with any human form, and having different attributes or corporeality” (Vol. 2: 563). The Sagée case was presented as an example of an apparition of the living with material properties. In fact, Aksákow referred to it as the “most precious and more instructive case of this genre” (Vol. 2: 593). In his view the features of the case excluded hallucinations as an explanation. The double, and other effects produced at a distance, showed Aksákow’s view that mental and physical effects could transcend the periphery of the physical body. In fact, these phenomena were believed to provide a transition between manifestations of the living and of the dead.

Social reformer and student of theosophy Annie Besant mentioned Sagée in her study *The Seven Principles of Man* (1892: 12) in support of a subtle body called the Linga Sharîra. “This Linga Sharîra,” wrote Besant, “is the exact double or counterpart of the physical body to which it belongs, and is separable from it although unable to go very far away therefrom. When separated from the physical body it is visible to the clairvoyant as an exact replica thereof, united to it by a slender thread” (p. 11). Commenting on the apparitions of Sagée Besant stated: “This phenomenon is perfectly intelligible to the Theosophical student, who knows that the Linga Sharîra is the vehicle of the Life-Principle, or Vitality, in the body, and that its partial withdrawal must therefore diminish the energy with which this Principle plays on the physical molecules” (p. 12).

Others wrote in the twentieth-century. According to Duff and Allen, who discussed the case in their book *Psychic Research and Gospel Miracles* (1902: 149–151), there was no doubt about the “existence of [an] ethereal counterpart, *replica* or *double* of the physical organism” (p. 145). The Sagée case was a particular example of a case when this body

had “been seen by several witnesses at once by *normal perception*” (p. 148). Similarly, a French author’s discussion of the case appeared just after he argued for the objective reality of some apparitions of the living (Moutin, 1907: 393–398).

In his book *La Survivance de l’Ame ou la Mort et la Renaissance chez les Êtres Vivants* [The Survival of the Soul or Death and Rebirth in Human Beings] Louis-Sophrone Fugairon (1907: 114–116) cited the case to support the existence of a subtle body he believed existed associated to the sarcosoma, or physical body. This subtle body, the aereosoma, was described as an “aerial” body composed of ether, water vapor, and gases. Fugairon believed that in some rare cases, such as Sagée’s, the aereosoma could leave the sarcosoma and be perceived by others. He wrote about the case:

When the image attained its complete development, Emilie [sic] seemed exhausted and in a state of complete prostration. When to the contrary the image vanished ... [Sagée] took back her forces. Consequently, the double was formed at the expense of Emilie’s [sic] substance, and it exhausted her. When this exteriorized substance reentered Emilie’s [sic] sarcosoma, she was strengthened (p. 116).

Gabriel Delanne was another French student of psychic phenomena that used the case to defend theoretical views of apparitional phenomena. In an early book Delanne (1897) defended the existence of the perispirit as a fluidic principle that served as the organizing blueprint of the human body, and as the place where memories were stored. This principle was believed to be involved in many physiological functions, so as to be “indispensable to maintain the stability of the human being” (p. 54).

Delanne (1909: 175–180) considered the Sagée case in a later book, the first volume of *Les Apparitions Matérialisées des Vivants & des Morts* [Materialized Apparitions of the Living and the Dead], devoted to apparitions of the living. In his view some of these cases were more than a telepathic image, being the projection of the soul with its perispiritual envelope. Some individuals, Delanne noted, seemed to have a predisposition to show their apparition at a distance. This was the case of Sagée, and of a few other individuals, who showed a “biological anomaly allowing the agent to *unconsciously project* a concrete emanation of themselves to the place where their thought is directed” (p. 197), apparitions lacking in consciousness. The appearances are “simple simulacra of the individual, virtual images, so to speak” (p. 197). “In the case of Mlle Sagée,” Delanne wrote, “we are in the presence of a fluidic form that has enough consistence to offer certain resistance to touch, analogous to the impression that tulle or muslin produces; this tactile sensation confirms the objectivity of the double” (pp. 197–198). Like others before him, Delanne saw mediumistic materializations as examples of the exteriorization of the doubles of the medium.

French magnetizer Hector Durville summarized the case in his book *Le Fantôme des Vivants* (1909: 75–77). It appeared in a chapter about manifestations of the phantom or double, such as apparitions of the living. During the waking state, Durville stated, the phantom was usually in the physical body. However, there were exceptions, and in some cases it could wander from the physical body.

The case appeared in a section of historical cases from nineteenth-century books about apparitions of the living. Sagée’s phantom, Durville wrote, was “composed of fluidic sultry matter, nearly physical, because it presents some resistance to the touch: it is a duplicate of the physical body, which is appreciably more than an image of the body reflected on a mirror. It is formed and grows at the expense of the physical [body] and borrows matter and force from it” (p. 77). The persons seeing the physical body during the apparitions said that it was pale, and “was exhausted and in a state near to prostration” (p. 77).

Durville also said that Sagée’s case was one of those apparitions of the living in which the person that was seen was not conscious of having been in a different location. In contrast, there were other cases in which the persons had vague or complete recollections of visits to a different location than that of the physical body.

Another discussion of “doubles” was presented by Italian criminologist and psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso (1909, chapter 10). He discussed the topic in terms of experiments and a variety of spontaneous manifestations. The Sagée case was cited as an example of a double taking place in the normal state (pp. 252–253). Nonetheless, Lombroso wrote that the existence of the double “is an ascertained fact for all the more or less anomalous states of the psyche, and especially in magnetic and hypnotic states” (p. 255).

Later, spiritist Vincenzo Tummolo (1912), editor of the Italian translation of Aksákow’s book on animism and spiritism, commented on the case in footnotes that were longer than the original report. He noted that the double appeared independent and remote from the physical body, and that the physical body lacked vitality. He concluded from this that when someone dies, so experiencing the permanent separation of the double from the physical body, it is the fluidic body which becomes fully free and powerful (Tummolo, 1912: 68–69). He believed in cases like Sagée’s, i. e., those without involvement of the subject’s conscious will, the detachment was due to spirit intervention, as those taking place through mediums in séances (pp. 208, 319–320). For this phenomenon to occur, he wrote, an intentional agency was necessary. This was the case because the “will [of Miss Sagée] was not involved in the occurrence of the detachment,” and “we are obliged to admit a completely external cause to the mediumistic body. If someone had hypnotized Sagée, I would be willingly to admit that his will was responsible for the phenomenon; but, as there was no hypnotist, we have to conclude that the

agency was that of an invisible entity, possessing an astral power on Sagée's soul, so as to pull it out of her body" (pp. 670–671).

In 1921, in *La Religion Spirite* [Spiritistic Religion], the professor of history of religions at the Institut Catholique in Paris Thomas Mainage in order to explain the telepathic phenomena proposed the hypothesis that, from the mind of a transmitting person, "elementary emanations" move to reach the mind of a percipient, where they are recomposed to form the initial thoughts and imagines. However to those "emanations", forces and/or matter can be joint, so to have other kinds of phenomena, as well as hauntings, psychokinesis, apparitions, and materializations. If we suppose that the transmitter can (subconsciously) withdraw a bit of matter from his own body, and join it to his "emanations", then a "materialized image" can form itself at a distance: exactly as it would have happened in the case of Emélie Sagée. As can be demonstrated by two more circumstances: "The real Emilie [sic], when she duplicates herself, weakens, fades [...]. There is an evident loss of physical force in her. In addition this 'double' is not a ghost, a shadow, a reflection. It is material." (Mainage, 1921: 152)

In France, too, astronomer Camille Flammarion (1922: 40–43) presented the case in a discussion of phantasms of the living. In his view: "The double was real, objective. Probably it might have been photographed." (p. 44)

In his book *Von den übersinnlichen Dingen. Ein Führer durch das Reich der okkulten Forschung* [Of Things Beyond the Senses: A Guide Through the Realms of Occult Research] Eberhard Buchner (1924), an author very knowledgeable in a variety of fields in cultural history (Ribbat, 1996: 186–189), summarized the Sagée case and declared Hennig's critique as "unjustified" without bothering to explain this verdict in any way (Buchner, 1924: 279–280). He tried to explain the case as a complicated instance of "veridical hallucination" (p. 283) that made use of the "eidolomagic power of the psyche" (p. 286), a concept that Georg Friedrich Daumer, once the first "teacher and foster-father" of Kaspar Hauser, had suggested half a century earlier (Daumer, 1867, 1872), and that described the mostly hidden capacity of the human psyche to exteriorize the inner images of an individual and to make them visible to others as real, tangible objects. Daumer (1872: 35), who presumably knew about the *doppelgänger* apparitions of Emélie Sagée but didn't comment on, wrote:

I ascribe to the human soul the, although hidden and only rarely occurring, capability to immediately realize its ideas and inner views so that they remain not only subjectively within themselves but also are externally manifesting to the senses of seeing, hearing, and feeling,—what I refer to as the *eidolomagic* power of psyche, from which I am able to explain, without difficulties and artificiality, many things that occur in the dark realm of vision, apparition, out-of-body experience

(“Sichselbersehen”), and doppelgänger, and, furthermore, are much more harder to believe and much less to make understandable.

In a later chapter of the same book, Buchner (pp. 315–320) tried to combine Daumer’s concept with Durville’s theory that we discussed above. The double pre-exists in the physical body and, once it has been exteriorized, it takes command and becomes the perceiving and acting agent of the person while its physical body remains more or less tranquil and inactive.

Another modern discussion of the case was presented by French physician P. Thomas Bret (1938) in his generally neglected book *Les Métapsychoses* [The Metapsychoses]. Bret argued in his book that there were different types of doubles. In addition to hallucinations, and to real doubles with and without consciousness, Bret argued there were three types of real doubles. These were invisible “metetheric” doubles, invisible and barely materialized doubles that could be photographed, and materialized, or ectoplasmic doubles perceived by everyone, such as Sagée’s case (pp. 69–71).

Sagée’s case has also been used in more recent times to support some ideas. One example was a paper by Dutch parapsychologist George Zorab (1975: 25–26). He presented cases—ranging from séance-room materializations to apparitions of the living—suggesting the existence of a “phantom-forming predisposition.” The latter group of phenomena includes cases in which it appeared that there was a “projected [...] ‘phantom double,’ which was seen by others under circumstances giving the impressions that the figure perceived was not wholly subjective, but possessed something concrete, taking up space” (p. 23). This predisposition was seen by Zorab as something akin to the observation that some people are “known to be gifted with a predisposition for producing ESP and PK phenomena” (p. 26). According to Zorab, acceptance of this predisposition, could lead us to believe that “cases of apparitions seemingly showing symptoms of possessing an objective nature, i. e. of solidity, could well fall within the category of the phantom-producing faculty of certain individuals, and that they therefore should not be regarded as the result of e. g. ESP induction, or as more or less materialized ‘astral bodies,’ ‘etheric doubles’ of living or deceased persons” (p. 27). Zorab insisted that he believed most apparitions were subjective, but that the cases cited in his paper were suggestive of some physical agency.

Other more recent uses of the case to support the concept of a projection from the body include several works about astral projection (Battersby, 1942/1969: 14–17; Crookall, 1968: 10; Shirley, 1937: 64–69 [reprint]; Webster, 1998: 63) and doubles (Davies, 1998: 54–55). Brazilian physician and OBEr Waldo Vieira mentioned the case in his book *Projeciologia* (1986: 74–75) as an example of a physical bilocation consisting most of the time in an

involuntary projection of consciousness. According to this author in cases such as Sagée's there was a projection of a "simulation," meaning the exit of an etheric body from the physical without consciousness, but capable of being seen by others (p. 74).

Two German books, a popular but not always reliable introduction to parapsychology and its history by Werner Keller (1973: 339–341) and Werner Bonin's *Lexikon der Parapsychologie* [Encyclopedia of Parapsychology] (Bonin, 1976: 138–139) contained summaries of the Sagée case. The authors did not attempt to evaluate or explain the case, but, in effect, they did much to re-canonize the case for the German readership after decades in which it had been mercifully ignored by most parapsychologists in Germany.

In her book *Viaggi Senza Corpo* [Travel without Body] Paola Giovetti (1983: 12–13) mentioned the case referring to spontaneous occurrences of "doubling" taking place with normal individuals, as opposed to saints, mystics, and shamans. Other authors cited the case to make the point that the human body contained an extra-physical element within itself that could be related to out-of-body experiences (Piccioli, 1968: 68–69), and as an example of astral projection (Xiong, 2004: 255).

Following spiritistic ideas, more recent authors have discussed the case. An example is Loureiro (1998: 84–91). He presented Sagée's apparitions as an example of "perispiritual doubling" (p. 85).

Other authors that have presented summaries of the case include Hilary Evans in his book *Seeing Ghosts* (2004: 40). In his view the case, and some other apparitions of the living, represent manifestations of an "extended self" that is not self-aware, having "a kind of unconscious existence of its own" (p. 230). Summaries have also been published by Fontana (2005: 62) and by Wilson (2006: 380–382). Numerous recent authors have mentioned the case in some detail in web documents, even in the Romanian, Polish, Turkish, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic and many other languages, and thus have turned Julie von Güldenstübbe's once intimate tale into a story that is potentially omnipresent on a world-wide scale. Still other writers have used the case in magazines about psychic phenomena (Caratelli, 2006; "Un Cas Extraordinaire"). Following the teachings of Kardec, the anonymous author of the latter article started his discussion stating: "The spirit and the perispirit can be exteriorized and transported at a distance while it continues to preserve continuous relations with the physical body. This fact constitutes the act of doubling" (p. 11).

At this point, we close with our descriptive working approach, which is exemplarily specified (and taken) by Finuncane, among others, as early as 1982: "That is the standpoint adopted in this general survey. Even though ghosts and apparitions may exist only in the minds of their percipients, the fact of that existence is a social and historical reality: the

phenomena represent man's inner universe just as his art and poetry do. And, as in the case of literary and aesthetic invention, the results cannot be divorced from their social milieu." (Finucane, 1982: 1)

Conclusion

The Sagée case, and other accounts of apparitions of the living, have become exemplars over time in the psychological research and spiritualistic literatures. Cases such as Sagée's are like texts in that their value lies in the interpretation placed on them, irrespective of their authenticity, and on their repeated citations. In this instance the citations of the case by writers such as Owen, D'Assier, Du Prel, Aksákow, Fugairon, Delanne, Durville, have assisted the development of the idea that something is exteriorized from the body, something that is objective in some little understood way. Cases of this sort have maintained belief in subtle bodies, and in interpretative systems based on such belief such as those of Kardec, Besant, and Bret.

Of course the use of the case to follow particular theoretical ideas is not the only factor in the process of creating a classic exemplar. We cannot discount the dramatic character of the tale, one that tells a good and engaging story. Most of the individuals that cited the Sagée case referred to her losing her position as a teacher, information that changes the account from a report of phenomena to a situation of human interest. Furthermore, the case has been cited frequently because of its characteristics—reports of recurrent and collective percipience, being tangible to touch, having multiple witnesses—and this has happened in spite of its evidential problems.¹⁶ It is the interaction between the needs and intentions of the persons citing the case, and the features of the case, that lead to it becoming a "classic." To complicate matters, these factors interact with a third one, the ideas of unorthodox concepts of force prevalent throughout the years the Sagée case was cited. Such literature emphasized that many phenomena, such as those of physical mediumship, depended on the vital resources of the body (Alvarado, 2006; Crabtree, 1993; see footnote 15). This dependence on bodily forces was a factor mentioned by some of the above-named writers regarding Sagée's phantoms.

While we have emphasized the old literature, much of which has been forgotten today in discussions of apparitional phenomena, we need to be aware that the case has

16 Sagée is an example of the type of case rejected by those researchers that paid particular attention to evidential considerations (e. g., Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2: 78, footnote): "None of the hitherto published cases of the repeated appearance of the same person's 'double' rest on good traceable authority. The case of Mdlle. Sagée published in Mr. Dale Owen's *Foot-falls* [...] was withdrawn in a later edition, as second-hand and not well substantiated."

entered popular culture not only through books written for the public (e. g., Davies, 1998; Wilson, 2006), but also through the numerous references to the case found in the Web. Anyone putting some time looking under “Sagée,” or under such entries as “double” or “doppelgänger,” will find a great number of entries. While many are quite superficial and enthusiastic, they illustrate the fact that the case is still considered an exemplar of sorts, and one no longer confined to the specialized literature.

And what’s about the case itself? Historically verified facts are something else than the facts of a historically verified story. The Sagée case history is, as shown, a historically verified, and, if necessary, further verifiable story. However, the historically verified facts of this historically verified story deviate in many regards unfortunately significant from the historic story, and thus from the historical events. In other words, the example of the Sagée case showed that for most authors of that time (here primarily the second half of the 19th century to the first third of the 20th century) the question of the authenticity of the reported events is unimportant or irrelevant for the interpretation of the phenomenon of the doppelgänger. The interpretations of the reported and much quoted doppelgänger apparitions of Sagée, however, are very diverse and also contradictory; they range from external fluidic or subtle body to external manifestations of the soul to hallucinations or astral projections. The numerous quotes of the case make it clear that the interpretations of the phenomenon of doppelgänger apparition are shaped by the respective zeitgeist. Only hypotheses guided by one’s own theory in the context of the respective scientific and cultural worldview thus make a much quoted case an exemplar.

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THE BÉLMEZ FACES

AN INVESTIGATION OF A SUPPOSEDLY STRONG CASE

Gerhard Mayer

Introduction: Hans Bender's Interest in RSPK Phenomena

Prof. Hans Bender (1907–1991), founder of the IGPP, always had a keen interest in investigating spontaneous RSPK cases and other spontaneous paranormal cases, especially if, on the one hand, they appeared to have strong and fairly unambiguous characteristics, and on the other, they included particular elements not necessarily typical of poltergeist cases. Thus, he was an open-minded researcher who not only searched for confirmation of accustomed or well-established models and theories but also for new insights into the realm of paranormal phenomena. Since the end of the 1960s, the popularity of parapsychological research had increased significantly in Germany, and the famous Rosenheim poltergeist case (Bender, 1969) made him a publicly renowned expert in parapsychology. At this time, he was very optimistic about the development of parapsychological research and its acceptance by the public as well as by his scientific colleagues. In 1967, he was able to institutionalize his parapsychological research by establishing the “Abteilung für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie” [Department of Frontier Areas of Psychology] as part of the Psychological Institute at the University of Freiburg (Lux, 2016). Given his prominent position, he tried to use television and mass media to promote parapsychology and maintain a competitive edge with regard to continually active skeptical opponents.

The purpose of this chapter is to give an idea of how Hans Bender performed such a case study, clearly showing his motivation and methodological approach as well as the pitfalls of an investigation abroad, using the case of the so-called Bélmez faces. Although this case is quite famous, only a relatively small number of publications are available—many of them in Spanish—and very few are scientific papers or books.¹ Furthermore, the somewhat complicated relationship between an allegedly RSPK case and its public

1 Alonso J. J., 1976; Alonso J., 2014; Alvarado, 1983, 1985; Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 319–364 and 504–506; Bender, 1972, 1974; Blanco-Soler, 2014: 211–224; Fernández Bueno, 1999; Fernández Bueno & Sentinella, 2004; Carballal, 1992, 2007; Gebhardt, 2009; Gruber, 1983; Jiménez & Fernández, 2005; Jordán, 1982; MacKenzie, 1987: 23–41; Martínez Romero, 1978, 1987; Naegeli-Osjord, 1974; Nager, 1974; Ramiro de Pano, 2009: 151–153; Ramiro de Pano, 2015; Rogo, 1983; Schneider, 1976; Serrano, 1972; Sorel, 1980; Tort, 1991, 1995; Tort & Ruíz-Noguez, 1993. This list does not aim to be complete. It is sometimes hardly possible to differentiate clearly between scientific, popular scientific, and entertaining literature.

reception by the mass media is made explicit. As an aside, the value of archival research is emphasized because the available literature refers mostly to reports that do not provide clear sources, and which have been perpetuated without verification.

The Bélmez Faces: Phenomenology, Circumstances, First Investigations

In August 1971, phenomena of supposedly paranormal origin occurred in the Andalusian village Bélmez de la Moraleda. Discolorations appeared on the concrete kitchen



Fig. 1: María Gómez Pereira in front of her house in 1972 (IGPP archive).

floor of a house, which were interpreted as images of faces. The events were allegedly strongly connected to the physical presence of the then 52 year old María Gómez Cámara, who had been living in the house in Calle Real 5.

When the first picture appeared, María did not attach much importance to it. At that time she felt a little ill and partly attributed her perception to her slightly febrile state. Her son destroyed the face a few days later and covered the damaged part of the floor with concrete. However, on September 8, a new face began to “materialize” at the same place. The mayor of Bélmez learned about it and prevented its destruction. On November

2, the face was cut from the floor and mounted on the wall behind glass. Excavations in the kitchen (2.80 meters deep) on December 2, 1971, brought human remains—without skulls—to light. The hole was refilled and covered with concrete. However, the transfer of the human remains did not prevent the appearance of further faces.² The “Faces of Bélmez” quickly became popular through largely sensational mass media coverage.³

2 Manuscript of a lecture given by Argumosa in Jaén/Spain on June 23, 1972 (misdated as May 23, 1972; IGPP archive, E/23-370).

3 The files of the IGPP archive include some information about the chronology of the phenomena. See the reports dated January 8, 1973 and March 1984 as well as transcriptions of tape recordings of presentations given by Germán de Argumosa at the IGPP institute and, on June 23, 1972, in the Spanish town Jaén (ibid.). A short overview of the case, which is, however, skeptically biased, and the related controversies can be found on Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C3%A9lmez_Faces; accessed on August 8, 2017). The sixth episode of the German TV documentary series *Dimension Psi* (2003) includes a five-minute section



Fig. 2: The second face “La Pava” (IGPP archive).



Fig. 3: The second face “La Pava” attached to the wall (IGPP archive).

During the first year, new faces occurred about once per month.⁴ One characteristic was the dynamics of the formations: they manifested themselves at different speeds, on some occasions directly under the eyes of witnesses, and sometimes disappeared again, or changed their appearance (Ramiro de Pano, 2015: 127–136).⁵

First investigations were conducted by the police—María mentioned the “scientific police from Madrid” that visited the house for eight days with their technical devices, examined the faces, and removed samples of concrete for analysis.⁶ In addition, a group

with current film footage and several historical photographs from Bélmez. A further overview is given by Ramiro de Pano (2015) and Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: 319–364 and 504–506).

4 Letter from Göhler to Bender dated September 4, 1972 (IGPP archive, E/23-371).

5 The author provides a series of photographs of faces which were taken at different times and display the changes.

6 Protocol of an audio recording, dated November 8, 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-370). Bender interviewed María during his third visit to Bélmez in September 1973. María also found it a bit peculiar that the mayor of Bélmez, who had been involved in the case from the beginning, did not appear during this examination, and could not be found in the village at all. She suspected that this was on the instruction of a superior authority. Not long before her death, she mentioned the “scientific police” again in an interview that she gave for a German TV production. She stated: “Before they left I asked them if they could tell me what they found out. They said to me, ‘Nobody can ascertain this. We will die and never know what it is’” (Oliver



Fig. 4–8: Changes of the second face on a series of photographs taken between September 1971 and April 1972 (Archive Argumosa).

named “Agrupación Estudios Eridani”, headed by the skeptic Jose Luis Jordán, reportedly investigated the case.⁷ Furthermore, the Guardia Civil had an interest in the devel-

Halmburger: *Dimension Psi* (2003), sequel 6 “Geister”, at 00:28:48).

7 The status of this group remains unclear. Ramiro de Pano mentions that we only know the opinion of Jordán about the case and that there is no official opinion of the group (e-mail dated July 30, 2017; see also footnote 12). Fernández Bueno (1999: 68), Jiménez & Fernández (2005: 173–174), Fernández Bueno & Sentinella (2004: 86) write (in identical terms!) of files of this group including a document dated April 10, 1972, in which a “very interesting excursion” is mentioned during which the members got the opportunity to become better acquainted. These files are owned by Jordán himself. Fernández Bueno (1999: 68) and Fernández Bueno &

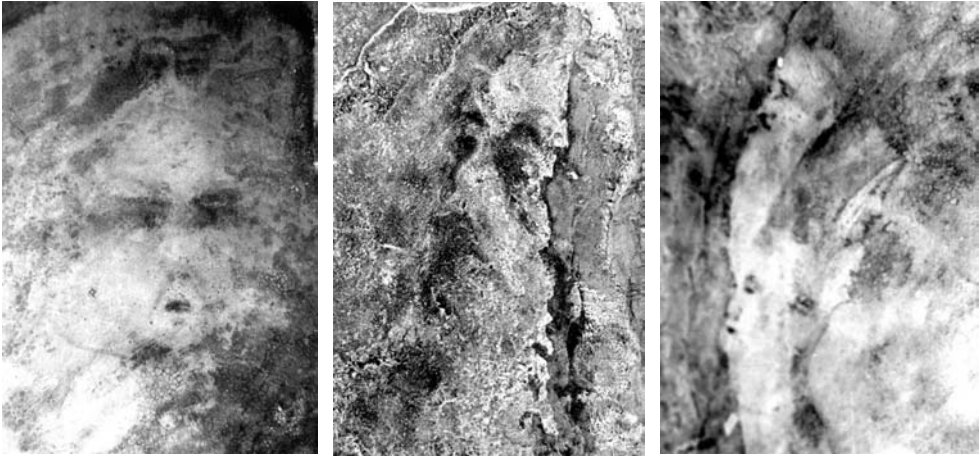


Fig. 9-11: Fourth face, another face and several small faces (IGPP archive).

opment of the case from the point of view of maintaining public order. Due to the fact that the retired officer of the Guardia Civil, J. Ortiz, lived opposite the house of the Pereira-Cámara family at the time, (ex-)members of the Guardia Civil were always present. Ortiz stated in an interview that they entered the house almost daily, and were present at every investigation step made by the researchers (Carballal, 2007).⁸ In February 1972, the Spanish parapsychologist Germán de Argumosa (1921–2007)⁹ asked the civil governor of Jaén about the status of the official investigations because he hoped to obtain a first-hand impression after having learned about the case from newspaper articles and waiting in vain for the publication of a report by an official investigation committee for about six months. The governor confirmed that no fraudulent manipulation or con-

Sentinella (2004: 86) refute the existence of an official investigation group headed by Jordán. Thus, the former vice president of the Spanish Society for Parapsychology, Jordán (“a kind of Spanish Martin Gardner”; Tort & Ruiz-Noguez, 1993: 165) remains a rather obscure, or ‘occult’, person (Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro, 2011; Magin, 2018; Mayer, 2018).

- 8 Argumosa explained in a radio broadcast (“Turno de Noche”) on June 17, 1994: “A permanent chain of control ran from the mayor to the last officer of the Guardia Civil, and all of them asserted that there was no fraud” (quoted from Ramiro de Pano, 2015: 123; translation by G.M.), and he also mentioned that in the 1970s during the Franco regime, no one would have taken the risk of such a hoax when so many officials and government authorities were involved, as was the case with the Bélmez faces (Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 385–386, endnote 84). See also Carballal, 2007.
- 9 See Ramiro de Pano (2009, 2015) and Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: 399–566) on the person and biography of Argumosa. These works include paragraphs discussing the investigations of the “Faces of Bélmez”.



Fig. 12: Argumosa conducts an interview with María Gómez Pereira. Picture from 1972 (Archive Argumosa).

ventional explanation could be found (see also Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 504; Carballal, 2007; Ramiro de Pano, 2015: 123–125). Argumosa then suggested investigating the “teleplastias” (teleplastics), as he called them, from a parapsychological perspective, and was asked by the governor to write a report containing the results of his investigation (Ramiro de Pano, 2015).¹⁰ At the same time, a group of investigators, put together by the newspaper *Pueblo*, was sent to the village.¹¹ The tabloid reports led to excessive media coverage, which resulted in a large number of tourists traveling to the “House of the Faces”.

On February 25, the same tabloid, *Pueblo*, published an article with the headline “Se acabó el misterio” [“The mystery is solved”] in which a chemical formula for the production of the faces consisting of silver chloride, silver, chlorine, and ultraviolet light was described—despite the fact that material analyses did not detect any traces of silver (Mayer & Ramiro de Pano, 2018; Ramiro de Pano, 2015).¹² This alleged “solution” of the

10 This report is dated March 14, 1972. It is published in Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: 319–326); a German translation is given in Ramiro de Pano (2015). A German translation from 1972 also exists, which contains some slight modifications (IGPP archive, E/23-370).

11 “Pueblo investiga: LAS CARAS HABLAN”. *Pueblo*, February 14, 1972. See also Fernández Bueno (1999: 44) and Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro (2011).

12 Jordán (1982: 144) writes about an unknown caller who informed the chemist of the investigation group “Pueblo” about this solution. He emphasizes that the caller, a member of the “Agrupación Estudios Eridani” whom he knew personally, only provided a possible method for the production of such images but in no way a solution to the case. Strangely enough, Jordán does not mention in his book that he himself had anything to do with this group, although he was its president at that time (Jiménez & Fernández, 2005: 173). See Alonso

case was rapidly adopted by the international press.¹³ As it later turned out, this article was published in response to pressure from the government, which wanted to get rid of the public turmoil caused by the faces (Jiménez & Fernández, 2005: 184–186).¹⁴ However, the occurrences did not stop with this, nor did the investigations. The formation of the faces, which seemed to depend on María's state of health with regard to their appearance (e. g. Blanco-Soler, 2014: 217), lasted until her death in 2004 and beyond.¹⁵

Bender's Involvement

When Bender learned about the Bélmez faces in early 1972, he was very intrigued by this case. He got in touch with Argumosa and persuaded him to visit the village several times in order to document the phenomena. Argumosa also conducted experiments, mainly trying to record “parafonías”, i. e. paranormal voices (so-called EVPs), on tape (Alvarado, 1983; Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 319–364).¹⁶ In his letters to Bender, he frequently and

(1976), Tort & Ruíz-Noguez (1993), Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: 392–397, endnotes 98 and 99), and Mayer & Ramiro de Pano (2018) on the issue of material analyses of the Bélmez faces in general. A last extensive analysis of the face “La Pelona” was initiated by Iker Jiménez Elizari and conducted in 2014 on behalf of the TV program “Cuarto Milenio” by J. J. Gracenea's team at the Department of Organic Chemistry at the University Jaume I, and by Luis Alamancos, expert of forensic criminology, and chemist Antonio Busto, of the acknowledged experts institute INPEVAL. Both teams did not find any indications of fraud, i. e. no traces of the chemicals and techniques that would be necessary to produce such formations. See Mayer & Ramiro de Pano (2018) for a detailed overview.

- 13 Although the article in *Pueblo* mentions that the formula is based on laboratory experiments and, therefore, only provides a plausible possibility for the production of the faces, the international press portrayed it as rather hard evidence. The German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* dated March 3, 1972, for instance, writes about traces of photographic salts, primarily silver chloride and silver nitrate, which were detected on the concrete of the kitchen floor, according to the report in *Pueblo*. However, this is a wrong interpretation of the Spanish article, maybe due to a translation error.
- 14 Jiménez and Fernández interviewed Antonio Casado, who was reporter for *Pueblo* and responsible for the respective article. He told them about the order from the director of the periodical to stop the coverage (and story) because it had become a problem of public order (“se ha convertido en todo un problema de orden público”; p. 185). See also letter from Argumosa to Bender dated February 5, 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-370).
- 15 After her death, further faces appeared, but in the house where she had been born (Alonso, 2014; Carballal, 2012; Gebhardt, 2009; Mayer & Ramiro de Pano, 2018). Even more so than the earlier examples, these are regarded as forgeries produced to boost tourism, or caused by pareidolia (Mayer & Ramiro de Pano, 2018). See Carballal (2012) for the late development of the case.
- 16 Argumosa was very interested in the work of Konstantin Raudive and the recording of elec-

accurately reported his investigations. In April 1972, Argumosa visited Bender at the IGPP.

The two researchers subsequently cooperated during the following years. Bender gave methodological recommendations to increase the possibility that an evidential basis could be obtained regarding the paranormal origin of the faces. He supervised the first examination steps from Germany. Bender then made three trips to Spain in order to conduct on-site examinations (in May and October 1972, and September 1973).

Several reasons can be found to make such a huge effort plausible: In Bender's opinion, such a spontaneous case—at least in the initial phase—could be shown to be very valuable for parapsychology.¹⁷ In this respect, the specific nature of the phenomena, i. e. not being elusive, played an important role. They appeared to have the character of permanent paranormal objects (Beloff, 1990: 191–202; Tort, 1991; Tort & Ruíz-Noguez, 1993). Thus, he hoped to find incontrovertible evidence of paranormal events immune to fraud. And not only that, in 1973, a German television station, cooperating closely with Bender, conceptualized a 6-episode series documenting paranormal phenomena under the title *Psi*. The TV team and its director hoped, with Bender's help, to document audio-visual paranormal phenomena that was as exciting as possible. Thus, parts of the on-site examinations took place in front of running television cameras. The plan was to obtain spectacular recordings of a replication of a successful experiment conducted about one year earlier. More on this later.

Hypotheses, Main Issues, and Results of the Investigation

From the beginning, several hypotheses concerning the phenomena were discussed:

- *Religious hypothesis*: A religious miracle. This theory was favored by the local population during the first months, but was, however, never officially supported by the church.

tronic voice phenomena. He met him periodically, together with other parapsychologists (H. Bender, A. Schneider, L. Schmidt) in Germany and in Switzerland (Ramiro de Pano, 2009). On November 10, 1971, he gave a lecture (“Extrañas voces de origen desconocido”) in Madrid on this issue (Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 303–318; 491–504). Argumosa also reported this activity in his correspondence with Hans Bender (IGPP archive, E/23–370).

17 In answer to the questions of an editor of the newspaper *Patria* from Granada, Bender stated: “In my assessment, there is no doubt that the faces have to be considered as being parapsychological.” And to the question to which category he would assign the phenomenon when comparing it with other cases known to him: “I attach extraordinary importance to it because teleplastic phenomena are very rare.” (Supplement to the manuscript of a lecture given by Argumosa on June 23, 1972: 21–22 [misdated as May 23, 1972; IGPP archive, *ibid.*]).

- *Conventional hypotheses*: Pareidolia as a perception-psychological phenomenon, i. e. perceiving “faces” in accidental patterns of stains that naturally occur on concrete floors under such environmental conditions; fraudulent manipulation of existing stain formations on the concrete floor; fraudulent production of the faces.
- *Paranormal hypothesis*: A psychodynamic RSPK interpretation, with María as a focus person (e. g. Blanco-Soler, 2014: 220).¹⁸
- *Spiritualist hypotheses*: María serves as a medium. Seemingly supported by the results of Argumosa’s EVP experiments. Alonso (2014: 30–38) distinguishes between a classical and a new spiritualist theory. While the first refers to the fact that human remains were found during the excavation in the kitchen, and the house is assumed to be built on an old cemetery,¹⁹ the latter proposes that the faces are produced by innocent victims killed during the civil war in 1936/1937 (Jiménez & Fernández, 2005).

In the following, I outline a reconstruction of the chronology of the examination steps as well as concomitant circumstances and events. It is primarily based on IGPP archive documents but also includes data from other sources (scientific papers, books, newspaper articles, etc.), which, however, are sometimes contradictory.

- Although there were several investigations of the case before parapsychological researchers entered the field, no relevant reports have become available. Asked by scientists César Tort and Luis Ruíz-Noguez, who published a paper on the

18 Blanco-Soler (2014: 220) writes: “When María was a little girl, the other girls didn’t want to be around her while playing or in school classes, because they heard voices around her, they felt pushes coming out of nowhere, and the dolls moved on their own.” María confessed this to Padre Pilón, founder of the Spanish parapsychological investigation group Grupo Hepta, of which Blanco-Soler is a member (e-mail by Blanco-Soler, dated October 25, 2018). Padre Pilón was involved in the investigations of the Bélmez faces since the early 1970s (Blanco-Soler, 2014). Another confirmation of these strange occurrences surrounding María during her childhood comes from Ramiro de Pano. Argumosa told her that he was informed by a person from Bélmez that sometimes school teachers tried to correct some girls’ misconduct by threatening to force them to be with Maria, as punishment, and the girls immediately rejected that punishment, because Maria frightened them (e-mail by Ramiro de Pano, dated October 22, 2018).

19 Interviews with the local population produced handed down reports of RSPK phenomena in this area of the village that go back long before the appearance of the faces. Furthermore, there are documents at the University of Salamanca on the basis of which it can be shown that a family of five was murdered in Bélmez in the 17th century, in the respective house or in the immediate neighborhood (Transcript of an audio recording of a lecture given by Argumosa at the IGPP on April 17, 1972 [IGPP archive, *ibid.*]. See also Martínez Romero, 1978).

Bélmez faces in the *JSPR*, the skeptic Jordán, who headed a commission in 1971, reportedly on behalf of the Spanish Ministry of the Interior, stated that unfortunately the report of this investigation “might have been lost by a bureaucrat of the Francoism” (Tort & Ruíz-Noguez, 1993).²⁰ Argumosa told Bender about an investigation made by a secret committee of the security police, which visited Bélmez in order to detect fraud. Informed by a Justizsekretär [clerk of court] about this operation, he wrote to Bender: “The absolute silence with regard to the achieved conclusions as well as the counter-order to suspend all activity speak for themselves, i. e. that no traces of evidence of fraud could be detected.”²¹

- Argumosa performed experiments himself in the “House of the Faces”. He was convinced he had recorded EVPs as well as photographed some ectoplasmic phenomena (Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 324; Ramiro de Pano, 2015). These findings promoted the spiritualist hypotheses among the public, although Argumosa was a proponent of his own alternative theory: the hypothesis of a conscious transcendence [hipótesis del consciente transcendente].²² For him, these findings supported the hypothesis that the faces are authentic paranormal phenomena, but not that they are caused by spirits of the dead (ibid.: 332, passim). However, the reporters present during the experiments started a series of articles with the sensational headline “Las caras hablan” [The faces are talking].
- From February 1972 onwards, the mass media became very hostile towards the Bélmez case and its parapsychological interpretation. Bender talked about “a campaign against Bélmez, which was initiated by the print media [...] an inquisi-

20 See also letter from Susanne (Susana) Polac to Bender dated March 7, 1972 (IGPP archive, E/23-371). It remains unclear whether this “official” committee really was constituted on behalf of the government. See footnotes 7 and 12.

21 Letter dated March 6, 1973 from Argumosa to Bender. See also the conversation protocol of a meeting with Argumosa in Freiburg on April 13, 1973, and the tape transcript of the SWF filming on November, 8 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-370). María Gómez mentions the visit of the committee in the above-mentioned documentary *Psi* (see footnote 6) and emphasizes that she could not find any conventional explanation of the phenomena.

22 Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: passim). In earlier years, he sometimes remained a little unclear with regard to his theoretical positioning, maybe for strategic reasons. On some occasions, he showed himself as a proponent of the psychodynamic (animistic) theory, perhaps to be in line with Bender, but on other occasions, he also did not reject the spiritualist hypotheses. The president of the Schweizer Parapsychologischen Gesellschaft [Swiss Parapsychological Society], H. Naegeli-Osjord, visited Argumosa at the end of 1973 and wrote in a paper: “he [i. e. Argumosa; G. M.] tends toward a spiritualist interpretation of this spectacular phenomenon” (Naegeli-Osjord, 1974). This may, however, have been primarily based on wishful thinking. Argumosa remained open-minded for different models, as a scientist should be, particularly in the field of unconventional research such as anomalistics.



Fig. 13: Bender conducts interviews in Bélmez in 1972 (IGPP archive).

tion by the alliance between altar and throne, [...] based on absolutely false accusations, false reports of confessions and so forth”²³

- Despite this strong opposition from the press, and public opinion in general, Argumosa continued with his visits to Bélmez. In April 1972, he witnessed a face developing on the floor within 10 minutes, together with two reporters, Rafael Alcalá of the newspaper *Jaén* and Pedro Sagrario of the newspaper *Patria*, and some villagers.²⁴
- In May 1972, Bender traveled to Bélmez and conducted interviews with involved individuals. He also gave a presentation on parapsychology in Madrid, referring to the Bélmez case. In doing so, he compared the phenomena with the thoughtography of Ted Serios (Eisenbud, 1989), emphasizing the role of a focus person that functions as a physical medium. Bender explicitly assessed the phenomena as paranormal but refused a supernatural, i. e. spiritualist, explanation.²⁵

23 Verbatim transcript of a telephone conversation between Bender and a representative of Padre Quevedo dated January 10, 1975 (IGPP archive, E/23-370; translation by G. M.).

24 Manuscript of the lecture given by Argumosa on June 23, 1972, in Jaén (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). See also transcript of an interview by Bender with Sagrario on May 21 or 22, 1972 in Bélmez (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).

25 Lecture manuscript in Spanish and German (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). The Spanish version, slightly edited and supplemented with a foreword by Argumosa, has been published in three parts in *KARMA-7*, No. 9–11, Juli, August, September 1973.



Fig. 14: The kitchen floor was covered with a plexiglass panel and sealed (IGPP archive).

- Following this, Bender suggested covering the floor with a transparent plastic sheet and sealing it at the walls with varnish. This was done on June 10, 1972, by Argumosa.²⁶ After a few hours, a new face had appeared under the plastic sheet. The following day, two teachers from the village and another person from the local public authorities visited the place and detected a newly developed face. However, when the local photographer came two days later, it had disappeared. On June 16, the plastic sheet had to be removed due to heavy accumulation of condensed water. The seals were undamaged when the sheet was removed.²⁷
- In October 1972, Bender visited Bélmez for the second time. This time, the floor was covered with a transparent plastic panel and sealed.²⁸ Plasticine was applied to some areas to test whether faces would also appear on other materials. His plan to install a special video camera, with which the development of a face could be filmed directly in fast motion, as well as permanent video surveillance of the room with another video camera, could not be realized due to technical and economic reasons.²⁹ A month later, a lot of water had again accumulated between the

26 Letter dated July 7, 1972 from Argumosa to Bender (IGPP archive, E/23-370).

27 Signed protocol (copy) dated June 16, 1972 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). See also Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: 387–388) and Ramiro de Pano (2015).

28 Bender applied protection marks in order to detect fraud. See handwritten notes on his protection measures (IGPP archive, E/23-371).

29 With regard to the third experiment, Bender stated about a year later: “It becomes clear that

floor and the covering panel. The experiment had to be terminated prematurely due to hygiene reasons but also because the wet floor was no longer acceptable for the family who lived there.³⁰ Bender was asked if he would like to attend the act of unsealing and removal,³¹ but this was not possible. In a letter, Bender gave precise instructions on how to deal with the situation in order to maintain a fraud-proof documentation.³² On December 2, the panel was removed in the presence of Argumosa, the mayor of Bélmez, and further witnesses, but before the arrival of the certifying notary—the latter against Bender’s instructions.³³ The room was closed and resealed so that the floor could dry out. The next day, the room was reopened by the same people. Newly appeared faces could be seen and these were photographed. All these actions, as well as the detected changes in the quadrants marked on the floor were protocolled and signed by the present witnesses.³⁴ However, as it turned out, the film remained unexposed, or the developing solution was bad. A reliable proof could not be obtained. The *experimentum crucis* failed.³⁵

- In late 1972, public opinion changed again in favor of the parapsychological hypothesis, even before a highly publicized conference on parapsychology on June 16–17, 1973, in Barcelona.³⁶ Bender’s involvement in the case, as well as his pre-

the real, absolute, and striking proof could be obtained if we are successful in continuously making the changes in the cement visible by means of time-lapse filming” (transcript of the audio recording of the filming by the SWF television team in Bélmez from September 11–13, 1973; translation by G. M. [IGPP archive, E/23-370]).

- 30 Conversation protocol of a meeting with Argumosa in Freiburg on April 13, 1973 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).
- 31 Telephone memo of a call from Renate Göhler to the IGPP (without date, IGPP archive, E/23-371).
- 32 Letter from Bender to Göhler dated November 29, 1972 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). The instructions concern the water between the plastic panel and the floor, and the sealed fittings with the applied marks, as well as issues of photographic documentation.
- 33 The problem was that the notary did not live in Bélmez, and was not available over the weekend of December 2 and 3. See letters from Renate Göhler to Bender dated December 18, 1972 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*) and from Argumosa to Bender dated February 5, 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-370).
- 34 Signed protocols (copies) dated December 2 and 3, 1972 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). See also Ramiro de Pano (2015).
- 35 See conversation protocol of a meeting with Argumosa in Freiburg on April 13, 1973, the letters dated February 5, 1973, and March 6, 1973, from Argumosa, and the document made by the witnesses who were present at the opening of the sealed room on December 3, 1972 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).
- 36 Letter from Göhler to Bender dated March 10, 1973 (IGPP archive E/23-371). Göhler wrote: “a turnaround of 180 degrees has taken place here. Parapsychology now is absolutely ‘in’, one



Abb. 15: Bender interviews María Gómez in September 1973. Between the two is the Austrian Countess Maria Anna Grundemann von Falkenberg, who acted as translator (IGPP archive).

sentation in Madrid, might have played a significant role because he was a prominent international expert.³⁷ Argumosa himself gave a seminar on parapsychology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM). Bender's translator in Spain talked about a "paranormal wave" in the country.

- On March 10 and 11, 1973, a group of about 150 students of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid made an excursion to Bélmez, accompanied by Argumosa as well as

a professor of philosophy, José de Solas, in order to conduct parapsychological experiments (EVPs) at the location. The appearance of three faces was witnessed "live" by 30 of them. However, these three faces disappeared after a few hours. Photographs were taken (Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 326–327, 329, 383 [endnote 79]).³⁸

- Argumosa suggested to the mayor of Bélmez that a new kitchen room be built for the Pereiras in order to increase the possibility of conducting parapsychological experiments in the original living-kitchen room without disturbing their everyday life more than necessary. He would bear half of the costs.³⁹ This proposal was realized during the first half of 1973.⁴⁰ However, Bender did not seem to be

can again talk about Bélmez, programs on parapsychology are aired by the radio, etc. An almost paranormal phenomenon!" See also letter from Argumosa to Bender dated July 10, 1973, and the transcript of the report (audio recording) by Bender of the visit to Bélmez on September 11–13, 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-370).

37 Letter from Göhler to Bender dated June 15, 1972 (IGPP archive, E/23-371).

38 Photographs of the excursion are provided in Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: 327–328). See also the conversation protocol of a meeting with Argumosa in Freiburg on April 13, 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-370), as well as Ramiro de Pano (2015).

39 Letter from Argumosa to Bender dated February 5, 1973 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).

40 Letters from Argumosa to Bender dated March 6, 1973, and July 10, 1973 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).



Fig. 16: Television team of *Südwestfunk* in front of the “House of the Faces” in 1973 (IGPP archive).

very convinced of its value. In a letter to his translator, Renate Göhler, he wrote: “It would truly be better to conduct such an experiment in an accurate manner (referring to the failed *experimentum crucis*; G. M.) instead of building new rooms which probably would destroy the ‘occult’ atmosphere of the house.”⁴¹ Faces also appeared in the new kitchen.⁴²

- During his third visit to Bélmez in September 1973, Bender tried to document a further replication of the experiment, this time without the problematic covering of the floor. He was accompanied by a German television team, as already mentioned. The intention was to conduct interviews in front of the TV camera with the student witnesses and the two reporters who had observed the “materialization” of faces.⁴³ Most importantly, they hoped to make spectacular recordings during the opening of the sealed room, and to verify the appearance of new faces under these controlled conditions. Photographs of the single marked quadrants on the floor had been taken, and the room was then sealed on July 23—all

41 Letter from Bender to Göhler dated March 19, 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-371).

42 Protocol of a meeting on April 13, 1973, with Argumosa in Freiburg (IGPP archive, E/23-370).

43 Transcript of a telephone conversation between Bender and Argumosa on September 3, 1973 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).

recorded by the present notary.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the results did not meet expectations. Some changes to the existing faces could be detected, and furthermore, one small face seemed to have disappeared in comparison with the photographs made before closing and sealing the room. However, the quality of the photographs that had been taken beforehand for comparison was too poor to allow reliable conclusions to be made about the evidence.⁴⁵

- Bender was convinced of the paranormal quality of the phenomena but he was forced to state: “Technical obstacles prevented reaching intended highest level of documentary evidence”.⁴⁶
- Although this was in fact Bender’s last visit to Bélmez, he considered carrying out a further experiment with better controlled conditions in 1974, probably during the period of the third anniversary of the first occurrence of the faces.⁴⁷ However, this experiment, which included the installation of a time-lapse video camera, did not take place (see possible explanations in the paragraph “Concluding considerations”).
- With the Jesuit Padre Quevedo, who grew up in Brazil and was living in Spain at that time, a “debunker”⁴⁸ came into play whose sharp public attacks were mainly

44 Letter from Argumosa to Bender dated July 26, 1973, in French (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). See also Fernández Bueno (1999: 59–62) who, in addition, provides an interview with the notary Antonio Palacios Luque. A notarial recording of this act translated into German is provided by Ramiro de Pano (2015).

45 See transcript (written on November 8, 1973) of the audio recording of the filming by the SWF television team in Bélmez from September 11–13, 1973 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). In his “Brief zum Jahreswechsel” [letter at the turn of the year] Bender wrote: “In Bélmez, slight changes in the configuration of faces during the sealing of the location of the phenomena, which had been checked by a notary, had helped to confirm the paranormal origin” (Bender, 1974: 20; translation by G. M.).

46 Transcript of a telegram from Bender to Argumosa dated January 10, 1975 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).

47 Transcript of a telephone conversation between Bender and Argumosa on April 30, 1974 (dated May 2, 1974; IGPP archive, *ibid.*).

48 “Debunker” is actually not the correct term because Padre Quevedo (= Óscar González-Quevedo, born in 1930) was quite interested in paranormal phenomena. In 1970, he founded the Centro Latino-Americano de Parapsicología (CLAP) in São Paulo that still exists under the name Instituto Padre Quevedo de Parapsicología (<http://institutopadrequevedo.com.br/>, accessed: August 3, 2017), and provides counseling for persons with extraordinary experiences as well as courses in parapsychology for professionals (physicians, psychologists, educators, etc.). One of the aims of the institute is to still peoples’ fears of paranormal phenomena and provide a psychodynamic explanatory framework that can be set against spiritualists and spiritualist interpretations which are widespread in Brazil. So the criticism of Quevedo is

directed against Argumosa, but also against Bender.⁴⁹ The controversy culminated in December 1975 / January 1976 with newspaper reports and radio broadcasts. Quevedo had interpreted a statement from Bender, according to which the intended highest level of documentary evidence could not be reached,⁵⁰ as indicating that Bender was not convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena. Bender sent a telegram to Argumosa, as a means of support for a new public encounter with Quevedo, in which he confirmed his assessment of the phenomena as paranormal (see footnote 46). This telegram was shown to Quevedo before the beginning of the event. However, the public debate about Bender's telegram did not produce the desired result because Quevedo interpreted the statements in a very unique way.⁵¹

Fake News and the Perpetuation of False Facts

Fake news is not a new phenomenon and as early as in the 1970s, it played a significant role in issues that attracted high public attention. As mentioned before, there were attempts to terminate the stir caused by the media coverage of the Bélmez case. Bender talked about “a campaign against Bélmez, which was initiated by the print media [...] an inquisition by the alliance between altar and throne, [...] based on absolutely false accusations, false reports of confessions and so forth”.⁵² The latter referred to an alleged

directed against spiritualism in general (e.g. against Kardechianism in Brazil), and, in the case of the Bélmez faces, against an assumed spiritualistic interpretation of the phenomena by Argumosa.

- 49 Quevedo later apologized to Bender in a letter dated January 17, 1975, declaring that the statements had been inartfully expressed, and finally “publicly twisted” (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).
- 50 Transcript of a telephone call between Bender and a deputy of Quevedo, Dr. Hopidga, that took place on January 10, 1975, as well as the telegram from Bender to Argumosa of the same date (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).
- 51 Letter from Argumosa to Bender dated January 24, 1975 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). Bender told a representative of Quevedo in a telephone conversation on January 10, 1975, that the main investigator of the case was Argumosa but he had visited Bélmez himself several times to examine the phenomena (transcript of the telephone conversation, dated January 15, 1975; IGPP archive, *ibid.*). However, in a speech given in Madrid as well as in a radio interview, Quevedo asserted that Bender told him by telephone that he had not made any investigations into the Bélmez faces himself and his affirmations were only based on information given by Argumosa (telephone conversation between Bender and Antonio Carretero Hanefey [on behalf of Argumosa] on January 15, 1975; IGPP archive, *ibid.*).
- 52 See footnote 23.

confession made by a photographer from Bélmez who asserted that he produced the faces, as reported by several newspapers.⁵³ Thus, they were forgeries. However, the photographer declared in an interview with Bender that he never made this confession.⁵⁴ It was the pure invention of a journalist.⁵⁵

Some proponents of the paranormal origin of the faces argue that there was a so-called “Operación Tridente”, controlled by the Franco regime in order to suppress an open discussion of the phenomena in the public (Fernández Bueno, 1999: 65–71; Fernández Bueno & Sentinella, 2004: 81–91; Jiménez & Fernández, 2005: 165–191). The three spikes of the trident represented the church, fake results of investigations by skeptical scientists, and governmental measures. Some critics doubt whether an “Operación Tridente” really existed, and regard it as a conspiracy theory (e. g. Alonso, 2014: 44). Such doubt appears to be justifiable, as can be seen from the interviews Carballal (2007) conducted with former members of the Guardia Civil. All of them denied that there was an “Operación Tridente”. However, there is no doubt that governmental pressure was exerted on various persons as well as on the print media for a period of time.⁵⁶ Thus, for example, the mayor of Bélmez received a letter on February 16 from the head of the government department prohibiting him to give any statements about the faces. Otherwise he would be suspended (Carballal, 1992; Fernández Bueno, 1999: 69). And the son of the photographer in Bélmez told Bender in an interview that he was advised at the end of February 1972 by Prof. Serrano, an assistant at the department for political sciences in Madrid, to no longer comment on the case. He was also reportedly threatened.⁵⁷

53 Letter from Polac to Bender dated March 6, 1972 (IGPP archive, E/23-371).

54 Interview of Miguel Rodríguez Montavez by Bender on May 21 or 22, 1972 in Bélmez (IGPP archive, E/23-370).

55 Transcript of the report (audio recording) made by Bender of the visit to Bélmez on September 11–13, 1973 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*). Quote: “Apparently, the understanding is now that a journalist produced the hoax due to his anger that another one got there first, and the responsible government entities gladly adopted it, so that this inquisition-like suppression of the case occurred” (translation by G. M.).

56 Ramiro de Pano explained: “under an authoritarian or dictatorial system no written documents are necessary; persons in official positions know what they have to think and do to maintain the trust of their superiors. A suggestion, a gesture of refusal, a verbal constraint, a telephone call is sufficient” (e-mail of August 1, 2017).

57 Interview of Jesús José Rodríguez by Bender on May 21 or 22, 1972 in Bélmez (IGPP archive, *ibid.*).

We can find the faked confession of the photographer and the accusation of his son of fraud in several later publications.⁵⁸ The same applies to the alleged solution of the case as a fraud with the help of the apparently wrong chemical formula.⁵⁹

A big issue regarding the subsequent public reception of this case is that the press was involved from very early on, installing an investigation group including two reporters. They worked together with Argumosa and might have been truly interested in the unbiased examination of the phenomena, although their main aim had to be to get a good story that sold well (Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro, 2011). They became eye-witnesses of the spontaneous appearance of a face (see footnote 24). However, from the perspective of a poorly informed skeptical reader, who got his information only from newspaper articles,

58 Unfortunately, this applies also to the, in many regards well-informed, coverage by Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro (2011), which provides a lot of interesting details but lacks a thorough checking of the sources, like so many other publications concerning this case. Furthermore, the authors provide an erroneous interpretation of the results of the material analyses made by Alonso (1976). Alonso only recognized that one face matches with the sole of a shoe which could have been impressed while the concrete was not yet hardened; he did not draw any conclusions regarding the fraud issue. However, Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro (2011: 19) write: “Esta conclusión venía a confirmar, sin atisbo de duda, que al menos aquel rostro analizado era un fraude” [This conclusion confirmed without any doubt that at least the analyzed face was a fraud; translation by G. M.].

59 A very bizarre version can be found in Joe Nickell’s book *Looking for a miracle* (1997). The skeptic author mentions this famous case in only a few sentences on page 39 (why?), seemingly referring to only one source: Scott Rogo’s book *Miracles* (1983). Rogo’s book includes significant errors, e.g. that Bender only made two trips to Spain, and that “the local press charged that Señora Pereira was perpetrating a hoax for financial gain” (p. 128). To our knowledge, María Pereira herself was never charged by the local press. Ramiro de Pano, who is a well-informed person regarding the case, confirmed these points (e-mail dated August 8, 2017). Rogo may have misinterpreted the fact that María was criticized for taking entrance fees from tourists and selling photographs of the faces. But the accusation of fraud in the press concerned the son of the photographer. However, Rogo was at least fairly interested in the case, and asked Bender for an investigation report and pictures for his publication in a letter dated March 5, 1973 (IGPP archive, E/23-371). Bender regretfully replied in a letter dated March 19, 1973 (IGPP archive, *ibid.*): “I have not yet made any written report on the Belmez [sic!] faces as the investigation is still going on. [...] Faces are said to have appeared under the plate, but the photographer spoilt the photos. Lack of exactness seems to be a characteristic trait of Spanish people. I will nevertheless publish a report in due course, in cooperation with German de Argumosa, the Spanish parapsychologist”. Nickell, on the contrary, excerpted only a few sentences from Rogo’s book which are in line with his own skeptical ideology and states: “Insofar as one is able to judge from a single photograph—depicting the first visage materializing [it was the second, of course; the first one was destroyed; G. M.] the face is indistinguishable from the work of a very amateurish artist” (1997: 39). This is the basis of the skeptic’s judgement. Nevertheless, we find this reference as a primary source in the Wikipedia entry on the Belmez faces (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C3%A9lmez_Faces, accessed: August 8, 2017).

their testimonies are automatically devalued by the fact that they were reporters from a tabloid.

Concluding Considerations

It should already have become clear that a thorough and well-controlled investigation of paranormal phenomena, even with supposedly good preconditions and high resource input, can fail, or become extremely difficult at least, due to uncontrollable external influences and conflicts of interest. Too many parties were involved, following interests that were too different, which thereby “spoiled the case” (Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro, 2011).⁶⁰ As Bender was not able to conduct all examinations on-site, important possibilities for documenting the phenomena failed. Bender was of the opinion that the experiments were not conducted accurately enough. In a letter dated March 19, 1973, he complained to his translator Renate Göhler: “The experiment with plastic panels was profoundly screwed up. No notary at the removal of the panel, and not even any photographs because the ‘developer’ was no good.”⁶¹

Even before the beginning of the thorough investigation, the interest of the public had been aroused. This led to large crowds of visitors and to the coverage by public media—with all the concomitant effects, most of which are negative with regard to a scientific investigation. Nevertheless, Bender continued to be optimistic at first. The alleged confession of forgery by the photographer could be dismissed as incorrect, and the formation of new faces did not stop, despite the public hustle and bustle. This encouraged Bender to conduct further examinations in cooperation with the Südwestfunk (SWF) television crew in order to obtain scientific evidence, as well as attractive and convincing footage at the same time.

However, the footage recorded in Bélmez by the SWF crew was never aired because the documentary series was terminated prematurely. Initially, this was planned only as a temporary suspension, after the airing of the third sequel. In this regard, the title of an article in the newspaper *Mittelbayerische Zeitung* dated January 23, 1975, is suggestive: “Questionable ‘Psi’ series of ARD (group of German public service broadcasters; G.M.) is stopped for the time. The headline stated “Bender’s poltergeist ghosts were on strike in front of the camera”, accompanied by the subtitle: “No evidence of the supernatural was produced / scientists announce war against superstition”. In addition to the fact that

60 Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro (2011: 24) conclude by quoting the investigator Manuel Gómez Ruiz that the case of the Bélmez faces may be the great lost opportunity of Spanish parapsychology.

61 IGPP archive, *ibid.*

Bender did not succeed, despite his huge efforts, in producing “definite evidence” of the paranormal event, he received strong opposition from various sides. The press reacted almost entirely critically to the first sequel, and the audience was divided.⁶² Due to the fact that Bender’s retirement was on the agenda, which raised the question of his university succession and took some energy to arrange it according to his own interests, a further attempt at completion of the remaining three parts seemed to be too much for him under the given circumstances. The failure of this television documentary series is likely to have heavily dampened Bender’s hope of supporting parapsychological research in a serious manner with the help of the mass media.⁶³

One main argument of skeptics against the genuineness of the Bélmez faces is that Bender never published a formal paper on his investigation, despite announcements he made in 1972 and 1973 (Bender, 1972).⁶⁴ This is not a scientific argument but worth taking into consideration in principle. It would be in line with the well-known file drawer problem in experimental parapsychology and could also be applied, with regard to this case, to the seemingly non-existent, or at least unpublished, reports of the examinations by the police and the ‘official committee of experts’, which apparently found no indication of fraud. However, given his personal situation (searching for university succession after his retirement) as well as the disappointment with regard to the television series, and furthermore, his chronic work overload, other plausible reasons can be found for the fact that this case was not presented in a detailed publication by Bender.⁶⁵ His high

62 Letter dated November 18, 1974 from Bender to the television editor Jörg Dattler (IGPP archive, E/22-223).

63 Argumosa wrote in a letter dated March 16, 1974, to Bender: “The tactics pursued by you in your tireless fight for the academic recognition and integration of parapsychology is very interesting to me” (IGPP archive, E/23-370).

64 In a letter to Scott Rogo dated March 19, 1973, who asked for a report of the case, Bender replied: “I have not yet made any written report on the Belmez [sic!] faces as the investigation is still going on. [...] I will nevertheless publish a report in due course, in cooperation with German de Argumosa, the Spanish parapsychologist. I will give you word when the manuscript is ready for print.” (IGPP archive, E/23-371) He also announced a forthcoming article on the case in the *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie* at the end of 1973 in a letter to a Mr. Wilbertz dated May 2, 1973, which, however, was not published (ibid.).

65 Several very interesting reports of RSPK case investigations by Bender can be found in the IGPP archive that are not published in elaborated papers. In a conversation with Johannes Mischo on the occasion of his 75th birthday, he complained that due to his “broad diversification of his scientific work” he did not find the time for larger publications and that much had remained unpublished. But he mentioned the English proverb: “It’s never too late to mend” (Bender and Mischo, p. 22, in Bauer & Lucadou [eds.], 1983).

regard of the case is reflected in the support of MacKenzie's reconstruction of the case published in 1987 (pp. 23–41).⁶⁶

A further crucial point was that Argumosa put great emphasis on his EVP experiments. When the reporters started a series of articles with the headline "Las caras hablan" [The faces are talking; see footnote 11], this clearly supported a spiritualist interpretation of the phenomena which was a thorn in the side of several parapsychologists, including Argumosa himself, and, in addition, created fierce reactions (for instance, that of the above-mentioned Padre Quevedo) and misunderstandings. Thus, Alonso (2014: 97ff) harshly criticizes Argumosa, *inter alia*, for being primarily interested in his EVP recordings, and quotes parts of the official report written by Argumosa for the civil government of Jaén (see footnote 10). Someone who knows very little about approaches and theories of parapsychological research might easily misunderstand Argumosa's report at the mentioned points. However, these statements have to be seen from a science policy point of view—Argumosa wanted to dissociate himself from amateur scientists and journalists by referring to an international congress in Italy. Furthermore, it is part of his methodological approach to the investigation of RSPK cases to see the phenomena as part of a wider whole. His methodology consists of three main steps: (1) exclusion of fraud, (2) examination of the phenomena with conventional scientific methods (e.g. material analyses etc.), and (3) parapsychological methods (Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano, 2014: 347ff). The latter is based on the idea that, at an alleged RSPK location, a whole variety of paranormal phenomena may occur, not just one single type. If one is able to capture convincing EVPs at such a location, this is interpreted as a strong indication that the other phenomena are also genuine.⁶⁷ Bender also did not generally preclude such methods as additional input. Thus, he asked the famous clairvoyant Gérard Croiset, with whom he worked, partly successfully, in several cases and experiments, for his opinion about the case during a visit on June 11, 1972. Croiset described the interior of a photographer's house in detail and sounded a note of caution.⁶⁸ However, Bender did not consider this note of caution to be very significant. In a letter to his translator, Renate Göhler, he

66 Tort & Ruíz-Noguez (1993) criticize MacKenzie's study because of the lack of an interpreter during his visits to Bélmez. However, they do not take into account that the main part of MacKenzie's work consisted of evaluating the complete correspondence between Argumosa and Bender, telephone protocols, and first hand research reports which are archived at the IGPP. Bender himself was accompanied by an interpreter during his three investigations in Spain.

67 Amateur-scientific ghost-hunting groups of today also apply this method, however with an emphasis on the parapsychological methods (Mayer, 2013).

68 Protocol written by Bender, dated June 20, 1972 (IGPP archive, E/23-370).

wrote: “This may be pure imagination, or a telepathic tapping into the controlled media reports, and does not impress me very much.”⁶⁹

Considering Bender’s main objective, to obtain incontrovertible evidence of paranormal events, it would have been best to restrict the experiments to conventional methods and make them as fraud-proof as possible. However, when huge public interest arose, things got out of control.⁷⁰ In addition to the mass media interest, several kinds of ‘investigators’ entered the scene. Some conducted experiments with hypnotized mediums,⁷¹ a medical doctor acupunctured the faces,⁷² and the professor of astrology and futurologist, Rafael Lafuente, made “sensational” forecasts.⁷³ Since 1996, a Spanish amateur investigation group, Sociedad Española de Investigaciones Parapsicológicas (SEIP), has been intensively involved in examinations and experiments with the Bélmez faces (Fernández Bueno & Sentinella, 2004: 137–149). They started a so-called Operación Génesis in 2002, which, among other things, has investigated the assumed influence of the health and mental condition of María on the facial characteristics of the faces (Alonso, 2014: 136ff; Fernández Bueno & Sentinella, 2004: 151–176). This all obviously had an influence on public opinion of the case and the researchers in general who dedicated themselves to its investigation.

A third point frequently made by skeptics (and not only by them) is the financial issue. If substantial amounts of money are involved this is often taken as a secure indication of fraud. Such considerations are certainly justifiable but they are, again, not scientific arguments. César Tort, one of the authors of the probably most informative scientific paper on the case, published in the *JSPR* in 1993, published a short note on the case for the *Skeptical Inquirer* two years later (Tort, 1995). He had abandoned his former neutral

69 Letter from Bender to Göhler dated July 2, 1972 (IGPP archive, E/23-371; translation by G. M.).

70 This applies in the very same way to the “Chopper” case described in Mayer, “The Authority Strikes Back” in this volume.

71 Argumosa & Ramiro de Pano (2014: 343 and 397, endnote 100) and Martínez Romero (1987). In 2003, a further experiment of this kind was conducted with the result that the hypnotized medium was able to establish a connection between María’s dreams and members of her family who died tragically during the civil war (Alonso, 2014: 37).

72 Unpublished report of a Spanish investigation group including Prof. Dr. Juan José Alonso Pascual, director of the *Instituto Hidrológico Y Mineralógico de Valencia* (archive Argumosa). See also file memo of a conversation between Bender and the Spanish artist Fernando Calderon on October 2, 1975 (IGPP archive, E/23-370, without indication of an author).

73 Article in the newspaper *YA* dated February 16, 1972: “Persiste el misterio de Bélmez de la Moraleda” (correspondent: Medina Hornos). See also Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro (2011).

position in favor of a skeptical one (“my former neutrality was a bit inattentive”). However, he does not provide any scientific argument to justify his change in the assessment of the case. Almost half of the text considers money issues (“may have been perpetrating a hoax for financial gain”),⁷⁴ and in the other parts he mentions arguments of skeptics, which were well-known from the beginning of the investigations into the case (“The photo I took of the face called La Pelona [...] has all the signs of having been sketched by an inexperienced hand – even infantile, I would say. And the same can be said of the ten other faces I photographed”).

Here, we can find a rather characteristic development: with increasing historical distance to the events, the tendency towards a restoration of the orthodox “order of reality” (cf. Mayer & Schetsche, 2016) becomes increasingly stronger. Judgements are often based on secondary sources, which are selected according to one’s own opinion and worldview.⁷⁵ To give an example quoted in the *JSPR* paper by Tort & Ruíz-Noguez (1993: 166): Ramos Perera, President of the Spanish Society for Parapsychology, who advocates the forgery hypothesis, stated in a telephone conversation with the authors in 1992 “that the fraud was done ‘by a photographer who retouched the originals’”. However, this statement is apparently based on fake news invented by a journalist.⁷⁶ Therefore, if one is interested in obtaining a relatively unbiased impression of a historical case, it is necessary, or very helpful at least, to examine primary sources accessible in archives, which are fortunately very rich in this intriguing case.

Acknowledgement

I especially want to thank Pilar Ramiro de Pano for her invaluable help. She generously provided documents and photographs, and gave important and enlightening information about the case that helped me to understand the situation in Spain in the early 1970s much better.

74 See Alonso (2014: 44) on this point. He writes: “Virtually from the very first minute, there was one issue [...] that has radically divided the two theories [the skeptical and the spiritualist; G.M.]: the economic” (translation by G.M.). The skeptics emphasize the possibility of financial gain for the family of María as well as the photographer and the people of the village, whereas the ‘believers’ point to the fact that María lived her whole life in modest conditions, and died in relative poverty. However, during the first months after the occurrence of the first faces, María actually took entrance fees from the tourists and sold photographs of the faces (Cuevas & Sánchez-Oro, 2011). See also footnote 58.

75 This issue deserves its own scientific study.

76 Transcript of an audio recording of the filming by the SWF television team in Bélmez from September 11–13, 1973 (written on November 8, 1973; IGPP archive, E/23-370).

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THE AUTHORITY STRIKES BACK

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE ALLEGEDLY FRAUDULENT “CHOPPER” POLTERGEIST CASE

Gerhard Mayer

In his book *Structural Anthropology* (1963: 172–75), the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss reports a case study made by M. C. Stevenson among Zuñi people in New Mexico: an adolescent boy was accused of having caused a nervous shock in a twelve year old girl by sorcery. He was brought to court. After vainly denying that he had any knowledge of occult powers he finally changed his strategy. Lévi-Strauss wrote: “He improvised a tale explaining the circumstances by which he had been initiated into sorcery” (p. 172). And furthermore: “First of all, we see that the boy tried for witchcraft, for which he risks the death penalty, wins his acquittal not by denying but by admitting his alleged crime. Moreover, he furthers his cause by presenting successive versions, each richer in detail (and thus, in theory, more persuasive of guilt) than the preceding one. [...] The judges do not expect the accused to challenge their theory, much less to refute the facts. Rather, they require him to validate a system of which they possess only a fragment; he must reconstruct it as a whole in an appropriate way” (p. 173).

Social Suppression, Social Elusiveness, and Rational Gravity

Here, we find an example of an enforced, and finally made, confession of producing paranormal phenomena. It had to be made in order to corroborate a commonly accepted system of beliefs and stabilize the community. In poltergeist cases that gain public attention, confessions often acquire a similar function, i. e. supporting socially dominant worldviews and restoring a threatened social order. It is part of phase four of Lucadou’s model of the dynamics and temporal development of RSPK cases (1995, 2015), the so-called “suppression phase”.¹ This last phase denotes the reaction of society as it strives to restore normality, i. e. “the order” that has been jeopardized by the alleged paranormal phenomena. In a thought-provoking manner, Evrard (2019, chapter “The ‘Amnéville RSPK case’” of this volume) hypothesized a complementary relationship between the possibility of the occurrence of psi phenomena in living environments and their social

1 The other three phases are the “surprise phase”, the “displacement phase”, and the “decline phase”.

suppression. He calls this dynamic “social elusiveness”, in accordance with the “natural elusiveness” of psi phenomena itself. McLuhan (2010) found a term that aptly catches another aspect of the process of the last phase of a RSPK case: “rational gravity”. In Lucadou’s and Evrard’s considerations, the (potential) existence of “real” psi phenomena plays a crucial role, i. e. their elusiveness should be explained, whereas the concept of rational gravity is primarily directed to *claims* of such phenomena and/or judgements of such claims, irrespective of whether they actually, or possibly, occurred or not. Rational gravity has to be understood as “a sort of backwards rationalizing that aims to expunge the sense of confusion that a paranormal claim tends to generate”. The author writes further: “There’s an almost imperceptible pull back to normality, a two-stage process whereby the mind first supplies a scenario that potentially resolves the problem, and then gradually creates the conviction that *this is in fact what happened*.” (p. 43, emphasis in original)

The short review of the so-called “Chopper” case presented here is an example that could be an illustration of the suppression phase of Lucadou’s model as well as of Evrard’s “social elusiveness” hypothesis, if ... well, if it was actually a RSPK case. However, the social suppressive reaction was so strong that the case is only remembered as a case of fraud, even in the parapsychological community. This feature makes it worth taking a closer look at it, its circumstances and development. Furthermore, it features a complex mélange of various interests that made it impossible to investigate and assess it in an adequate manner—even though it was apparently “solved”. The high level of public attention produced by the mass media gave it a disastrous twist in some respects, and exerted a fatal pressure, which could not be evaded by the RSPK investigators Hans Bender and his assistant. A particularity of the case is that the parapsychologists were brought in only at a late stage. The dynamics of the events had then already become uncontrollable.

The “Chopper” Case

The events around the “Chopper” poltergeist case began in the spring of 1981 with a period of telephone terror toward a then 16 year old dentist’s assistant Claudia J.² at her workplace in the small Bavarian town of Neutraubling near Regensburg (Geisler, 1982).³

2 The names are not anonymized because they have already been published by the mass media.

3 The short chronology of the events broadly follows an article which is published in 1982 in the magazine *Esotera*. The author of the article was the chief editor Gert Geisler (1982), who wrote it on the basis of information provided by the former IGPP staff member Elmar Gruber, who had been involved in the investigation—including a literal excerpt of Gruber’s protocol of exposure that he had sent to the prosecution (see also Gruber’s biography of Hans Bender *Suche im Grenzenlosen* [1993: 297–301] in which he provides some details of the examination of the “Chopper” case; this paragraph of the book is available online: <http://>

The caller called himself “Chopper”, seemed to be enamored of Claudia, and annoyed her with proposals, promises, and dumb jokes. Her employer, the dentist Dr. Bachseitz, engaged the Deutsche Bundespost [German Federal Post Office] to get to the bottom of the problem by means of an interception circuit. With this step, the telephone terror against Claudia seemed to break up, but the voice of “Chopper” now intruded ongoing telephone conversations between Bachseitz and his patients. The voice called up to 120 times a day. A characteristic of the statements of “Chopper” were their vulgar, and partly obscene, content.

The technicians from the Post Office examined the telephone system and the cables in and to the house with huge technical and personal effort and partly replaced the telephone lines and sets with new ones. However, they were unable to find the cause of the voice (Hurt, 2002). During these actions, a vast number of audio recordings of telephone calls were made by the Post Office, as well as by the dentist himself. In November 1981, the events took a new turn when the police got involved due to a murder threat directed against Claudia.⁴ They carried out telephone surveillance themselves, conducted interrogations, and searched 55 apartments in the nearby neighborhood without managing to clear up the case (ibid.).⁵

In February 1982, the phenomena took a further new twist when the voice could be heard not only through the telephone but also as a voice in the room itself.⁶ Now it obtained a character which allowed it to be interpreted as a RSPK phenomenon, and made the failure of the telecommunication technicians and the police to clarify the events plausible. Eventually, an exclusive report published by the local weekly magazine

www.ergruber.com/index.php/artikel/55-artikel/440-chopper – accessed: January 23, 2018). Although the article is exceedingly complacent and simplifying in its conclusions—and therefore to be treated with caution—the depicted chronological order of events may well correlate with the facts as far as they can be reconstructed. A relatively comprehensive description can also be found with the article “Hallo, hier spricht Chopper” [Hello, this is Chopper speaking] published in the German magazine *Stern* on March 11, 1982. Additional information comes from various press articles as well as transcripts of telephone conversations that can be accessed in the archive of the IGPP (IGPP archive: E/23).

4 The police took the threat seriously, referring to a recent case of the murder of a 15 year old girl close by (see *Hamburger Abendblatt*, October 25, 1983: “Zahnarzt ließ sich nicht auf den Zahn fühlen”).

5 A local radio ham was suspected, for instance, because he had an altered voice due to oral surgery.

6 Transcript of the onsite inspection (without date). Mr. and Mrs. Bachseitz, Claudia J., Hans Bender, and chief prosecutor Elmar Fischer were present (IGPP-archive: E/23).

Die Woche on February 11, 1982 triggered the critical stage of the case.⁷ After that, the nationwide mass media entered the stage, besieged the dental office, and exclusive contracts were concluded with the concerned persons. During this (short) period, Claudia clearly enjoyed the attention of the mass media, and her dealing with the situation became apparently more and more playful, also in the sense that she began to consciously produce phenomena (“Gelogen habe ich nie—nur etwas geschwindelt, als ich sagte, daß ich ‘Chopper’ nicht kenne” [I have never lied—I only fibbed a little when I said that I don’t know ‘Chopper’]—*Hamburger Abendblatt*, March 9, 1982).⁸

One day after the report in *Die Woche*, on February 12, the director of the IGPP, Prof. Hans Bender, was informed of the case by way of several telephone inquiries directed to him as a scientific expert of parapsychology and poltergeist events.⁹ The first one came from the criminal investigation department requesting an assessment of the events. After that, staff members of the Bavarian broadcasting company got in touch to ask him to make a public statement on the occurrences in a live broadcast.¹⁰ The next call came from a Professor K. from the Institut für Statistik und Wissenschaftstheorie [Institute for Statistics and Philosophy of Science] in Munich who expressed his interest in the case and offered an onsite visit (as a scientist). As Bender was not able to travel to Neutraubling before February 21 due to official obligations, even though the case was already “burning” at the time,¹¹ it is possible that he advocated a physicist unknown to him to visit the

7 See the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 4, 1982: “It is due to the journalist Günther Schießl from Regensburg that the Chopper thing has become a case for the public at all. The reporter of the local tabloid *Die Woche*, known by the city administration for his persevering enquiries, spotlighted Claudia and her ghostly friend on February 11. He had not anticipated, and probably not wanted, that his colleagues from all editors’ offices set out for Neutraubling. ‘Even if the Chopper blows a fart through the sewer system tomorrow—the day after tomorrow it will be aired throughout the world,’ ranted Schießl about the wave of hysteria unintentionally triggered by him.” However, Schießl gave a hint to reporter Peter Ehm that there is “a really big story, a haunted house” (transcript of a telephone conversation between Bender and Ehm on February 12, 1982; IGPP archive: E/23), and therewith contributed quite strongly to the spreading of the news. Subsequently, Ehm had begun with his own telephonic enquiries and interviews.

8 All translations of German quotes were carried out by the author.

9 Several phone memos and telephone conversation transcripts dated February 12, 1982 (IGPP archive: E/23).

10 Phone memo of the request by journalist Gaitanides dated February 12, 1982, as well as two transcripts of telephone conversations with Gaitanides on the same date (IGPP archive: E/23).

11 However, he wanted to “first let the fuss die down”, which occurred in public, and became particularly concerned when an article in the tabloid *Abendzeitung* by journalist Peter Ehm

dental practice as a neutral scientific observer before himself.¹² Furthermore, he talked with the journalist Peter Ehm from the Munich tabloid *Abendzeitung*, who seemed to have an intrinsic interest in parapsychology and be well informed about the case, and who gave him first detailed information.¹³ At the point when the case started to receive great public interest and had become a hot story for the press, Ehm was able to talk with Claudia, and won the confidence of Dr. Bachseitz, the dentist, as well. He was also in touch with the investigating police officers and apparently cooperated closely with them by mutually exchanging information. Bender then received further information from the above-mentioned scientist Prof. K., who visited the “haunted house” together with another well informed journalist, Eberhard Fuchs,¹⁴ from the magazine *Die Aktuelle*. Both of them reported the results of their visit to Bender (February 18, 1982). In a further telephone conversation on February 21, Fuchs provided additional information on the case which he had apparently obtained in an interview with Bachseitz, attended by reporters of the Bavarian broadcasting company. In this way, Bender learned that Bachseitz himself owned audio recordings of telephone conversations with the voice of “Chopper”, in addition to the German Federal Post Office and the police.

When Bender and his assistant Elmar Gruber eventually came to Neutraubling the case was already heading towards its climax.¹⁵ They were confronted with a situation which was disastrous from a scientific and mental hygiene perspective: In front of the “haunted house”, they encountered a cluster of lurking reporters, and also some journalists who had paid to be accommodated in the house.¹⁶ During the on-site examinations by

was headlined: “Professor Bender will den Fall aufklären” [Professor Bender wants to solve the case]. Bender was very unhappy with this (transcript of a telephone conversation with Ehm dated February 14, 1982).

- 12 See telephone conversation between Bender and Fuchs dated February 19, 1982.
- 13 Transcripts of the telephone conversation between Bender and Ehm dated February 15, 1982, and between Bender and Käsbauer dated February 19, 1982.
- 14 Eberhard Fuchs was also attracted by frontier areas of psychology to some respect. He is the author of the two books *Jugendsekten* [Youth Cults] (1979) and *Nostradamus* (1982).
- 15 After Bender’s engagement with the case had become public, he received numerous letters and messages from various individuals who submitted ideas to help solve the case (ventriloquism, information transfer by infrared laser beam and the like); but some psychics also offered to help with the clarification.
- 16 According to Gruber (as reported by Geisler, 1982), a tabloid reporter had been accommodated for two whole weeks. This article, published in *Esotera*, describes the situation with the mass media in some detail (Geisler, 1982: 344). With regard to the coverage in the tabloid *Bild*, see Mayer, 2004: 255–260.

Bender and Gruber, a reporter from the prominent weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, Fritz Rumler, was present for part of the time. On February 24, together with Bender and Gruber, he conducted an interview with Dr. and Mrs. Bachseitz, and Claudia.¹⁷ At that time, the criminal investigation department of the Munich police had set up a special commission (“Soko Geist”) in order to deal with the case. The detective constables arrived the very same day. They occupied the practice rooms for several days, making observations and conducting interrogations with the protagonists, and did not need much time on their part to get (partial) confessions from them.¹⁸ However, the parapsychological investigator Gruber proudly claimed to have “solved” the case even faster than the police. He observed lip movements made by Claudia which synchronically moved to the utterances of “Chopper”. Eventually, he sent an exposure report of his observations (IGPP archive: E/23) to the chief prosecutor Elmar Fischer, “against the wishes of Bender” (Gruber, 1993: 300).¹⁹ Bender himself was much more cautious with his judgement, as can be seen in a different article, written by him and published in the newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* on February 28, 1982. At that time, he regarded the case as not yet solved.²⁰ He considered it as a “mixed” case, i. e. that it included both genuine and fraudulent phenomena, and that further investigations would be necessary because some witness statements were still not explainable. However, this was no longer possible due to the dramatic development taken by the case.

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- 17 See transcript of the audio recording dated February 24, 1982 (IGPP archive: E/23). Rumler’s report on the “Chopper” case is published in *Der Spiegel* 9/1982: 114–115.
- 18 During this period of time, new physical phenomena occurred in addition to the known voice phenomena. The newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt* (October 25, 1983) quoted a police officer: “It became madder and madder”. “Pieces of furniture fell over, pictures fell from the wall, a vase got broken, and a skull tumbled down from the cabinet. Mrs. Bachseitz described objects which floated through the rooms. And Mr. Bachseitz suddenly freaked out. ‘Pigs, pigs!’ he bawled with a Chopper voice.” The witness: “It really was horrible.”
- 19 Gruber provides the paragraphs of his biography of Bender (1993: 297–301) concerning the investigation of the “Chopper” case on his Internet page (<http://www.ergruber.com/index.php/artikel/55-artikel/440-chopper>; accessed: January 24, 2018) and added some photographs that he took during the field investigation. Interestingly, he also inserted “against the wishes of Bender” to the original text of the book without indicating this addition. He justified his action in a smug manner as being motivated by the wish to “avert major damage to parapsychology” (1993: 300).
- 20 See also his statement in the television broadcast *Drehscheibe* of March 4, 1982, as well as Bender’s unpublished report with hypotheses on the case (undated; IGPP archive: E/23).

A Difficult Examination Situation

The issue here is not to extensively and thoroughly reconstruct the case but to draw attention to particular problematic situations which can occur in the context of field-research-based single case studies. Bender was very much interested in the examination of the phenomena—not at least due to the fact that they were atypical for a poltergeist case.²¹ It is probably for this reason that he accepted the unfavorable circumstances. He encountered some resistance during his examination, and he needed both of the journalists that were most involved in the case to gain access because Bachseitz refused to contact him at first, and Claudia's father banned her from speaking.²² The difficulties with the examination were exacerbated when the police officers of the "Soko Geist" arrived from Munich.²³

This case brings together almost all the aspects characteristic of the problems associated with the investigation of RSPK cases: (a) the involvement of various kinds of mass media with their specific interests; (b) the increasing competition between different actors (reporters, German Federal Post Office, criminal investigation department, justice); (c) contradictory indications and testimonies; (d) serious scientists as debunkers; and (e) an increasingly confusing *mélange* of motifs, confessions, explanations, and

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- 21 He stated in a telephone conversation with Ehm on February 13, 1982: "It is highly inconvenient for me to travel just now, but for phenomena, being an international expert, you obviously do anything." And in a report containing hypotheses about the case (undated) he writes: "It can only be hoped that the 'Chopper' does not ultimately disappear before the case is solved. If it happens to be a technical manipulation phenomenon this would be disturbing for the security service, indeed explosive if such possibilities exist which cannot be uncovered. The technical, and therewith criminalistics, hypothesis is confirmed only if one is able to arrest a perpetrator. In order to test the ventriloquism hypothesis an expert has to be engaged [...]. Evidence for the poltergeist hypothesis has to be faced with the particular difficulty that it is confronted with the widespread prejudice: poltergeist phenomena are the epitome of superstition, or—more discreetly—psychokinesis is contrary to the laws of nature and therefore cannot exist." (IGPP archive: E/23)
- 22 See telephone conversation between Bender and the lawyer Ernst Bäumel dated March 31, 1982. Ehm himself was in a big conflict of interest which came up in his telephone conversations with Bender: on the one hand, he wanted to use, as a reporter of a tabloid newspaper, his information advantage to deliver a "hot story" preferably earlier than the competitors; on the other, he understood the position of Bender, and wanted to support him according to his own interest in parapsychological research. Bender exploited, in a sense, the competition between Ehm and Fuchs who both possessed interesting information for Bender, and who both wished to get exclusive photographs of him.
- 23 In an undated investigation report, Bender made some methodological suggestions that should have been applied "if beyond the press rush, blocking by the father [of Claudia – G. M.], and restrictions by the criminal investigation department an appropriate examination were possible" (IGPP archive: E/23).

various psychical mechanisms. The merely parapsychological RSPK investigation addresses three concerns (parapsychological, psychodiagnostic, psychohygienic), which are (and have to be) competitive in parts. In a situation as described above, the diverging interests and motifs become significantly more complicated and confusing, even in a retrospective reconstruction. In addition to the epistemological interest in the phenomenology of the case and the psychohygienic and medical obligation to help, the scientific investigators are confronted with further claims and demands of responsibility from other actors, referring, for instance, to the public right to information or the maintenance of public order.

Thus, the post office attempted to detect and eliminate external or internal disturbances of the telecommunication system and restore proper functioning. The police attempted to identify troublemakers who threatened public policy. For the mass media and entertainment industry, however, who make a living from the news value of such small irritations and unsettling of everyday life, the case was a valuable source for the production of attractive and promotional content. The pressure to succeed was enormous for all parties because large sums of money were involved (costs of the examinations, fees for exclusive contracts). The journalist Fuchs, for instance, told Bender on the phone that the Bundespostministerium [postal ministry] put the telecommunications engineers under pressure: “they are under pressure to succeed, and have already become quite nervous”.²⁴ Eventually, they were happy to hand over the case to the police and parapsychologists on the grounds that parapsychological phenomena as well as their pretense are not their responsibility. In turn, the public attention aroused by the extensive and national media coverage put pressure on the police investigations, which remained unsuccessful for almost three months, despite the huge effort. After bringing in the trans-regional police, the “Soko Geist”, quick success was needed. Even during the ten days before its operation, the pressure on the people directly involved had increased enormously, due to the endless coming and going of journalists, television crews, police officers, lawyers, parapsychologists, and other interested people, some of which were even accommodated in the house, and curious onlookers and reporters beleaguering the street in front of the house. They had to prove and/or maintain their own credibility. According to common knowledge in RSPK research, it can be assumed that this situation had an impact on the RSPK phenomenology during that period of time, meaning that the inhibition threshold for fraudulent production of allegedly paranormal phenomena might thus have been massively reduced with all persons in the spotlight (“decline phase” of Lucadou’s RSPK model [1995, 2015]). This finally led to the detection of fraud.²⁵

24 Phone memo dated February 17, 1982 (IGPP archive: E/27).

25 A newspaper, *Die Welt*, provided details about the exposure of “Chopper”, given by Detective

Considering the case as a whole in retrospective, one certainly could come to the conclusion that it was a mistake to become involved in a scientific examination because the contextual conditions were extremely bad, and the risk of failure high. Bender was definitely aware of this, as can be seen from the transcripts of the telephone conversations. However, there are some reasons that nevertheless support his decision to conduct on-site examinations. With his outstanding expert status, Bender had a certain obligation to the public that he accordingly discharged. Furthermore, some similarities to the “Rosenheim” poltergeist case,²⁶ where a similar number of parties were involved in the investigation, promised a further interesting, and well documented, “big” RSPK case. The fact that the phenomenology of the reported extraordinary events did not meet the usually expected patterns did indeed make Bender suspicious, by his own account, but likewise curious. With his commitment, he demonstrated openness for the possibility of a previously unknown pattern of phenomena that is important with regard to the investigation of single case studies. It avoids the circular reasoning with a premature assessment of the “genuineness” of the phenomena that can often be found in this field.²⁷ A further, methodologically interesting, point is how Bender used committed journalists as sources of information and as “door openers”. As can be demonstrated with the archival documents at the IGPP, the cooperation can be considered successful to a certain degree because both reporters concerned proved to be reliable observers. Furthermore, they provided useful interview data as well as interesting information gained through their cooperation with other information carriers (e. g. police officers).

Confessions, Revocations, and the Restoring of Order

The more public interest that has been aroused by a case with allegedly paranormal phenomena, the more vehemently the authorities tend to react in order to restore normality

Constable Johann Uhlirsch. Apparently, all those concerned lost their nerve: “The first was the dentist who, kneeling in an adjacent room, was observed to throw a heavy crystal ashtray into the treatment room. At the same time he burped. At which Claudia tried to suggest to one of my officers: ‘That was the Chopper!’” Subsequently, according to the detective constable, the girl also became active. “She swept the telephone from the table behind her back, and upset a vase. Meanwhile, the doctor was grunting behind his hands in the adjacent room.” (*Die Welt*, March 8, 1982)

26 cf. Bender (1968, 1969), and Karger & Zicha (1968). The RSPK phenomena of that case occurred in a lawyer’s office in autumn 1967, and also made a great public stir. After unsuccessfully attempts of technical engineers of the German Federal Post Office to fix the “technical problems”, Bender got in touch with the concerned lawyer and began with own examinations.

27 This often results in only investigating what phenomenologically fits with common models.

and order. This is almost inevitable due to the involvement of the media. For them, the story is not finished after the case is “solved”. Exposing and ridiculing the culprits is the next chapter of the story. “Culprits” does not necessarily refer to the protagonists, who supposedly faked the phenomena, but rather the officials who were mucked around with without quickly becoming aware of it; the officials who probably took reports about paranormal phenomena seriously, which no reasonable person should do ...

The “Chopper” case was hyped up as “the most sensational ‘poltergeist’ case of the last decades” (Geisler, 1982) and reached an audience across national borders. Public television, as well as the national press, was engaged in intense reporting. Various theories of the cause were presented, including ultrasonic waves, manipulation of water pipes, ventriloquism, the labyrinth theory (there is an old tunnel from the Second World War beneath the house),²⁸ the dental filling theory (combining different metals creates a receiver for radio waves), laser beam theory, and psi theory (IGPP archive: E/23).

The German tabloid with the biggest audience, *Bild*, brought out a sort of “daily soap” about the case which ran for almost a whole month (from February 19 to March 15; however, not daily) reporting all kinds of relevant and irrelevant information (Mayer, 2004: 255–260). There were exclusive contracts between newspapers and protagonists; a smart journalist secured copyright protection for several book titles (Geisler, 1982); a tabloid offered a significant reward (5,000 DM) for exposure of the “Chopper” (*Bild am Sonntag*, February 28, 1982); a film producer offered Claudia a movie role (*Bild*, February 26, 1982); and two amateur musicians wrote a song about the “love relationship” between “Chopper” and Claudia, entitled “Chopper Song” that was aired by a Bavarian broadcasting station (*Abendzeitung* and *Die Woche*, March 4, 1982); and eventually, the 17 year old Claudia received several marriage proposals (e. g. *Bild*, March 8, 1982).

The police and prosecution first seemed to have taken a wrong track because several newspapers, such as the *Abendzeitung*, reported the solving of the case on March 4, 1982: two girls and a boy had been arrested and interrogated, and had confessed to having produced the voices of “Chopper”. The journalist Ehm from the above-mentioned tabloid referred to information provided by the chief prosecutor Fischer. However, *Die Woche* reported on the very same day that on the day before, March 3, the Bachseitz couple and Claudia were picked up at 5 p. m. and brought to Fischer for interrogation (*Welt am Sonntag*, March 7, 1982). Claudia and Dr. Bachseitz also made partial confessions. Fischer

28 This theory was introduced by Bachseitz himself. It is based on the fact that the house is built on a former testing area of the Messerschmidt aircraft factory. According to him, this area is hollowed out with bunkers and tunnels which were used by the perpetrator. In a television interview he talked about a masked terrorist who produces the voice phenomena: “the man is in the underground ... as so many in Germany” (*Tagesthemen*, March 4, 1982).

Zahnarzt-Praxis

Zahnarzt-Frau als Haupttäterin? Mann und Claudia spielen

„Chopper“ rief den Filmstar

Tag nach PSI-Professor

Doch Claudia darf mit dem bekannten Wissenschaftler nicht mehr zusammenkommen



Von EBERHARD UNFRIED

Regensburg Parapsychologie-Professor Hans Bender, dem „Geist Chopper“ auf der Spur, hatte Pech. Der Freilager Wissenschaftler darf nicht mehr mit der Zahnärztin Claudia J. (17) zusammen nach der mysteriösen Stimme fahnden. Claudia Vater Horbert J. zur 17: „Ich habe ihm jeden Kontakt zu meiner Tochter verboten.“ „Chopper“ rief unterdessen den ganzen Tag nach Professor Bender.

Noch immer ist den Fahndern der Trick „Choppers“ ein Rätsel, der seit einem Jahr in der Praxis des Zahnarztes Neutraubing blickt. Ich hatte Vater

aus ganz Deutschland — alles Leute, die uns helfen wollen.“

Eine Rentnerin (70) aus Cham schrieb: „Einen Besen quer vor die Praxistür stellen.“ Magier „Tareuc“ (aufsteigen der Phönix) aus Stuttgart bot



Glück versuchte sich der Parapsychiker Hoffmann aus Regensburg. Doch sein Pendel mit Silberkante „Chopper“ entlarven.

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So konnte „Chopper“ die Polizei überlisten

Telefon-Geist“ droht

Spuk beim Zahnarzt

Geist bittet: Claudia,

Regensburg, 27. Februar

Der Geist aus der Spuk-Praxis muß sich nicht an dem Mann. Als die hübsche Zahnärztin Claudia J. (17) gestern 10h in der Praxis zu ihrem Schreibtisch ging — erhielt die menschliche Stimme aus dem Wasserhahn: „Claudia, warum verläßt du mich? Dann

Der Geist muß inzwischen erfahren haben, daß der bekannte Münchner Film-Produzent Horst Macher (50) „Chopper“ Claudia eine Filmrolle angeboten hat.

Schon nie doch wenigstens dieses Wochenende“ flüchte der Geist. Und „Ja“ will mit dir laufen gehen, irgendwo in Regensburg in einer Disco.“

Claudia lahnte ab: „Ich bin schon mit meinem Freund verabredet.“ Er hat Namen, ist 20 und Metzger, fährt einen blauen Capri mit weißen Streifen. Außerdem ist der Geist allwissend: „Ich will auch zu einem Capri, aber eines schwarzen.“

Wie heißt bei dem Geist auch vorstern Keesen Schmitt häßler. Der Regens-

aus ganz Deutschland — alles Leute, die uns helfen wollen.“

Eine Rentnerin (70) aus Cham schrieb: „Einen Besen quer vor die Praxistür stellen.“ Magier „Tareuc“ (aufsteigen der Phönix) aus Stuttgart bot

Regensburg

mit Mord!



Claudias Geist erwischt! Der Zahnarzt war's

Er wollte die 17jährige erstechen

schmeckt das Rauch.“

Claudia: „Gib! Kaul lieber deiner pe, von der du mir schick hast.“

„Geist“: „Nein, der schick dich Rauch auf.“

So oder so pendelt sich der „fon-Geist“ bis zu 15 täglich in der Zahn-Praxis. Als „Geist“ Neutraubinger Bürgmeister Herbert J. bei dem Zahnarzt an schaltete sich die menschliche Stimme in das Gespräch ein und meinte: „Herbert macht Dein Tennis immer wieder p der „Geist“ mit se

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Von Gerd Hertle

gave a press release at 8 p.m. and proclaimed that the case was solved, without mentioning concrete names and details. He told the reporters that there were “several Choppers” and stated: “Es ist, salopp ausgedrückt, eine ausgemachte Viecherei, mehr nicht” [it is, to put it bluntly, an outright mess, that’s all] (e.g. ZDF broadcast *Tagesthemen*, March 4, 1982). He then demonstrated (not very convincingly) how the convicted individuals had disguised their voices with their hands and, probably, with the help of hollow objects. He then informed some members of the press individually, giving them apparently different information (*Mittelbayerische Zeitung*, March 5, 1982). During those days, the newspapers presented various culprits, in every possible combination, as being responsible for the voices: a group of adolescents, Claudia, Dr. Bachseitz, and Mrs. Bachseitz. The confusion of the journalists was obviously a reflection of the vague and contradictory findings of the police and prosecution.²⁹ There were contradictory confessions, statements, and data; the voice analyses did not provide a single perpetrator; the motives remained absolutely unclear; and a new incidence of a telephone call with “Chopper” occurred after the case had been “solved” (e.g. *Die Welt*, March 8, 1982) that was interpreted by the prosecution as the work of a copycat criminal.³⁰

Dr. Bachseitz, who later withdraw his confession and considered himself innocent until the end (e.g. *Abendzeitung*, October 25, 1983), let himself be admitted to a psychiatric ward, together with his wife, because he was no longer able to deal with the provoked fuss (e.g. *Abendzeitung*, March 6/7, 1982).

After a long legal aftermath, Dr. Bachseitz, Mrs. Bachseitz, and Claudia J. were sentenced and fined, despite several contradictory statements, relativizations, and revocations of the above-mentioned confessions. A voice analysis of “Chopper” by a Munich

29 A newspaper report provides an example of the character of the data: “The dentist gave, according to Fischer [the chief prosecutor – G. M.], an extremely inconsistent account during his interrogation. He indeed made ‘almost a confession’ by admitting that he heard his voice in the practice rooms. He wanted ‘to appear interesting’. On the other hand, Bachseitz had affirmed that this must have happened ‘subconsciously’, and he did ‘not feel guilty’. In light of this statement one should require a psychiatric test report, said Fischer.” (*Badische Zeitung*, March 10, 1982)

30 In a TV talk show long after the “solving” of the case at the turn of the year 1982/1983, Claudia again confessed that she had “mitgehoppert”, i. e. that she was responsible for some of the occurred voice phenomena, and that she furthermore assumed that Bachseitz also took part in the game. However, she said that there must have been a third ghostly voice whose originator she did not know. This big unknown had been the instigator of her own “Chopper” activity. After receiving anonymous calls for several weeks from someone using a disguised voice she began to reply, and the “game” began (*Badische Zeitung*, January 10, 1983). At that time, Claudia seemed to have taken on the accepted conventional interpretation that there was no paranormal aspect, i. e. that it was not an RSPK case.

professor of phonetics, Prof. Tillmann, played an important role as evidence during the sentencing. However, Tillmann only analyzed a single word, “ja” (yes), and identified it as Claudia’s voice—according to the first reports at least (*Stern*, March 11, 1982).³¹ In many mass-media presentations, this scientific finding was seen as highly important—apart from the partial confessions—because it was considered as a scientific proof of Claudia’s guilt. However, several details, such as the assumed cooperation of the three defendants as well as the motives, remained unsolved (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 12, 2002; see also Hurt, 2002).

Despite his interest in the phenomena, Bender always assumed the function of a “lawyer of the concerned people” who tried, as best as he could, to defend them from the possibly fatal consequences of a naïve contact with representatives of the mass media, and to help them in psychohygienic terms. Unfortunately, he was not successful in this case. The massive public interest aroused by the mass media coverage resulted in a tragic development for those directly involved. Their former life was actually destroyed. A few months after the case was “solved”, Claudia had lost her job as well as her friends. There was no more talk about movie role offers (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 3/4, 1982), and she finally left her home town (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 12, 2002). The dentist had to give up his practice, and also moved away from Neutraubling (*ibid.*). The German Federal Post Office made claims for compensation of 60,000 DM (= about €30,000) from Bachseitz (e.g. *Abendzeitung*, March 8, 1982), and Claudia had to pay for legal costs and the police operation (about 12,000 DM = €6,000), in addition to the financial penalty laid by the court (*Bunte*, January 13, 1985).³²

The Authority Strikes Back ...

With regard to the “Chopper” case, the “rational gravity”—to use and modify the McLuhan’s metaphor—had almost acquired the strength of a black hole. No more doubts existed publicly, despite the long and highly complex process with which the case had developed. The publicly presented and accepted solution was very simple and led to headlines such as “Why the dentist and his Claudia fooled the whole of Germany” (*Die Aktuelle*, March 8,

31 On the basis of the available documents, it remains unclear whether further voice analyses were considered in the lawsuit.

32 It is not clear if Bachseitz actually had to pay the claims for compensation made by the German Federal Post Office because he was not seen as being responsible for the early phase of the occurrence of the “Chopper” voices by the court, only Claudia. For internal reasons, Claudia could not be asked to pay compensation. In later newspaper articles, a sum of 35,000 DM is mentioned that was claimed by the Post Office from Bachseitz (e.g. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 19/20, 1985).

1982), and “The whole of Germany laughs about ‘Chopper’” (*Wochenend*, March 11, 1982). It received a distinct tone because a parapsychological investigator, Gruber, tried to play a crucial part in “suppressing” the case. And even Hans Bender, who was highly skeptical about the “total solution” of the case by the “Soko Geist” as well as by his assistant, told the press during the court proceedings against the Bachseitz couple one and a half years later that he refuted a paranormal phenomenon of the occurrences in the practice rooms, and that, in his opinion, the whole thing was rather a pathological than a parapsychological problem (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 25, 1983). This is rather astonishing in view of Bender’s former cautious assessment that took all the contradictory data and confidential information he exchanged with Claudia’s defense into account (IGPP archive: E/23). However, the press coverage consistently ridiculed the role of parapsychologists after the case had been “solved” by the police and prosecution. Thus, he probably chose not to argue with common opinion and thereby emphasize his psychohygienic aim and function with regard to RSPK cases, particularly since faked phenomena had been produced beyond doubt, and it is highly likely that pathological problems played a significant role in the psychodynamics of the “ghost trio system”. From a retrospective point of view, taking all the publicly available and confidential information into account, the case would be more plausibly interpreted as a mixed case, going in line with Bender’s earlier assessment. Many characteristic “ingredients” can be found with regard to the psychodynamics involved, as well as the typical development of the case. However, the extremely high level of public attention produced by the mass media caused an extremely strong and harsh reaction from the “authorities” in order to restore the disturbed “order of reality”. The effort put into inquiries were disproportionate, as Ernst Bäuml, Claudia’s advocate, explained to the press: “not even with a fourfold murder have I experienced something of this kind” (Bäuml, quoted in Hurt, 2002: 155). The outrage of the authorities was enormous, as well as the derisive laughter in the media. The media were the big winners of the “game”—as were the public who were given good entertainment and a change from everyday life for a while. All other parties lost: the individuals concerned, the officials, and the parapsychologists. What remained, was the story of a big jest produced by a “Geistertrio” [ghost trio] that “succeeded for a period of nine months to fool technology, logic, reason but finally also (and this should never ever be done) the state authority” (*Badische Zeitung*, December 22, 1983).

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PART IV

CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDIES

CASE REPORT OF THE INVESTIGATION OF A STRANGE PHOTOGRAPHIC ANOMALY¹

Gerhard Mayer

Introduction

What is this?! This question was asked in the subject heading of an e-mail that was addressed to the counselling department of the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (IGPP) in 2002. The question concerned a photograph attached to the e-mail. The sender, Kerstin,² a 28-year-old woman from a small town in south Germany, asked for an explanation of a particular feature of the photograph which she believed possibly depicted something paranormal.

When people who have experienced things which they interpret as being paranormal or supernatural ask advice or request information from the IGPP the counselling team has initially to decide how to manage the request. The first step is to assess whether the contact should be treated as a request only for information or, alternatively, for therapeutic help. If the latter is the case, the subsequent process is guided by the attempt to alleviate the psychological strain of the persons concerned, and it is oriented to the clinical parapsychology approach (see Kramer, Bauer & Hövelmann, 2012; Simmonds-Moore, 2012). The question if the reported assumedly paranormal phenomena are genuine or fakes or errors in perception, does not have priority. Thus, the investigation of the reported paranormal phenomena automatically fades into the background. However, if there is no psychological strain recognizable the dominance of a clinical perspective dissolves and other interests can be pursued, as in the particular case to be described in this paper. The investigation was conducted by the author and included two on-site investigations with the participation of Ina Schmied-Knittel.

The Photograph and its Origin

Firstly, I would like to give a short description of the circumstances of the origin of the photograph in question as reconstructed through our investigation. It was shot in

1 A slightly shorter version of this paper was firstly published in 2014 in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 78.1, pp. 25–38.

2 All names of concerned persons are pseudonyms.

the middle of the night during a birthday party. The event took place on a warm summer night in July 2002 in a secluded barbecue site on a hill in a rural area of southern Germany—the houses of the nearby village were about one mile away. Beside the fireplace there was a log cabin, and in front of the log cabin two DJs put on music on turntables. Between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m., two young women—I will call them Silvia and Beate—stayed in the log cabin to chat, dance, and enjoy themselves, while they took photographs of each other. The camera they used belonged to a friend of theirs who usually took pictures of such events and uploaded them onto a private internet site. When the owner of the camera first saw the pictures on a big computer screen after transferring the image files to the computer, he perceived an unusual feature on one of them (reproduced in Figure 1). The photograph was taken at 2:26 a.m. and shows Silvia dancing to the sound of the music outside, while standing on a bench (not visible on the picture). In the centre of the picture a face-like shape is visible, embedded in the space between the crook of the arm and Silvia's body (enlarged as Figure 2).



Fig. 1: The photograph in question with “Silvia” in the foreground, plus an “extra”

The owner of the camera checked all the other pictures that were taken at the event to see whether he might find a similar face on any of them, but this was not the case. During the following days he did not tell anybody about the figure, and the photograph was uploaded onto the internet site together with the other pictures. Nobody commented on the unusual feature, perhaps due to the low digital resolution of the copies.

Finally, the irritation and—to a certain degree—horror induced by the “face” persuaded him to talk with friends about it. Thereafter, the news quickly spread in the group and became a hot topic. Possible explanations were discussed. Some of the people involved who had been particularly affected did various investigations of their own by showing the photograph to a psychic medium, and to different people with an esoteric-spiritual background (Pagan, Wiccan, esoteric Christianity) in order to get an explanation regarding the nature of the being behind the uncanny face. People in the village were asked about lore concerning the place. The hill was allegedly used as a meeting place of witches, and also a place where (allegedly) witches were burnt to death. According to the villagers, the little wood on the hill is strange (“there’s something wrong with it”), and the same applies to a sequestered building, an old isolated house, behind the wood. Moreover, a murder apparently took place in the nearby village about 30 or 40 years ago. Most of these indications were provided by Kerstin who got in touch with the IGPP. She did some Internet research concerning the place, asking a workmate who “is quite good at local history” [by e-mail of October 15, 2002] and by collecting information from the old inhabitants of the village. We did not have the resources to verify these stories, particularly since we did not advocate a spiritualist hypothesis explicitly, so that establishing the truth or otherwise of these stories was not that relevant. The important point of such stories is their myth-supporting quality. However, such indefinite results made it difficult for people to be definitive as to the plausibility of conventional and non-conventional explanations. Finally, the IGPP was approached for an explanation.



Fig. 2: Enlarged “extra” in the photograph

The Investigation

The first thing that comes to mind when confronted with an odd and uncanny—but also distinct—feature in a digital photograph is that there may well have been a person at work who is skilled in using image editing software. Other conventional explanations of this “extra” are: something staged by party guests, or by persons unknown, i. e. somebody, or some people, played a prank by applying make-up, or a mask, in order to scare those present; or a remarkable coincidence which led to the appearance of the face-like shape, such as some undefined object in the window opening which by coincidence resembles a human face and is misinterpreted as such.

We concluded that it was implausible that the people who consulted us might have had the intention to fool us with a fake. The assessment was based on various indications and reflections. On the one hand, our counselling team who had first contact with the case has extensive experience in assessing the credibility of clients. One of the counselling team had quite a long telephone conversation with the sender of the photograph. Furthermore, we could inspect the whole e-mail correspondence which includes a long letter by the sender describing her personal investigations. On the other hand, the quantity and heterogeneous composition of the participants of the party spoke against a fake. However, we took this possibility into account and chose a step-by-step approach with a reassessment phase.

Thus, a colleague of mine at the IGPP, Ina Schmied-Knittel, and I decided to investigate the case more thoroughly. Broadly, we pursued two issues: a) the investigation of the phenomenon with regard to its ontological status; and b) the investigation of the social context as well as the peoples' reactions to the occurrence of the "extra". The former was in order to get some "insights into the operation of psi in naturalistic settings" (Stokes, 1997: 76; see also Alvarado, 2002, and Mayer & Schetsche, 2012); the latter was in order to assess the plausibility of different explanations (conventional and anomalistic) but also to get information about the social processes induced by an alleged anomaly, regardless of whether or not it turns out to be a fake. That is because of the particular quality of the "extra", which differs considerably from the well-known, rather ambiguous and blurred, ghost pictures. So, even if it had been something staged it would be an interesting case, from a sociological and social psychological perspective (cf. McClenon, 1991; White, 1993).

Field Investigation and Additional Data

The field investigation was carried out in two stages. The first part included a group interview with Kerstin, along with her brother Sebastian and her close friend Susi, and the owner of the camera, Uli, who first discovered the "extra" on the photograph. We surveyed the location of the party together to get detailed information with regard to the geographic situation. In the second stage we interviewed another three party guests: the woman who actually took the photograph (Beate) together with her boyfriend Robbie who had been DJ-ing at the party, and finally the girl dancing in the foreground of the picture (Silvia).

The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recording device and transcribed. We took pictures of the location and made a drawing of the site. We also tried to restage the situation depicted in the photograph by using a wooden carnival mask to represent a witch—such masks are fairly common in the carnival customs of southern Germany

—but unfortunately the contact person could not obtain the key to the log cabin and so we could not gain access.

In addition, we considered information received by e-mail. Moreover, the people in touch with us gave us the password for the internet pages where a whole series of pictures of the event were available.

Expert Report of the Manipulation Test of the Digital Photograph

Although we couldn't detect any manipulation of the digital file at first sight, we had to make sure that the digital image file had not been edited or tampered with. Therefore, we consulted a publicly appointed and sworn independent expert in digital image forgeries, Anders Uschold, in order to get maximum certainty about this point.³ He tested the original digital image file for manipulation. The expert's disinterested examination consisted of a number of checks of the recording and file parameters as well as the quality of the image. He examined the picture with regard to the plausibility of the recording situation and the file parameters, found an equivalent image noise as well as a consistent response of image sharpness, and did not detect any assembly edges or corrections of the same. He assessed the casting of shadows, the decline in the lighting, and the red-eye effect as very natural.⁴ In the conclusion of a 12-pages report he stated, "the picture is—regardless of an assessment of its content—considered as trustworthy and not manipulated by classical and digital image processing methods. From an expert perspective, the documentation is judged to have very high credibility. The image file provided gives in its shape no indications of inconsistencies. From an expert perspective it is assumed to be genuine and not manipulated. Manipulations that would provide such a perfect data file would require a level of knowledge that could not be expected in the social environment of the people involved. [...] For the entire range of available screening criteria the image shows no indications of manipulations by means of image processing. Thereby, highly significant criteria are available like image noise and shadow castings which—with regards to its complexity—cannot even be changed by highly experienced image processors or specialists without error signature. For this reason a subsequent manipulation of the image file is excluded from an expert perspective" (quotation from the conclusion of the expert report by Uschold; translated by G. M.).

3 Uschold studied computer science, with advanced courses in image processing and analysis, as well as chemistry. Since 1999, he is a publicly appointed and sworn expert of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Bavaria. He also is giving lectures on digital image processing at the Technical University of Munich since that time (see <http://www.uschold.com/> for details [accessed: 8-10-2013]).

4 See Farid (1997, 2008) for an introduction in digital image forensics and ways to uncover doctored images.

For an expert who usually deals with presumed cases of industrial spying, the alternatives that have to be taken into consideration are: manipulation of the digital image file (on the level of the file parameters or of image editing), and manipulation of the recording situation / *mise-en-scène*. Regarding the latter he wrote, “circumstances permitting, a mask or very well-made makeup could have been used for manipulation”.

Location Survey

The log cabin, together with the fireplace and a parking area, is situated on a hill with a nice view of the valley section in its front. Three sides of the log cabin are relatively exposed. Behind the log cabin (see Figures 3 and 4) there is a small grass-covered elevation where a water reservoir is situated. A larger forest area is also located in that direction at a distance of about 500 to 1,000 meters, marking the border to a restricted military area.

On the evening in question the log cabin was primarily used to store beverages and other materials for the party. The DJs placed their musical equipment under the projecting roof in front of the door of the log cabin. Most people stayed in front of the log cabin, around the fireplace, and in the cars in the parking area. A bench stood in front of the window depicted in the photograph. If a person wanted to look through this window, he or she would have to bend forward a little bit. The head of a person about 175 cm high then would get into the position of the face-like shape on the photograph. During the party the glass window was removed. The window opening could be closed by shutters.

Interviews – Explanations and Reactions

In addition to reconstructing the particular situation at the time the photograph was taken, we were able to obtain statements on the reactions of the people concerned and their individual attempts at an explanation. As mentioned above, the news of the particular “extra” on the picture spread like wildfire. Many of the concerned people were strongly disturbed by the face-like shape. Speculation about its origin sprang up, and different stories about strange experiences attached to that place circulated, including that a workmate of the father of a party guest experienced something similar during a barbecue: strange rapping noises in the wood and, when a small group of people tried to trace its origin, a being running away from them. Or an even more peculiar experience had by Silvia, Beate and their boyfriends at the same place about two weeks before the birthday party: they were barbecuing when suddenly a fox appeared near the fireplace, circled five or six times at a distance, and then disappeared. After a while he came back from the nearby wood bearing a child’s headband in its muzzle and deposited it close to the fire. The strange behaviour of the fox, as well as its lack of shyness and the unusual



Figs 3 and 4: Log Cabin exterior, front and rear perspective

object it fetched were so disturbing and somewhat frightening for the four young people that they immediately stopped barbecuing, went to their car and drove away.

The attempted explanations have been partly conventional and partly paranormal. The most common was that the “face” belonged to a nature spirit, a kind of guard of the particular place who was attracted by the commotion caused by the techno party, and displeased by the thoughtless approach to the environment and the pollution of

the natural space with loud artificial noise. Such “stories” as the one with the fox are conducive for paranormal interpretations of the “extra” on the picture, of course, as well as being conducive for getting the creeps. Accordingly, the reaction of many of the concerned people includes a feeling of fright to a greater or lesser degree (scotophobia, fear of being alone at home, sleep disturbance). Some believed that the spiritual being could be everywhere, that it could attach itself to the group, or visit individuals at home. Thus, the owner of the camera who normally creates the impression of being a smart, cool and easy-going guy with a smile on his face, and who did not talk with anybody about his detection of the particular feature for a long time, had been frightened in a drastic way. His friends reported:

He couldn't sleep anymore at all, and didn't want to open the wardrobe doors because all the time he had a mental picture of that “face” in his mind.... he became totally paranoid, fearful, shit his pants, and at night also saw the picture all the time.

However, these disturbances have been not very enduring: everyday life goes on, and such experiences slide into obscurity—experiences which primarily consisted of imagination because the triggering event belonged to the past when it was noticed. At the time of the interviews, the concerned people asserted that they would never have a noisy party again at that particular location, although when we got in touch with some of them about six months later, another similar event had taken place.⁵ No strange things seemed to have happened when this event took place.

Interviews – Further Information About the Circumstances and the People Directly Involved

A rough outline of the circumstances of the picture's origin has been given at the beginning of this paper, but there are further details which are interesting with regard to the assessment of the “extra” in the picture. As mentioned above, the picture was taken at 2:26 a.m. The two women, Silvia and Beate, had consumed alcoholic drinks during the night. They described their mental condition at the time as slightly drunk and not tired, but rather alert and in high spirits. Their boyfriends were in front of the log cabin at that time, DJ-ing together. Silvia's boyfriend Berti had some fun in sneaking around the win-

5 This information was provided by the owner of the camera. He reported in an e-mail that the photograph had been a conversational topic for the inhabitants of the village during the Carnival. Most of them thought—“unfortunately”—that the photograph was faked. He wrote: “However, one can't blame them because most of them only know a copy of a copy, and not the original. Well, for us, the photo was slowly forgotten, too. That is a good thing. Because we recently partied up there at the cabin”.

dow corner from the outside a few times: he then suddenly tore open a shutter and put his head into the window opening to scare the girls. It was about five to ten minutes after that when Beate out of the corner of her eye perceived that one of the shutters slowly opened and “a figure” or “a head” came up from below, looked through the window, and disappeared again. She was confused and told Silvia what she had seen. Silvia saw the opening of the shutter too but nothing else, and she answered that Beate must be crazy. Therefore Beate went outside to ask the boyfriend if he had been fooling around again. However, he denied this and suggested that she had been drinking too much alcohol. Subsequently, the two women forgot about the episode. It was not until the news of the “face” spread, and the friends talked about the picture, that the boyfriend came to Beate and brought it to mind again saying: “Hey, at the time you asked me if I was making fun of you at the window”. It was then that it all came back to her again and she said to herself, “I really saw that thing, but I didn’t bear that in mind at all.”

Beate was 18 years old when we interviewed her with her 24-year-old boyfriend with whom she cohabits in an attic flat. She made a fun-loving optimistic impression with a penchant for the techno scene and lifestyle. She also showed a certain, but not very pronounced, affinity to occultism. She had not read any books on this topic, but practised glass moving once. Interestingly, she and her cohabitant experienced some presumable RSPK phenomena in their flat, such as unexplainable sounds of footsteps and the malfunction of electrical devices. Beate told us that the house allegedly had been built on a former burial ground which could be the reason for the occurrence of these phenomena. However, these phenomena occurred less and less often, and therefore attracted little attention.

Silvia is the same age as Beate. She was described by some party guests as being a very lively, fun-loving, and attractive girl, although another participant characterized her as an externally calm person (“still waters run deep”). My female colleague and I conducted our interview with her in her parental home where she was still living. In that situation, she seemed to be a rather serious person, with a girlish, quiet and shy demeanour. Her father came into the room a few times to check if everything was in order with his 18-year-old daughter. Silvia’s memory of the events around the party and of the particular situation of the picture’s origin was blurred. She could not remember many details at the beginning of the interview. Only in the course of the conversation did her recollection become more distinct. Her attitude towards occultism, paranormal beliefs, and the “extra” in the picture in particular was very ambivalent. She had learned a bit about parapsychological research and poltergeist phenomena in school, and she enjoyed reading fictional adaptations of such topics in novels by Stephen King, for example. However, she very much strived for a conventional and rational explanation of the face-like shape

in the photograph. In contrast, her father, who joined us after the interview was finished and who showed a fair interest in the work of our Institute, remarked after looking at the picture, “Well, do you attract ghosts, girl? ... please keep them away, do, would you?” Overall, we got the impression that Silvia was a young woman who was subjected to ambivalent feelings in different areas of life, and being emotionally unstable. At the time we interviewed her she had just separated from her boyfriend. With regard to her family circumstances she displayed a strong emotional dependence on her parents combined with a striving for personal autonomy. She seemed to be succumbed to implicit intrapsychic tensions in order to manage the two contradictory sides of her personality (for details, see Mayer & Schetsche, 2011: 135–137).

Discussion of the Results

The „Extra“ in the Picture – Staged Incident, Chance, or Anomaly?

The question of the likelihood of a staged incident is not so easy to answer. The red-eye effect in the face-like shape in the picture suggests that it may have been a living person causing the “extra”. The size of the figure corresponds with the size of a human face, as we could reconstruct during our local survey. Thus, it is quite possible that a person stood near the window at the time of the shot. Five scenarios cannot be ruled out. In brief, they are: 1) it was a collective hoax; 2) it was a trick by a single party guest; 3) it was caused by someone from the nearby village who wanted to play a prank; 4) it was an unknown person who came to the location more or less by chance; and 5) it was an indefinite object misinterpreted as a face. Taking each of these points in turn:

1. A collective hoax seems highly unlikely because it would hardly have remained secret in the long run. Furthermore, our impressions gained during the interviews speak against it. Moreover, in retrospect no reasonable motivation can be found.
2. The “extra” on the photograph could be the result of a staging or hoax by someone of the party guests. For example, Berti’s jokes during the preliminary phase of the shot have a structural similarity to the situation depicted on the photograph later on: Berti opened the window shutters several times from the outside; his face occurred in the windowcase, and he scared the young women for fun. However, there are clear differences: while he immediately was recognized by both, and his purpose was to be perceived, this was not the case with the depicted “individual”. He/she/it appears two times unrecognized: the first time only vaguely by Beate from the corner of her eye, and the second time very much later rather by chance on the computer screen.

The physiognomy of the “face” in the picture does not resemble that of any of the group of party guests. As there were no window panes fitted, optical distortion caused by odd light refraction can be excluded.

In retrospection, a comprehensible motif for such behaviour can hardly be imagined. Therefore this possibility has to be estimated as very implausible.

3. The interviewees mentioned the possibility that it could be a prank by one or several villagers because they were bothered by noise annoyance. In this point, divergent views were expressed in the group. The majority ruled out a noise annoyance due to the considerable distance of the village. During the course of many parties which the young people had at this barbecue site the police appeared only one time, and the reason for this was not noise annoyance. It was a routine visit in order to look if everything is alright. And only one time, a small group of skaters from the village visited them to see what is going on up there.

If one considers this third possibility, whether due to annoyance or for fun, the question arises if it would have been a suitable strategy to get such an effect. One has to keep in mind that the effort taken to stage such a *mise-en-scène* would have been quite considerable (e.g., regarding the make-up). This only makes sense if the perpetrator could be sure that the party guests would find out during the party. The unknown “person” in the photograph could not have simply assumed that, and it seems not to be intended.

4. The possibility that it was an unknown person who wanted to remain unrecognised is somewhat more reasonable. This is because the log cabin is accessible from all sides, the shutters can be opened from the outside, the anthropomorphic form of the “extra” has approximately the size of a human face, and the reflex of the eyeground suggests a correct physique of a (human) eye. However, on closer consideration the limits of plausibility are massively stretched. On the one hand, it seems to be very unlikely that an unknown person would not have been discovered by the party guests because he or she would have had to stay there for some time (between the first occurrence in the window opening noticed by Beate, and appearing as “face” in the picture). On the other hand, the recorded time the picture was taken (2:26 a.m.) strongly limits the possibility that an unknown person just happened to come by. Furthermore, the “face” shows distinct discolorations around the eye and on the forehead side, so that make-up must have been used. In that case, too, questions regarding a comprehensible motif remain unanswered.
5. There are two strong arguments against a misinterpretation by pareidolia: the lack of the glass window which rules out the possibility of a diffuse or distorted reflexion which could be wrongly perceived; and the detectable red-eye effect which was estimated as “very natural” by the expert who compared it with the red-eye effect in the face of Silvia. Furthermore, the perception of the opening of the win-

dow and the occurrence of „something“ (a figure or a head) in the corner of her eye by Beate would remain unexplained.

An important argument that makes conventional explanations extremely implausible is the formal limiting conditions which have to be met for producing such an “extra” in the picture: Silvia is moving and the crook of her arm had to have been in the correct elevation and distance to the window, and the person must have been looking out for the best possible moment, and then only quickly peek through the window opening, so that he or she was depicted in the picture but remained unseen by the photographer. The probability that all these limiting conditions are met is extremely low. If one wanted to stage such a picture, one would have to make many attempts for the required result. Silvia’s pose and facial expression, as well as the position of the photograph in the whole series of pictures taken, argue against such a staging.

Thus, on the whole, there is not much that speaks for a conventional explanation except for the fact that the alternative would be a paranormal explanation of a phenomenon which does not fit very well into the common forms of experiencing poltergeist phenomena or apparitions—at least not at first sight.

If we try to sum up the aspects that suggest a paranormal explanation of the “extra”, we can identify four reasons: 1) the “incubation period” of the phenomenon; 2) the time of occurrence and the state of mind of the people directly concerned; 3) the psychical structure of one or more of the people concerned; and 4) the location. I consider each of these points in turn:

1. According to reports of PK phenomena occurring, for example, within the context of séances, we have an incubation period during which an atmosphere has been created that is known as being favourable for the occurrence of paranormal phenomena (Batcheldor, 1979, 1984; Isaacs, 1984). This happened with the joke played by Silvia’s boyfriend who frightened the two women by pretending to be an “uncanny figure”, as though he flirted with the supernatural.⁶
2. The time of occurrence was deep in the night, and the mental disposition of the people concerned was less controlled and in high spirits due to the consumption of alcohol, among other factors. This also is known as being favourable for extraordinary experiences (Alvarado, 1998; Luke, 2011).

6 The so-called Batcheldor approach to PK induction in sitter groups suggests certain techniques and the creation of a particular atmosphere to avoid two types of resistance of participants of sitter groups: ownership resistance (fear of having PK abilities oneself), and witness inhibition (fear of being witness of displays of something paranormal). With this, the PK success in sitter groups should be increased. According to Batcheldor (1984), the use of pseudo PK is effective in triggering genuine PK.

3. We found indications that the people directly involved have an increased affinity for paranormal phenomena: the photographer, Beate, lived in a flat in which she experienced RSPK phenomena. Her boyfriend had a familiarity with paranormal phenomena, rooted in his family. He was located in the close proximity of the log cabin at the time the picture was taken. However, Silvia, the person depicted in the centre of the photograph, mostly exhibited the features of a focus person (Huesmann & Schriever, 1989; Roll, 1974). She seemed to be emotionally unstable, succumbing to strong intra-psychic tensions, living out two very different sides of personality, and showing a poor memory of the event. Her age of 17 at the time the party took place means she fell within the typical scope of focus persons in RSPK cases (Huesmann & Schriever, 1989: 86–88; Roll, 1977: 386–387). However, we could not detect a clear psychical function of the alleged paranormal experience for coping with difficult problems of life, as has become evident in several RSPK cases (Belz, 2012; Hess, 1988; Rogo, 1974, 1982).

4. Inquiries about the history and folklore of that particular place on the hill made by one of the party guests as well as some remarks and experience made by others point to a specific “charging” of the location (gallows hill, place of burning of witches, etc.).

Assuming a paranormal explanation, the integration of the “extra” into the natural context tends to suggest a spiritualist interpretation: especially the red eye effect and the position of the “face” in the window opening create a natural and slightly shadowy impression, as found in most spirit photographs. Furthermore, the above-mentioned “charging” of the place i.e. historical myths and reports of odd experiences by others, could be seen as an indication of a place-linked component of a possible anomaly. It remains an open question if, and to what extent, the psychical condition of one or more attendant persons might have had a catalytic effect, though the nature of the event makes such considerations highly speculative. Thus, I can only give a summarizing conclusion in form of a personal assessment:

The expert report of the analysis of the digital picture excluded the possibility of subsequent manipulation of the image data file, the most obvious conventional explanation of the “extra”. It also confirms my impression with regard to the credibility of the statements made by the people interviewed. This also plays a decisive role in the assessment of other conventional explanations. In the face of the knowledge available I rate them as implausible and very unlikely, even though they cannot be absolutely ruled out. Among typical patterns known as favourable for the occurrence of paranormal phenomena, differences can be seen which do not fit into the “classical” patterns. It seems to be an intermediate case (Gauld & Cornell, 1979) because several factors argue for a place-linked anomaly, but there are also elements indicating person-centred aspects.

The Social Dynamics – Anomaly as a Social Process

For an understanding of the social dynamics of the incident it is helpful to ask about feelings of subjective evidence with regard to the people concerned. According to Stenger (1993), four sources of such feelings of evidence can be distinguished: sensual perception, cognitive construction, emotional insight, and social confirmation. With reference to the possible anomaly in question, this means: the “extra” on the picture is *sensually evident*, and it retains its character even after various methods of technical manipulation such as enlarging, inverting, etc. The possibility of making copies without loss of quality makes the “extra” not attached to one specific person at a specific time and place, in contrast to many spontaneous extraordinary experiences. The context of the origin of the photograph is also objectifiable in many aspects (the date of the recording, knowledge of the local situation, collective experiences during the party, manageable number of participants who are known to each other). Therefore various explanatory possibilities can be examined and assessed with regard to their plausibility. In this case basically the most obvious hypotheses (manipulation of the picture, prank by a member of the group, chance) can be refuted as implausible. These *cognitive constructions* were accompanied by the *emotional experience* of creepiness and/or fright which occurred more or less with everybody spontaneously, or after a defence reaction at first. The owner of the camera who detected the “extra” on his computer screen tried to obtain *social confirmation* after having withheld his discovery for some time. This brought about a process of rapid mutual scrutinizing and confirming, at first within the group, and then externally with other people. However, it has to be stated that the individual party guests and subgroups dealt quite differently and with differing intensity with the phenomenon, and in no way shared the same view with regard to models of paranormal explanation. An explanation given by two psychics about the nature of the alleged entity was not taken seriously by many, as was Beate’s statement that she had perceived “the thing” in the window. Both would have supported the spirit hypothesis, but were disbelieved and therefore found no social confirmation. This indicates that the people concerned were not willing to accept every argument which supports a paranormal explanation. Some were of the opinion that the phenomenon was directed at the whole group (e.g. as an admonition or a warning), some at themselves (e.g. someone who reported having dreams about that entity) or at others in the group (“that must have something to do with Silvia”). Play with feelings of creepiness and thrill also was not absent: thus, for example, the owner of the camera proposed — probably jokingly — to arrange a “Blair Witch Party” at the log cabin the following year.

However, these individual ideas and beliefs also illustrate a socially shared knowledge of how to deal with and to interpret extraordinary experiences for which no fitting

explanations are initially available. In the present case the interpretation that it was an “apparition” turned out to be the most plausible for most of the interviewees. A typical pattern of perception and interpretation can be reconstructed:

1. Confusion by the “extra”, the face-like shape.
2. Inexplicability with regard to the recording (photograph) and the context of its origin (party).
3. Reference to the implausibility of the attempts at rational explanation which were offered (prank, manipulation, chance).
4. Compatibility of the phenomenon with:
 - individual ideas/beliefs (supernatural, spiritual, traditionally religious, etc.),
 - unconventional interpretations which are socio-culturally provided (although the ontological status of terms such as “ghosts” “witches”, “hauntings” is scientifically questioned, they exist as socio-culturally mediated explanatory models),
 - historical knowledge and/or local incidents respectively comparable phenomena (burning of witches, magical places, urban legends).

Therefore with the present case, the social dissemination of interpretations which would rather be refuted by scientists can be demonstrated very clearly, as can the apparently quite unproblematic approach to such interpretations. All of the people concerned were aware of the fact that paranormal explanations would be assessed as problematic, at least from a scientific perspective. Firstly, they properly worked through conventional explanations until only the more unconventional spiritualistic explanations remained as interpretation patterns. With this, the function of socially shared perception and interpretation for the emergence of the feeling of subjective evidence is reflected once more. A socially available interpretative frame exists which can be adapted to individual ideas of the extraordinary. This explains the individual variations of spiritualistic explanations (nature’s guardian, entity of a world in between, place-linked ghost).

Several interviews included references to local myths. Therefore the spiritualistic interpretations can be revealed not only by their compatibility with individual and collective patterns of ideas/beliefs, but also by such region-historical references. Particularly the countryside with its deep forests, monasteries, castles, and ruins where the odd incident occurred provides room and places for miraculous events from which arise sagas, legends, and myth: of the undead, of revenants, sylvan spirits, and meeting places of witches.

Postscript

After having finished the inquiry I learned from a colleague that the prestigious *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* [Dictionary of German Superstition] includes the following record under the keyword “unsichtbar” [invisible] which corresponds in an unusual manner with the formal structure of the photograph:

[I]ndividual privileged people have the gift of being capable to see such invisible entities. Sunday children in particular are considered as capable of seeing ghosts, and also children who remain unbaptized over a period of two Fridays or who came into world in Advent. And this gift is transferable as well. One who has looked through the cirlet of the arms akimbo of a woman capable of seeing ghosts will receive this gift himself. Gods also become visible through the bended arm.

(Bächtold-Stäubli, 1987, HWA, vol 8: 1454, translation by G. M.).

In addition, in the Old Norse poem *Biarkamól* [The Old Lay of Biarki] a verse can be found which also addresses the look through the arm akimbo. His wife Hrút says to the deadly wounded hero Biarki:

Lower thy eye and look through my arm,
sign then thy view with victory-runes:
unscathed shalt thou, Biarki, then scan with thy glance
and fasten thy eyes on the father of victory.

(Hollander, 2008: 11)

A footnote explains: “One who possesses second-sight can make others see what he sees by letting them look through his bended arm supported on his hip. The victory runes are the same, apparently, as those referred to in *Sigrdrífumól*, stanza 7” (ibid.: 108).⁷

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7 I have to thank my colleague René Gründer for pointing out these striking correspondences.

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MYSTERIOUS OBJECTS IN PICTURES TAKEN BY A WILDLIFE CAMERA

THE PITFALLS OF PERCEPTION¹

Gerhard Mayer & Jürgen Kornmeier

In einem schwarzen Fotoalbum mit 'nem silbernen Knopf
Bewahr ich alle diese Bilder im Kopf

(Sido: "Bilder im Kopf")²

"Images in the Head" and the Constructive Aspects of Human Perception

With the opening of the "perceptual window to the world", and thus the start of differentiated perception, human beings generate meaningful patterns from structures of instreaming sensory data in order to understand the outside world, and to be able to survive. Our everyday experience strongly suggests that the world is, as we perceive it. However, numerous optical illusions show us that we only have limited access to the information surrounding us. With the first step of visual processing, for instance, the information from a three-dimensional world will be projected onto two-dimensional retinæ. Thus, we lose the direct access to a whole spatial dimension, and must tediously reconstruct depth from secondary information, such as occlusion, shadowing, motion parallax, etc. (cf. Rock, 1998). A further example comes from color perception: we only have access to a tiny "window" of wavelengths of a very broad spectrum of electromagnetic waves that come down to earth daily after being emitted by the sun. Wavelengths within this "window" activate four different light receptors in the retina. As a consequence, we perceive the world either as colored or in gray scales, depending on the light intensity (luminance). However, we are blind to all wavelengths outside this tiny "window".

1 This article was firstly published in a German, slightly different, version in the *Zeitschrift für Anomalistik*, 14, 7–24. A shorter English version was published by Kornmeier & Mayer (2014) in *Perception*, 43(11): 1270–1274.

2 "In a black photo album with a silver button / I keep all these images in my head" (translated by the authors).

A further problem of perception results from the anatomy of our sensory system: our retinas contain about 125 million photosensitive cells (photoreceptors) but the visual information they collect has to be transferred from the eye to the brain through only one million ganglion cells (Schacter, Gilbert & Wegner, 2011). Therefore, the amount of data received has to be reduced in an intelligent manner. Thus, the necessity of data reduction begins in the eye and continues up to layers of processing where conscious perception becomes possible (cf. Gregory, 2009).³

Given these massive sensory limitations, perception was already described as an unconscious inference process very early in scientific history (e.g., Alhazen, 1989; Helmholtz, 1867; Wheatstone, 1838). Our sensory system weights the incoming sensory information, which is a priori noisy, incomplete and to varying degrees ambiguous, with former perceptual experiences that are stored in our memory in order to obtain the most stable and reliable results. During evolution perception has developed towards a highly efficient and largely unconscious construction process. We construct internal images or “models of the world” (“Weltmodell”; Metzinger, 1999) and/or models of ourselves, that become relevant for our actions. With increasing life experience, the inventory of stored mental representations grows. In addition, this inventory of memorized perceptual experiences enfolds its own dynamics. The representations of “real” objects become complemented with “imagined objects” such as dwarfs, aliens, and the Tower of Babel.

When we talk about “images in the head”, this is obviously meant in a metaphorical sense. It would be a mistake to imagine that we have a kind of picture book in the visual cortex and view the images with an inner eye. The optical images that are displayed on the retina of the eye are translated to nerve impulses and conveyed to the respective centers of the brain. The following statement by the famous perception researcher Richard Gregory describes this connection aptly:

The brain creates descriptions from simple features received from the senses and represented by the activity of specialized neurons of the brain. Representations may be stored in memory, and indeed perceptions and memory are closely related (Gregory, 2009: 7)

The consequences of the limitations of our senses combined with the limited processing capacities of perceptual and cognitive systems and the resulting necessity of data reduction can be manifold. One such consequence of these limitations is that

3 With his book *Seeing Through Illusions*, Gregory (2009) provides a valuable introduction to this issue. Basic information about human perception can also be found in Goldstein, Irtel & Plata (2008); Gegenfurtner (2011) provides a popular scientific introduction.

we can miss important pieces of information, a fact that is widely exploited by stage magicians. Another consequence is that perception can become unstable and in the extreme case perceptual interpretations can repeatedly change even if the sensory information remains unchanged (Kornmeier & Bach, 2012; Long & Toppino, 2004).

The attempts of our perceptual system to match sensory information of limited quality with concepts stored in memory can also result in misinterpretations, if the match between sensory input and selected concept is poor but no better alternative concept is available. In this regard, the psychological phenomenon of pareidolia must be mentioned, i. e. the tendency to perceive known or meaningful structures in random patterns such as faces, shapes, known objects, or voices. A prominent example of this phenomenon is the so-called “Face on Mars”: During a space mission in 1976, a low resolution picture was taken of a certain landscape formation on Mars. The content of the resulting picture was strongly reminiscent of a face using a specific spatial resolution and perspective. During a second space mission launched 20 years later, another picture was taken of exactly the same place on Mars but with a much higher image resolution. The newer sensory evidence, which is of a much higher quality clearly rules out the initial face interpretation (Fig. 1a, b, Fig. 2).

Such “malfunctions” of perception can occur when the quality of the available sensory information is not sufficient, and therefore the interpretative capability of our sensory system reaches its limits. They can also occur in cases of high sensory quality, when the objects emitting the visual information are novel and unknown, and fitting concepts are missing from our memory. Like several other optical illusions and perceptual phenomena, such cases allow us glances “behind the scenes” of the perceptual processing machinery. In addition, examples such as pareidolia show an evolutionary important function of our sensory system: to obtain a plausible perceptual interpretation as quickly as possible, independently of the quality of the available sensory information. Rapid and concurrently plausible perceptual interpretations have most probably been of vital importance during the course of evolution.

However, such perceptual phenomena are also of great importance for anomalistics research. If someone observes and documents a supposed anomaly, malfunctions of the perceptual system have to be taken into account as major factors with regard to the assessment of the reliability of the observer’s interpretation and report.⁴ This is well known, and seriously considered during investigations of spontaneous cases, particularly “paranormal photographs”, i. e. photographs, which allegedly depict something unexplainable, or an unexplainable occurrence (see Mayer, 2015, for an

4 cf. Wackermann (2015) on the issue of perception anomalies.

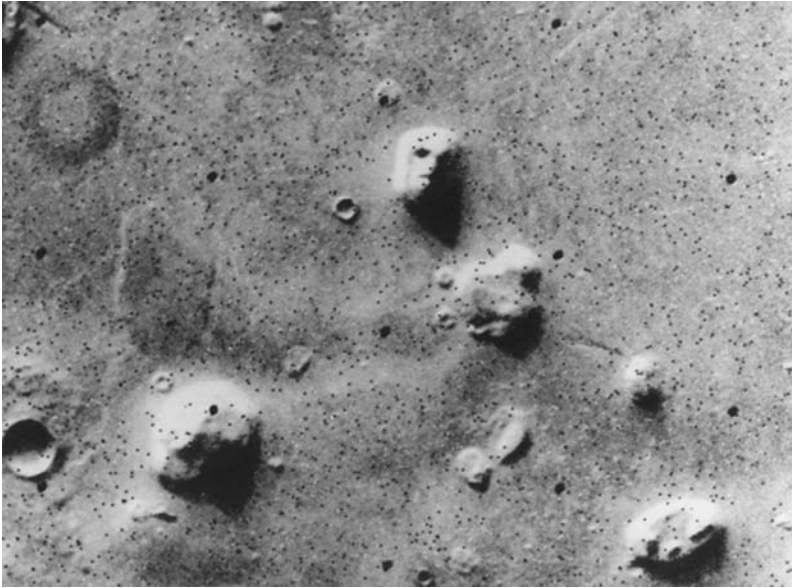


Fig. 1a: "Face on Mars"

[source Figs. 1a and 1b: <http://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/catalog/PIA01141>]



Fig. 1b: Enlarged section of Fig. 1a

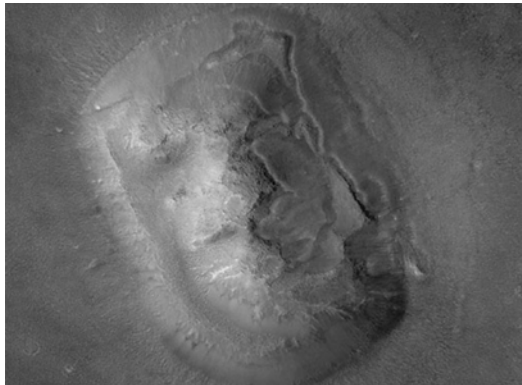


Fig. 2: The same landscape formation at a higher resolution and from another angle

[source: http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image_feature_60.html]

overview). In the following, we will present an investigation of photographs taken with a wildlife camera, which apparently depict something strange, or mysterious.⁵

5 This investigation was conducted by G. M.

“Pictures From our Wildlife Camera” – Situation and Context

On June 15, 2014, a request was made via the website of the German Gesellschaft für Anomalistik e. V. (GfA)⁶ concerning pictures depicting something strange. The contact person, Mrs. M., is a passionate hunter. The pictures had been taken on July 2, and 4, 2013, and subsequently discussed in the circle of acquaintances of Mrs. M. without achieving a sufficiently satisfying interpretation of the strange objects. Eventually, the desire for clarification led to research on the Internet, and finally to the request to the GfA. Mrs. M. then provided two series of three pictures, on which the “extras”—the technical term for objects or elements in photographs that are discussed as depictions of anomalies—are recognizable.

The photographs were taken with a wildlife camera (Primos Truth Cam 35) at a bait site. The camera reacts to movements (infrared sensor), and was configured to shoot three consecutive pictures at an interval of one second, while simultaneously triggering the infrared flashlight.⁷ The camera had been installed mainly for the documentation of a sounder of boars, which “had quite regularly visited the bait site [...] during the last year” (e-mail dated June 16, 2014).⁸

The three pictures with the first “extra” were shot on July 2, 2013 at 7:51 a.m. They show the bait site. In the center, there is a wooden post carrying a white container. The strange object can be seen in the center of the second quadrant (bottom right) on an imaginary diagonal line between the bottom of the wooden post and the lower right corner of the picture (Fig. 3). It is partly hidden by the branches of a fir tree and a fern leaf. When the three pictures are regarded in quick succession, a movement of this strange object can be seen. The size of the object and its distance from the camera cannot easily be deduced from the pictures alone. However, with additional information provided by Mrs. M., as well as from further photographs taken at the same place, the object can be estimated to be of about 10 cm in height.

6 The Gesellschaft für Anomalistik (GfA) is the German sister organization of the Society for Scientific Exploration. The focus of interest is not limited to the field of classical parapsychology, but also covers topics such as ufology, cryptozoology, and astrology (see www.anomalistik.de).

7 Further technical features of the camera are: daylight resolution is 3 mp; during darkness, the camera automatically switches to b/w modus with a resolution of 1.3 mp. The range of the sensor is limited to half of the display range of the camera. See <http://assets.academy.com/mgen/98/10104798.pdf> (accessed: January 18, 2018).

8 This, and all following, translations of quotes were made by the authors.



Fig. 3: Second image of series 1 from July 2, 2013 ($f/2,8$; $1/125\text{sec}$; ISO 100; image brightened, exposure corrected, “extra” marked by a surrounding red circle)



Fig. 4: First picture of series 2 from July 4, 2013 ($f/2,8$; $1/30\text{sec}$; ISO 100; “extra” marked by a surrounding red circle).

The image depicting the second “extra” was the first of a further series of three photographs that were taken on July 4, 2013 at 11:04 a.m., and are slightly overexposed (Fig. 4). On this photograph, a blurred transparent-whitish shape can be seen in the air below and to the left of the white container on the wooden post. It is depicted slightly bigger than the white container. No “extra” can be seen on the subsequent two pictures of the series.

Mrs. M. commented on the images in an e-mail dated June 16, 2014, as follows:

We are both passionate hunters, and have obviously installed wildlife cameras at our bait sites. During the last year, several, and particularly one, sounder of boars visited this bait site quite regularly, and we therefore installed our camera there, in order to monitor the regularity as well as the times of the visits. It occurred to us last year that instead of the expected sounder something strange was depicted on the pictures [...].

Two days later, a further strange picture was added, [...] something rising up into the air, which is only depicted on one picture. This mean, that it was faster than one second, because neither the approach nor the rising nor the direction of disappearance can be seen. There is not a single picture before or after on which this thing shows up.

On a personal note, I would like to mention that all of us are sure that this is no animal, and, strangely enough, after these days last July, not a single animal came again to our bait site. Only since February this year have animals sporadically appeared, sometimes a deer, sometimes a fox, but the boars are gone and don't come to this place anymore (BOARS are very sensitive, they have good senses, and particulary of smell).

The “extra” of the first series was identified as a moving shape and gave the impression of a small humanoid skull. This was most probably the reason why an anomalistic interpretation had been established (“all of us are sure that this is no animal”). The allegedly strange behavior of animals during the subsequent time period, as well as the series of three pictures recorded two days later, one of them depicting an additional “strange extra”, reinforced the anomalistic interpretations.

Analyses of the Photographs

Initially, the pictures of the first series remained irritating. However, we quickly found a sufficiently plausible explanation for the “extra” on the first picture of the second series: it likely depicts an object (e.g. an insect) flying very closely past the camera and triggering the motion-sensitive sensor. Due to the close proximity to the camera, the object was outside its scope at the time of the second shot. In addition to the fuzziness that results from a position outside the depth of field of the camera (aperture = 2.8 [!]), there is a motion blur that is contingent to an exposure time of 1/30 second. This unusually long exposure time, with regard to the bright daylight situation (11:04 a.m.), which led

to an overexposure of the picture, may have occurred due to temporal coverage of the exposure sensor by the object flying past.⁹ Although some uncertainty remains with this interpretation, the occurrence of such an “extra” can thus be plausibly explained.¹⁰

With regard to the pictures from the first series, the assessment of the size of the “extra” was problematic. Due to the fact that the object was largely obscured by vegetation (evergreens in the foreground, ferns), a good reference was lacking in the photographs. For this reason, but also in order to get a better impression of the functioning of the wildlife camera, we asked Mrs. M. to provide us with further series of pictures from the respective two days. On one of them, a bird (presumably a jay) is visible, which allowed an estimation of the size of the object to be made (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Photo series from July 2, 2013, at 7:45 p.m., with bird (sections).

Our approximate estimation was in line with the statements made by Mrs. M., who had visited the site again and removed the obscuring fern leaf. We first adjusted the brightness and contrast of the slightly underexposed pictures to improve the recognizability of the object. Viewing the three pictures in quick succession made the movements that occurred during the two-second period visible. Apart from the movement of a few twigs at the picture margin, they are limited to the direct surroundings of the object.

9 In the operation manual of the camera one can read: “**Empty Photos/False Triggers** – [...] If there are limited, random photos with no game present, the following scenarios are most likely 1) an animal ran through the picture extremely fast or 2) a smaller animal/bird is around the camera/sensor but is not in the camera field of view [...]” (<http://assets.academy.com/mgen/98/10104798.pdf> – accessed: January 18, 2018.)

10 The photograph was also examined by Hans-Werner Peiniger, who agreed with this argumentation and interpretation (e-mail dated July 3, 2014). Peiniger is president of the Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des UFO-Phänomens e. V. [Society for research into the UFO phenomenon], and has many years of experience with the interpretation of strange “extras” on photographs. We thank him for his quick and uncomplicated cooperation.



Figs. 6a-c: Photo series from July 2, 2013,—sections with the “extra” marked by a surrounding red circle

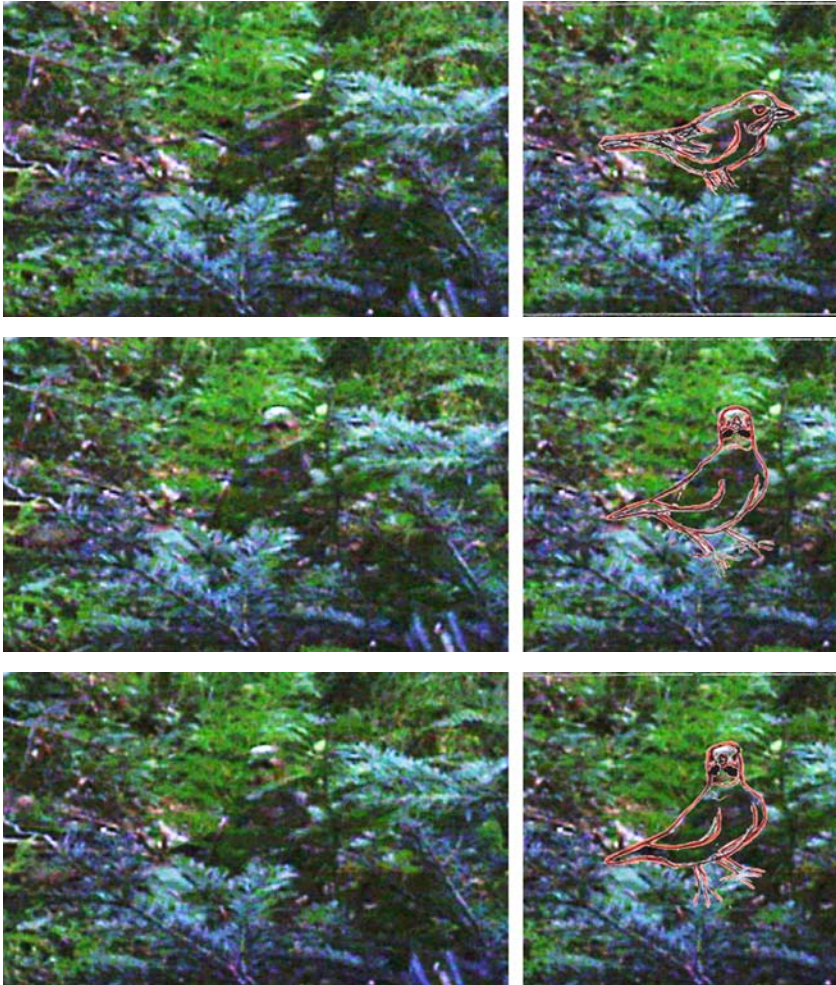
Two small, dark, horizontal patches that are surrounded by an oval shape are strongly reminiscent of a head with two eyeholes and spontaneously catch one’s eye. The interpretation of a small humanoid holding an object in his hands is thus in a plausible range (Figs. 7a and 7b).¹¹



Figs. 7a and 7b: Sections of pictures 6b and 6c with added contours of a humanoid

11 Mrs. M. described it in a follow-up interview as follows: “(the object) actually looks like a little man with a lot of muscles, who picks something up from the ground with his right hand and holds it in the direction of the camera” (e-mail dated July 1, 2014).

Closer inspection of the pictures in quick succession, however, provided a plausible alternative interpretation: a jay.



Figs. 8a-c: Sections of pictures 6a-c, with added contours of a jay

The “switching” of the interpretation made the allegedly stick-like object in the hands of a humanoid the tail feathers of a jay. Our suggested bird-interpretation received a high degree of comprehensibility and plausibility from most of the viewers. The movement is easily identified. The bird is seen from the side in the first picture; the tail points to the left and is facing slightly upwards. Even the form of the beak is recognizable on the right side (although only hard to identify). On the second picture, the bird has stretched upwards, the head directed toward the camera. As the bird moved up, the tail went down

and can be seen as a black shadow in front of the bright branch. In the third picture, the tail is lowered further through the movement of the bird.

The interpretation of the object as a skull with black eyeholes is promoted by the reflection of the laterally shining sunlight on the plumage of the bird's head that outshines the internal differentiation and details in the image.



Fig. 9: Jay, with frontal view of the head and characteristic dark patches at the throat.

The picture series was shown to several people. After giving respective hints, the interpretation of the object as a jay was seen as plausible by almost all of them. One important factor for this was most probably the two characteristic dark patches at the throat of a jay which could easily correspond to the part of the object that had been interpreted as eyeholes. A second important factor was probably the motion information, which was added by the fast presentation of the sequence of pictures. In this way, the contours of a bird could be made out.

The phenomenon of switching perceptual interpretations of the same visual information is comparable to and reminiscent of the well known reversible figures (Gregory, 2009: 121–138; see Fig. 10 as an example).

The Curse of the Atacama Mummy

Sensory information is a priori incomplete, noisy and to varying degrees ambiguous, mainly due to the limited capacities of our senses. Prior perceptual experiences are thus crucially important ingredients in order to make sense of the sensory input and to reach the most plausible perceptual interpretation as quickly as possible. Different time scales can play a role in this process, reaching from perceptual experiences in the distant past to



Fig. 10: All is Vanity. Reversible figure by Charles Allen Gilbert (1873–1929)

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Reversible_figure?uselang=de#mediaviewer/File:Allisvanity.jpg]

those occurring very recently, with varying intensity. This is well known, both in vision science and in perceptual psychology, but is nevertheless always impressive. One crucial factor is, of course, the availability of plausible memory content that fits with the current sensory information.

In the present case, it is highly probable that memory influences led the viewers to interpret the wildlife camera pictures in the framework of an anomalistic context. Neither a mental jay image was available to Mrs. M. and her hunting colleagues nor another plausible conventional explanation. This may have led to their conviction that the mysterious object *could not* be an animal. A further important point concerns the statement of Mrs. M. that since the day of the recording of the pictures, animals, and mainly the previously regularly occurring boars, avoided the place.

Such a phenomenon should be investigated in an open-ended manner, and non-conventional possible explanations should be not categorically excluded a priori. However, possible conventional explanations should first be carefully examined. Further, a thorough examination of the temporal context of the event is absolutely necessary. In this case, the blurred “extra” on the picture of the second series as well as the allegedly weird behavior of animals during the following time period were significant clues. Both points would not have caused such an irritation if taken alone; however, their effect was amplified through their connection with the first series of pictures with the “humanoid skull shape”. They reinforced a pre-existing anomalistic interpretation but were not causative.

The associations the humanoid shape elicited in one of the authors (G.M.) at first evoked memories of pictures of a mummy with about 13 centimeters in size that was found in the Mexican Atacama desert in 2003 (Fig. 11). Some interpreted it as the mummy of an extraterrestrial, and it was subjected to extensive genetic tests.¹²

In order to obtain information about the emergence of the anomalistic interpretation Mrs. M. was confronted with a lavishly illustrated article about the Atacama mummy

¹² See <http://siriusdisclosure.com/evidence/atacama-humanoid/> for further information and pictures (accessed: January 18, 2018).

that had been published on March 10, 2013, in the German magazine *Spiegel online*,¹³ and asked whether she knew of this case and the pictures. Her reply in an e-mail from July 1, 2014, was:

[Y]es, I knew the pictures of the mummy, and I even searched for comparable ones when we first saw the photographs. The pictures of the mummy crossed my path at some point, quite some time before the recording of our photographs, in some article on the Internet (probably “Bild-Zeitung”), and following the pictures on our wildlife camera, I searched exactly for this mummy in order to make comparisons, and classify the alleged figure. As if you had suspected this :-).¹⁴

Mrs. M. further described how people in her environment struggled for interpretations, which, after agreeing that the object was “not an animal in any case”, also included a “creature from outer space” and a “forest spirit” as alternatives.

After being offered the alternative interpretation “jay”, it took a certain time until Mrs. M. was able to deliver herself from her fixation, as she put it, and could identify the bird:

I thank you warmly for your efforts to clarify what can be seen there, and I hope that it only was a bird, anything other than an animal would worry me :-) (e-mail dated June 16, 2014).

We then sent her some information about perception-psychological phenomena. Finally, she wrote in an e-mail on June 19, 2014:



Fig. 11: Atacama mummy's head (with permission from Greer, 2013)

13 <http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/kein-ausserirdischer-forscher-entraetseln-mumie-ata-a-899087.html> [accessed: January 18, 2018].

14 The respective article from *Bild online* is dated April 25, 2013: <http://www.bild.de/news/mystery-themen/alien-mensch-mutation/forscher-untersuchen-mysteroeses-skelett-dieser-mini-alien-soll-ein-mensch-sein-30145034.bild.html> (accessed: January 18, 2018). On that website there is a hint to a further strange finding of a creature in Mexico, an “Alien Baby in an Animal Trap” (article from August 24, 2009: <http://www.bild.de/news/mystery-themen/mexiko/ausserirdischer-in-mexico-gefangen-9493992.bild.html> [accessed: January 18, 2018; the formerly provided video clip has been removed]), whose shape of the skull is even more reminiscent of the humanoid shape on the photographs from the wildlife camera: http://www.nachrichten.net/details/3588/Mexiko_Zweites_Alien_gesichtet.html (accessed: January 18, 2018).

What pleases me the most is that I eventually see a bird, since yesterday evening. Firstly, I persuaded myself that it is a bird; then I searched for it using various resolutions; and, in particular, [I] finally abandoned the idea that the anterior [object] is an arm, it is namely a piece of the fir that leans over the fern. All this thinking away and accurately viewing the movement, knowing that the tail is on the left—then it is quite simple, I can see now: a bird. Nevertheless it is incredible how my and all our all brains play tricks with us, astonishing.

Concluding Remarks

If humans perceive something that does not fit into the generally accepted model of the world, then myths, fictional stories, and media representations provide concepts that help to interpret and classify what is perceived. As shown with the Atacama mummy, but also many other phenomena (e.g. Fortean), the world provides sufficient strange, bizarre, and unexplained things about which there are wild speculations, and which can be used for explanation. Such attempts at explanation might be accompanied by heavy doubts and skepticism but they themselves are likewise accompanied by skepticism towards the comprehensive explanatory claims of conventional science. Images of aliens, Yetis, and gigantic sea serpents are well known, even to children through the reading of comics, and they constitute a pool of ideas and concepts of anomalies which can be referred to in ambiguous perceptual situations. This pool of “images in the head” grows over the course of a lifetime. The physical reality of the Atacama mummy proves that strange and unexplained things do exist—a fact that would not be diminished by a conventional explanation and classification of the mummy into well known scientific models and categories, as the case may be. The present case example perfectly demonstrates this relationship because, not only could a temporal correspondence of media coverage about the mummy and the humanoid interpretation of the object on the pictures of the wildlife camera be ascertained, but the general impact of the media images on their interpretation could also be directly verified. This, again, demonstrates how meaningful and prolific a multidisciplinary perspective is, with regard to the investigation of spontaneous cases; a multidisciplinary perspective that takes the phenomena themselves as well as the social processes, dynamics, and processing strategies provoked by the experience equally into account.¹⁵

15 This aspect comes distinctively to the fore with another examination of a photograph with an allegedly “paranormal extra” (see previous chapter). However, with regard to that case no plausible conventional explanation could be found.

Acknowledgement

Our special thanks go to Mrs. M. who showed much trust in our work by providing us with the picture series and supported the examination with her cooperation in an exemplary fashion. We also wish to thank Hans-Werner Peiniger and Michael Schetsche for technical advice.

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THE “CASTLE HOTEL” CASE – BECOMING A HAUNTING MYTH AND A “LOST PLACE”

AN INVESTIGATION REPORT¹

Gerhard Mayer

Introduction

Buildings with a rich historical tradition are predestined to being accommodated not only by the living but also by “shadows of the past”. The history becomes visible in architectural manifestations, time-related aesthetics of furniture and interior design in general, historical pictures and souvenirs, etc., but also in traces of use, wear, and decay—and sometimes, for some people, in signs and messages from deceased individuals that are closely connected with the respective buildings in some way. Such buildings could then be regarded as haunted by “experiencers” as well as people who have heard about it and believe in hauntings and ghostly appearances or are at least open to such a possibility. If this happens nowadays, these buildings quickly become well-known in certain circles, or scenes, as so-called “paranormal hot spots”.

However, this was not the case when the marketing head of the “Castle Hotel”² in a southern German spa resort got in touch with the counselling department of the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (IGPP) in Germany in 2005 and reported strange phenomena that could be interpreted as hauntings, or paranormal phenomena in general, probably because the “wave” of ghost-hunting groups that has flooded the USA since the early years of the new millennium, and at the latest since the start of the very popular TV series *Ghost Hunters* in 2004, had not yet reached Germany (Mayer, 2010, 2013). Therefore, the examination of this case could take place in a relatively unspoiled contextual “field”. The following report provides an insight into the

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- 1 The investigation was carried out by a team of IGPP staff members: Liane Hofmann, Gerhard Mayer (investigator-in-charge), Uwe Schellinger (historical research), Michael Schetsche, Ina Schmied-Knittel, and Cäcilia Schupp-Ihle.
 - 2 The name of the hotel as well as names of the people concerned are anonymized and/or changed. Although the name of the hotel, its location and former owner have meanwhile been made public by other parties (see section 5), we will maintain this rather paradox anonymization for the sake of our methodological and ethical principles.

methods of the investigation and evaluation of a highly complex situation by means of a social scientific as well as psychological approach. Furthermore, it provides clues about how a haunting myth develops, and how field research can have significant influences on the field under investigation. After a short overview of the examination procedure, I will describe the single steps and results in more detail, and follow this with a concluding reflection and a glance at the aftermath of the investigation and the case itself.

Examination Procedure

The total duration of the examination covered a period of about three months and can be divided into five phases. The first phase consisted of making contact, getting advance information, and clarifying the inquiry. It was followed by a preliminary examination with a first on-site exploration. After an interim evaluation (phase 3), a second on-site exploration took place and interviews with the hotel manager and staff members of the hotel were conducted. During the last phase, interviews with former staff members as well as an historical inquiry were executed.

The first (telephone) contact with the IGPP was made by Mr. A, who had been the marketing manager of the “Castle Hotel” for two months. He reported unusual, spooky events in the hotel which could be of interest to the IGPP with regard to a scientific investigation. He learned about these various phenomena from staff members, who for the most part interpreted them as paranormal occurrences. The initial hypotheses were spiritualist, and referred to the long history of the hotel, which served as a military hospital during World War II. Mr. A offered to provide support if we were interested in an examination of the case. From a first long telephone interview, advance information was obtained about the respective occurrences as well as the circumstances at the hotel. However, at this stage, we were not yet sure about the motive of the marketing manager, e. g. whether he aimed to use the IGPP investigation as a means for creating a “certified haunted hotel” marketing concept; subsequently, we had to be cautious.

The reported probably paranormal phenomena covered a relatively broad range, from “atmospheric” sensations (feeling the presence of someone or something) to visual and acoustic perceptions, and RSPK-like phenomena. Two oil paintings had been adjudged a specific role, being linked to the history of the hotel in a particular way. The first depicts a young lady dressed in white, interpreted by the staff members as a picture of Adele (“Adi”). She ran the hotel for many years and was called “the hotel queen”. The second painting likely depicts a young clergyman. Some staff members called him “The Bishop”. Both pictures hung in central places in the hotel. The depicted persons were said to occasionally change their facial expressions.

Two IGPP researchers³ then made an on-site visit and were guided through the rooms of the hotel. They were allowed to go into rooms and areas that were not accessible to hotel guests, such as attics and basement rooms. Photographs were made for documentation. Another interview was conducted with Mr. A, and both parties agreed to maintain confidentiality towards the public.

The findings acquired so far were then discussed within the team. Despite the fact that the motives and structure of the case remained unclear even after the on-site visit, the team decided to examine the case further in a step-by-step approach. After every examination phase, a new decision should be made regarding further steps. The case seemed to be interesting because the hotel and its employees had serious existential difficulties at that point in time.

An examination team⁴ visited the hotel to conduct interviews with all the hotel employees (nine in total) who were willing to take part. With the exception of the porter and an intern, everybody agreed to be interviewed.

After assessing the state of the acquired data, we decided to augment the insights gained so far by conducting three further interviews with people who could provide an external view of the situation. Mrs. M and Mrs. N were former staff members of the hotel; Mrs. L had got to know the hotel from the perspective of a guest as well as course organizer. Thus, a viewpoint reaching a little bit further into the past of the hotel could be provided. Mrs. M was currently the owner of another hotel in a south German village, and Mrs. N held several functions there. The last interview, with Mrs. L, was conducted at the IGPP in Freiburg. In addition, the IGPP historian Uwe Schellinger carried out research into the history of the hotel and the hotel dynasty B., paying special attention to the circumstances of the death of the “hotel queen” Adele B. in 1949 as well as the two oil paintings mentioned before.

Findings

The results of the investigation are based on the interview data, photographic records, and historical research, as well as gathered material (plan of the site, geographical maps, etc.).

3 Michael Schetsche and Ina Schmied-Knittel.

4 Liane Hofmann, Gerhard Mayer, and Cäcilia Schupp-Ihle.



Fig. 1: The “Castle Hotel” nowadays

Reported Phenomena

Taking all reports of the unusual events together, a wide range of extraordinary phenomena of various qualities is covered—from phenomena that seem to be closely related to the domestic electrical system, to atmospheric perceptions and sensations, through to impressions of personality changes.

Phenomena during the passage of time

The first accounts refer to phenomena appearing in the mid 1990s. At that time, none of the current employees belonged to the hotel staff. Most of the phenomena occurred during the whole period at differing frequencies and did not seem to be linked to the presence of certain individuals. Sometimes hotel guests were concerned who knew nothing about the “haunting myth” of the building. Such an incident, occurring in the “problem room” No. 428,⁵ led to the sudden departure of the guests. However, apparently

5 This must have occurred between 1997 and 2003, when Mrs. M was the manager of the “Castle Hotel”.

person-related experiences were also reported (out-of-body experiences, personality changes).

Overall, an escalation in the number of incidents seemed to have taken place during the last one or two years before our investigation—the period of time when the current sociodynamic system of the employees evolved. It admittedly meets one’s expectations that incidents of the more recent past are more easily remembered than older ones, but there do actually seem to have been qualitative and quantitative changes. A first increase can be determined when Mr. D started to work as cook in the second half of the year 2002. He reported having had his first unusual experience after three or four weeks: a swing door in the kitchen opened by itself. In autumn 2003, a significant organizational and personal restructuring took place after an apparently fraudulent action of the then managing director who subsequently disappeared. The joint management of three hotels, including the “Castle Hotel”, was dissolved. Mrs. M and Mrs. N left the hotel and went to the above-mentioned other hotel, whereas Mr. B moved from there to the “Castle Hotel” and took over its management in March 2004. Mrs. F also started as cook during this period (December 2003). In the course of the year 2004, various extraordinary incidents occurred.

Time of day

The phenomena were mainly observed in periods when it was rather quiet in the hotel, i. e. at times when the number of guests was very low, and—with regard to the time of day—after service was ended in the evening, or early in the morning, before the guests had risen.

Places

A significant accumulation of phenomena can be determined on the fourth floor. This is where the two so-called “problem rooms” No. 428 and No. 434 were found. The second floor was also characterized as suspicious, but we could not find clear links to the reported incidents. This was more the case with the service rooms on the ground floor. The bar also played a certain role. Furthermore, the connection points between the floors were important: the elevator and the staircase, as well as the rear staircase belonging to the staff area that ended right next to room No. 434. The basement rooms with two bricked up walls, to which much importance was attached with regard to historical myths about the hotel, were inconspicuous.

The two oil paintings “Adele” and “The Bishop” played a special role. The portrait of Adele B. hung on the staircase between the ground floor and the first floor; the picture of the clergyman was in the reception area of the hotel.

Phenomena

The escalation during the last one or two years before our examination concerns not only the frequency but also the (ascribed) strength of the phenomena. Mrs. N, for instance, remarked that she had not experienced “such stories as experienced by them [*the current employees*], that the elevator went up and down [...] or steps on the hallway”. According to Mrs. M, these accounts include a great deal of fantasizing:

(I)f the stories that are now told about the hotel [...] that women are climbing the stairs, that somebody is singing, or that one can see somebody in the mirror—well, this is a little bit too far-fetched in my opinion. It rather seems to me as if someone .. I will not say exaggerated but simply wanted to make the whole thing interesting. Or, if one has something to tell, the other also likes to tell something.⁶

Most of the phenomena dating from further back are of a rather “atmospheric” character, and difficult to assess. Thus, mainly changes in light levels had been perceived to correlate with other things happening: on “good days” the light was shining bright, on “bad days” it was dull and dark. Mrs. N considered these correlations “the most serious”:

(W)hen something wasn’t in order with the light, or so, then, then one could be sure that something, something was different on that day [...] that something would happen or so. Or that some device will not function properly. No one knows why, and afterwards it works again.

Similarly difficult to grasp, although important for the creation of the legend about the hotel, are the unusual perceptual phenomena concerning the two oil paintings “Adele” and “The Bishop”. They were supposed to change their facial expressions according to the attentiveness of the spectator—for instance, in the case of “The Bishop”, if one caressed his cheek. It could not be determined when this ability had first been attributed to these paintings.

Mrs. N also reported sudden feelings of oppression and sensations of cold that especially came over her at night during the late shift, partly accompanied with a feeling of the presence of somebody or something. Other people experienced comparable events that happened throughout the entire assessable period. The cook, Mr. D, considered the sudden occurrence of goosebumps as an indicator for the presence of something supernatural.

According to Mrs. M, an unexplainable musty smell appeared occasionally in the ceremonial hall from one day to another. When staying at the “Castle Hotel” as a guest, Mrs. L once perceived a strong chlorine smell as part of an intensive biographical and partnership-related experience of conflict.⁷

6 All translations are made by the author.

7 This incident is insofar special in that Mrs. L interpreted her perception clearly as a (meaningful)

As mentioned above, Mrs. N reported that changes in the lighting were sometimes accompanied by the dysfunction of technical devices. She seemed to take such incidents as well as the changes in light levels as indicators of "bad times". The receptionist, Mrs. C, gave a detailed report about similar occurrences that can be understood as kinds of synchronistic phenomena. These were mainly burst bulbs in the foyer and especially in a chandelier in the reception, which were seen as predictors, or indicators, of negative events:

(F)or example that telephone calls bad for us, for the hotel, came in, perhaps from the tax office or something else, or someone became ill, or something happened in one's family. Thus, always a connection, but only if a bulb bursts!



Fig. 2: oil painting of "Adele"

At one time it turned out that a host had broken a toe; another time, a woman fell out of the shower and broke her arm.

A relatively large share of the phenomena can be related to the domestic electrical system, such as changes in light intensity, bursting of bulbs, and more: hosts awoke and noticed that the illumination of the balcony that could only be operated from their room was switched on. Mr. D reported a particular evening when the light in the catering area automatically switched on several times after he had switched it off. In more recent times, the telephone control panel often displayed outgoing telephone calls from unoccupied rooms which, however, were not registered as outgoing calls by the computer system. Furthermore, automatic movements of the elevator were increasingly observed in the course of the last years. The movements of the elevator were partly linked to the sound of the elevator's door opening, although allegedly nobody could be in the elevator, and the door could only be opened manually. Such an incident was the first extraordinary experience in the hotel for the executive housekeeper, Mrs. E, which frightened her a lot and swept away her initial skepticism towards the "haunting tales". She and a colleague were

sensorial hallucination that could not be intersubjectively shared. Her partner did not perceive the same smell.

about to clean room No. 421 opposite the elevator. Both of them perceived its arrival, saw that the door opened outward, and closed again without anyone being inside it.

Further acoustic phenomena include the sound of high heels in the service area, in unoccupied rooms, and on the staircase that has a carpet flooring, a female voice singing in the area of the operating rooms and the rear staircase, nocturnal baby's crying, and the perception of a female cry in the guest bathroom on the ground floor, as if a woman was being pushed into an abyss and loudly cried "No!".

The above-mentioned feelings and sensations of the presence of something or someone are rather indefinite, whereas the latter phenomena that occurred during the last two years clearly have a more sensorial quality. They can be more easily seen as "personally" caused, which is conducive to a spiritualist interpretation. The same applies to the optical impressions of a scurrying person in a white veil, and perceptions of shadows in the line of light at the lower gap of a room door. There are also older reports from hosts who perceived a person in their room. They are interesting in that one cannot assume a priming by the employees and/or knowledge of the hotel's history. The former director of the hotel, Mrs. M, mentioned a case that is particularly expressive because the concerned guests, who did not know anything about the unusual incidents in the hotel, departed as a consequence:

Once we had guests that were in that room, well, the woman was pretty scared, or outraged. She took a bath and, um, was of the opinion that her boyfriend had come into the bathroom and touched her from behind, and turned around, but nobody was there and her friend lay on the bed. Well, they then departed. She was so ... [...] she, she really, definitively said: "somebody touched me", she didn't want to go into that room again. And, um, they departed.

The whole thing happened in room No. 428—one of the reasons for its designation as a "problem room". Another reason was also reported by Mrs. M:

(W)e often had the problem that the receiver lay beside the telephone although this room was not occupied. Although I blocked all the master cards and recoded them, time and again the receiver lay next to the telephone, and the bathtub was full of water.

Of a similar quality but far more open to different explanations are phenomena such as a swinging door that automatically starts to move, a closed bottle of beer of which one third of the contents is lacking, a picture that falls from the wall, or the sudden shaking of glasses at the bar—all without a directly identifiable cause.

The latter took place in the context of a special situation to which the repeated switching-on of the lights on the ground floor mentioned above also belonged. Mr. D

associated these phenomena with the appearance of a somewhat weirdly dressed, confused-appearing woman with long black hair. She suddenly appeared in the hotel, looked at pictures on the wall, and asked specifically about things concerning the hotel dynasty. She then engaged him into a conversation about the medieval abbess and mystic Hildegard of Bingen. This woman had information about him that she could not have had, according to his opinion. Finally, she left the hotel through the entrance, which was also seen by other employees. Some days later, she was seen again, dressed the same and looking at a picture:

I then said: "yes, well, she appears to me somewhat crazy", and then, "I don't know, maybe she is stealing something, or wants something, do you think?", um, "we should ask if she wants something to drink", and then S. [*a former employee*] went to her and asked her. Well, asked if she wanted something to drink. She then sat at the bar and drank a glass of wine. And then she paid, and, well, only with small change, small coins. Then she stood here again and looked again at the picture, and we were here, thinking: "oh yes, there you are", and when we turned around, the woman had disappeared [...] completely disappeared. We ran to the front, we even went outside, and we both looked for her. The woman had completely disappeared.

On that evening, the above-mentioned phenomena with the electric lighting as well as the shaking of the curtains and rattling of glasses in the bar occurred. Mr. D and two further former employees that were present at that time first suspected the woman, who may have hidden, of being the cause, but a search—including the basement—came up with nothing.

The unusual behavior of animals is a further class of phenomena that was mentioned in the interviews. Mr. B reported the strange behavior of a Saint Bernard dog, which allegedly behaved totally differently in the former room of "Adele" than in other rooms of the hotel. Mr. D told of his cat and of the odd appearance of a fat fly connected with the sound of footsteps in an unoccupied room above him.

Finally, experiences came up that, in the broadest sense, could be included in the field of altered states of consciousness. Mrs. C described several out-of-body experiences (OBEs) during different nights, once accompanied by the appearance of a figure. Although she tried to validate her perception with regard to its plausibility she remained unsure about her actual state of consciousness, i. e. whether it was a lucid dream or an OBE in a state of waking consciousness. The same applies to the nocturnal experience of a woman who perceived her bed rocking and the appearance of a figure. For Mr. D, the situation in the hotel seemed to be highly dream-inducing. According to his view, the dreams partly had a special quality in that they provided pictures of bygone eras of the hotel, which did not come from his memory.

The forms of personality changes reported by Mrs. L to which she was subjected several times during her stays at the hotel are a special case. Her sensitivity / mediumship seems to have been heightened in the hotel as well as her uncompromising directness and disputability. She particularly seemed to enter into representative roles of victims and acquire information hitherto unknown to her.

As can be seen, a whole cluster of strange phenomena of different kinds and qualities can be listed. Most of them are, from the perspective of an investigator, “weak”, i. e. conventional alternative explanations could easily be found for the assumedly paranormal incidents, although they have a high degree of subjective evidence, and would be strong if considered under an RSPK hypothesis. According to the judgment of the investigating team, there are no objections to the credibility of the interview partners. A relatively large number of observations were intersubjectively shared, i. e. two or more people were together when they happened. The group composition was different during the single incidents.

Surprisingly, the reports of Mrs. M include the “hardest” and most impressive phenomena (filled bathtub, receiver beside the telephone, and also the guests departing because of their weird experience in room No. 428). She did not consider these as “good” or “genuine” incidents in contrast to the occurrences reported by the current staff. In fact, she generally took on the position of a skeptic, who was not willing to believe everything reported and had a conventional explanation at hand for most of the occurrences. However, her own attitude towards the paranormal was not decidedly skeptical but rather vague, which made her statements somewhat inconsistent.

*Experiences and Interpretations of the Interviewed Persons*⁸

The following paragraphs include individual depictions of the interview partners, their respective experiences and interpretations, and an assessment by the investigating team.

Mr. A

Mr. A was the driving force with regard to the examination of the incidents in the hotel. He informed the IGPP and also provided contact with people who did not belong to the hotel staff. He was in charge of marketing and had been living in the hotel for two months. Mr. A had learned of the unusual occurrences in the hotel from the managing director, Mr. B, as well as from other hotel employees. Eventually, he became interested in the issue.

⁸ The provided information is based on our report of the case written in 2005. Therefore, information about age and time courses refer to 2005 when the hotel was still in operation.

He had experienced only a few and not very impressive unusual phenomena in the hotel, e. g. the vague feeling of a presence, or a sudden impression of cold in the staff room.

The range of explanations he took into account was broad. In any event, he clearly stated: "there is something" in the hotel. For him, the fact that several people had independently seen something unusual, and nobody was "peddling" his/her experiences, was an indication of the genuine nature of the phenomena. He also attached great weight to the judgment of his acquaintance, Mrs. L, whom he considered as highly sensitive and mediumistically gifted. She had given some information about the history and specific situation of the hotel during a New Year's celebration.⁹ Mrs. N also seems to have had a strong influence on his interpretations. Thus, one can regard his attempts at an explanation as a conglomerate of different models, whereby the origins of the single elements remain somewhat unclear. For him, the most plausible explanation seemed to be that the hotel, mainly because of its former function as a hospital, was a place where souls of the deceased who had not yet found the "way into the light" reside. Another important hypothesis for him was that Adele B. was still trying to influence the events in the hotel after her death. Further hypotheses he mentioned include there being "yet another dimension" in which the hotel business still existed as it had been around the year 1900, and the possibility that the underground passageways in the nearby mountain slope played a role in the past as the site of secret gatherings, while the hotel operated only to camouflage them. Mr. A had also considered conventional explanations but they were not sufficient for him. He told us that he loved the building because it had something very special, and its atmosphere had captivated him a little.

Although Mr. A was the marketing director of the hotel and we had to take into account that he could try to use the haunting myth as a marketing strategy, we did not consider this to be his main motive for asking for an examination of the phenomena, but a genuine interest. His worldview was diffusely esoteric. He was the staff member with the shortest "biographical history" linked to the hotel but he had a kind of existential tie to the building in common with the other employees due to economic obligations and pressure.¹⁰ His aim (or obligation) to create a new future at this very place would certainly have promoted his inclination to see the hotel as something fatefully special and fascinating. Seeing the hotel (and/or the invisible intelligent structures behind it) as an actor could probably have been used to reduce or avoid his own responsibilities. Such

9 However, his opinions of Mrs. L do not correspond very well with her self-assessment as well as her assessment of the situation.

10 Before he became the marketing director, he organized a blues festival at the hotel that brought him financial ruin.

an esoteric interpretation could be: “It was the wish of the hotel that I came here and had to stay. This is the real reason for my failure with the blues festival which brought me financial ruin”. With such an interpretation, his statements that the hotel “was capturing people who were working here, or staying for a longer period”, and they therefore “all choose this hotel” if they have the choice between it and the neighboring big hotel with a slightly better building structure become understandable. However, the building had never directly “talked” to him through paranormal events.

Mr. B

Mr. B had been the managing director of the hotel since March 2004. His business philosophy did not seem to be very hierarchically oriented, rather emphasizing a “we-are-all-in-the-same-boat” attitude. He was currently searching for new marketing strategies and therefore planned to refer to the important history of the hotel which was reflected in many artifacts. He also mentioned considering marketing the hotel as a “haunted place” but was worried that such a concept could have the opposite effect to that intended.

Mr. B had learned about the unusual occurrences through the accounts of staff members. His only personal experience was the strange behavior of a Saint Bernard dog which belonged to the former leaseholder of the hotel. It had behaved differently in problem room No. 434 than in other rooms, appearing intimidated and frightened. Mr. B’s statement that “people basically say that animals actually perceive if there is something there” indicates an implicit spiritualist hypothesis. However, with regard to the other phenomena he mentioned, i. e. mainly technical irregularities (flickering of the light, displayed telephone calls from unoccupied rooms, etc.), he adopted a decisive skeptical position and suggested coincidences, failures of the outdated housing technology, perception errors, and delusions as explanations. As long as he did not experience strong personal evidence he would not believe that the souls of deceased people were still in the building.

Mr. B was friendly and cooperative during the interview. However, it seemed that he was strongly aware of the role he was expected to play: a manager who did not go crazy and kept a cool head. He presented himself as a highly contradictory character. On the one hand, he always had a conventional explanation on hand during the interview, but on the other, he seemed to strongly promote spiritualist and magical interpretations among the employees by saying, for instance, “Leave the chandelier switched off, so that nothing else will happen!”, and presenting respective beliefs more or less explicitly (although mainly in a mood merry with wine, according to statements by staff members). In his ambivalence, he vacillated between dissociation and pushing. Acting by proxy allowed him to keep at a comfortable distance and make a cautious approach to the unknown or paranormal.

Mrs. C

Mrs. C had been working at the "Castle Hotel" since September 1999, with interruptions. She also lived at the hotel, and worked mainly in the reception. She was 21 years old, had no interest in religion, and no experience with occult or esoteric practices. However, she was interested in literature and texts on parapsychology, and, for example, used the Internet as a source of information.

She reported plenty of unusual phenomena that she herself had experienced during the whole of her time at the hotel: the feeling of a presence, unexplainable acoustic phenomena, a sensation of coldness, a female voice humming, the sound of high-heeled shoes clacking on the staircase, automatic movements of the elevator, changes in the oil painting of "The Bishop", and bulbs bursting. She had experienced some of these occurrences together with other staff members, intersubjectively confirming her perceptions. This also applies to the two appearances of the previously mentioned weird black-haired woman in the guest area of the hotel, who had scared her. Four out-of-body (OBEs) experiences that she had had at night played a special role. During one of these OBEs, she had seen a little girl appear next to the bed, who turned into an adult woman. Mrs. C remained uncertain whether this was a dream or not.

Although she considered conventional explanations for the phenomena and questioned her own perceptions and interpretations, a belief in the paranormal quality of the phenomena as well as a spiritualist explanation appeared to predominate. She assumed that the building had a soul, and that a connection to life in "another layer of reality" could exist.

"I simply say it now"—this sentence is characteristic for Mrs. C. It symbolizes a mixture of substantiation, i. e. putting something into the world, and relativization, or a tentative attitude. She reported her constant fear, which led her to always sleep with the lights on. On the other hand, she was convinced that the ghosts that were present were benevolent and kept their protective hands over the building. Although she was probably the employee who could change her workplace most easily, something seemed to have caused her to remain. She herself emphasized the somewhat mysterious attraction of the building. However, personal relationships and a feeling of solidarity could also have played a crucial role. The way in which she reported several unusual occurrences (she often used "we") makes it sometimes difficult to distinguish whether the experiences belonged to her or Mr. B. It remains unclear who influenced whom more. Despite her fear, she seemed to love the story of the haunted hotel and the benevolent ghost of the building too much to go without it. Because of her strong identification with the hotel and the hotel management, it is difficult to ascertain her own personally reasoned position toward the phenomena.

Mr. D

Mr. D had been working as head chef at the hotel for about two and a half years. After becoming separated from his spouse he had moved into the hotel. He described himself as a mentally unstable and fearful person. He had been suffering from anxiety states and sleep disturbances for a long period, and had often had bad dreams that affected the whole of the following day. Before being confronted with the occurrences in the hotel he had never been occupied with such issues and had never experienced similar things. However, his friends had had frightening experiences with occult practices, and his mother was a sensitive person who sometimes had precognitive dreams. He explained his own sensitivity for extraordinary experiences with his biography (probably in the context of drug use—he did not want to talk about it more specifically).

Mr. D reported the most unusual occurrences. The spectrum ranged from atmospheric, optical, and acoustic phenomena to the strange behavior of animals and weird dreams with references to the history of the hotel. He had experienced some incidents with other employees: the appearance of a person in a white habit at the bar, or the repeated automatic switching on of the electric lighting after it had been switched off. In some of his dreams he had seen pictures of the hotel's past, during World War II and its function as a hospital. Mr. D also spoke about the oddly clothed lady with the black hair mentioned above. He had talked with her for some minutes, and she had information about him which, in his opinion, she should not have had. Her entire appearance and particularly her sudden disappearance had seemed to him uncanny or at least strange.

Mr. D saw the hotel as a kind of actor that was able to influence people's behavior or fate. All the people who were currently working at the hotel had had bad luck in their lives outside. One belonged to the building, and the building allowed nothing else. Nevertheless, he would not have liked to go somewhere else. He was of the opinion that the building wanted to show or disclose something with the phenomena and dreams. It may have been Adele B., who was a kind woman. The phenomena had become stronger when things were not going well with the hotel, with little business, or if there had been a quarrel because of financial problems.

Mr. D's representation of the events was quite diffuse and difficult to understand. Many things remained fragmentary, unclear, and ambiguous. Several possibilities are conceivable: that the unstable and thin-skinned psychological condition of the head chef as well as his high psychological stress actually led to an increased sensitivity for paranormal phenomena, or perhaps, that the reported experiences were partly based on misperceptions, misinterpretations, and misjudgment. He displayed some of the characteristics of a focus person (Gauld & Cornell, 1979; Huesmann & Schriever, 1989; Roll,

1977). However, he differed from a “classical” focus person in not externalizing his own personal problems. In his own assessment, his main problems were not the unusual phenomena occurring in the hotel but in other areas of his life. There seemed to be no personal benefit to him from experiencing the phenomena. All in all, he could have been a good catalyst for paranormal phenomena. A general gain could have been the charging of the location and psychosocial system with a specific meaning. This applied to him as well as to the other members of the “community of fate”.

Mrs. E

Mrs. E had been working at the “Castle Hotel” since 2001. She was 39 years old, Croat, in charge as executive housekeeper, and responsible for the cleaning of the rooms. She did not live in the hotel. Before being faced with the unusual incidents at her work place, she had never paid any attention to the field of parapsychology and had not had any extraordinary experiences of this kind. Mrs. E had not heard anything about unusual phenomena at the hotel until December 2003. After learning about the strange behavior of a dog observed by Mr. B, she had initially remained skeptical. However, during the following day, while cleaning room No. 421 with a colleague, they had seen the door of the elevator opening while no one was in there. She reported:

I asked my colleague if she had seen something. She said “Yes ... I saw that”, because I thought that I had probably hallucinated or something like that, and then she said: “Yes, I saw it”. We really were frightened, both of us. Then I shouted to the [fourth] floor. I thought some colleague had played a joke on us. Then I shouted to our boss: “Mr. B!!!”. He came upstairs, and I said: “Mr. B you are playing a joke on us!” And then he said: “No, E!”—literally “I didn’t do that!” And then I told everyone what and how it had happened.

This was the only unusual occurrence that she had experienced herself. However, it could have become a starting point for the increasing thematization of such phenomena. When asked about her explanation for the phenomena, she often referred to the interpretations and statements of other employees but limited exclusively to the spiritualist hypothesis. After her extraordinary experience she had changed her behavior insofar as she, on the suggestion of Mr. B [!], caressed the picture of Adele every time she passed, and talked to it because Adele would have liked it.

Mrs. E seemed to have a very ambivalent relationship towards ghosts and the whole subject area. On the one hand, she paid little attention to it, but the ghost hypothesis was easily established with her. Although it frightened her to talk about such issues and she therefore avoided these topics of conversation, she seemed to have no problem with the idea that the ghost of Adele (“a benevolent ghost”) was hovering around her during her

work. She was pragmatic: as long as the ghosts did not behave malevolently, and she did not experience negative effects, she was satisfied with the idea of a potential peaceful coexistence—may it be real or pure fiction.

Mrs. F

Mrs. F was 20 years old and had been working as a cook at the hotel since December 2003. After a short temporary period working at another hotel in Munich she had come back to the “Castle Hotel”. Mrs. F had neither had any former extraordinary experiences nor interest in these topics.

She had learned about the unusual phenomena before she started to work at the hotel. People had told her that they would never move into this building because it was haunted. She had nevertheless moved in, and nothing happened for a long time. Her personal unusual experiences did not start before October 2004 and mainly included optical and acoustic phenomena: the appearance of a lady in a white habit at the bar, the sound of allegedly unexplainable movements of the elevator as well as people in it, a cry in the guests’ bathroom, as if a woman was being pushed down somewhere. There were no further witnesses to the latter incident. The same applies to the following experience she had one night: she had woken up and perceived that the door was opening, and then the whole bed was vibrating as if someone was shaking it. A tall figure was standing beside the bed. She subsequently got up and closed the interior door. The fact that she had found this door closed the next morning strengthened her conviction that it was not only a dream. She reported her experience to Mr. B:

(H)e said to me: “This was Adele.” And I: “Don’t give me that bullshit!” But he is of the opinion that it was real, that I likely did not dream it. Because he believes that otherwise my door wouldn’t have been closed the next morning when I got up.

Mrs. F always mentioned alternative, conventional explanations for the phenomena with a doubting undertone. However, she ultimately seemed to prefer the spiritualist explanation that had been suggested by various people. She not only thought about Adele B. but also other “souls”. Many others had died in the hotel, and had also been walled in during the time when the hotel was a hospital. It was always being said that souls who could not properly die still haunt the place where they died. She also wondered if the woman’s cry in the guests’ bathroom was caused by the ghost of Adele B. who was probably murdered there. Mrs. F had taken on the idea of the building as an actor from Mr. B and Mr. G and had applied their statement “People [employees] who go away will come back again” to her own situation of coming back after a failed attempt to work at another place.

In contrast to other employees, Mrs. F explicitly mentioned the existentially threatening situation at the hotel with the possible loss of work and accommodation. She also talked about her stressful private situation regarding the relationship with her parents. The hotel and staff provided her with a familial environment, and she perceived a lot of solidarity among the employees. In the course of the last year, she seemed to have changed her beliefs because she no longer generally excluded a spiritualist world view after her own extraordinary experiences. She had been strongly supported in this by other staff members and the managing director. Thus, it remains unclear how much this change was based on social pressure. With her return, she became a living example of the building as an actor which influenced the fate of the individuals connected with it.¹¹

Mr. G

Mr. G was born in Mauritius. He had moved a lot throughout the world and worked in more than 35 countries. He had been living in Germany for seven years, and working in the "Castle Hotel" for six. He was the manager of the restaurant, and also took care of foreign guests because he could speak several languages. He took a very critical view of the financial situation of the hotel but hoped that it would continue because he liked the building as well as the working atmosphere within the team.

He mentioned that there had been talk about the phenomena not only recently but also earlier. His own experiences had mainly included the feeling of a presence of something as well as acoustic phenomena (the sound of a woman's high heels, the voice of a woman singing). Because of his cultural background—he was Hindu—he had a specific approach to the phenomena. According to him, deceased people are everywhere. In his culture, it is believed that one really has died after a "good" or "natural" death. However, after a sudden, unexpected death, the individual lives as a ghost until the actual predetermined time of death has come. He had already had similar experiences in the past, and was able to talk to deceased friends. If he encountered problems in his life he talked with his deceased parents. For this purpose, he had arranged a small altar in his room (not in the hotel), and sacrificed cigarettes and rum in rituals. He received answers in dreams. With regard to the hotel, he was of the opinion that the phenomena could be caused by ghosts of people that had died there during the war. Mr. G dealt in an even-tempered way with the phenomena and had not yet tried to talk with the deceased individuals because he did not want to disturb them. There was no reason to do anything as long as nothing bad happened. They should simply be left alone. He was convinced that certain

11 This is problematic because it promotes external locus of control (Rotter, 1966) as well as potential dependencies.

people were particularly attracted by the building and would always come back because they would not feel comfortable working at other places and would become sad.

Mr. G gave a calm and balanced impression. He felt strongly connected to the hotel and its atmosphere. Due to his cultural background he would have been rather surprised if there had not been any ghosts, taking the important history of the hotel into account. Seeing the building as an actor also did not seem to be a very unusual idea to him. His way was to maintain a friendly coexistence without the need for many words. Mr. G was apparently the calm and integrating pole in the system. Although his role with regard to the occurrence of the phenomena was probably of little importance, he appears to have had a significant influence on the “myth” of the building. When he, who had travelled around the whole world, talked about the particularity of the hotel, this may have had a great influence on his younger and less experienced colleagues.

Mrs. L

Mrs. L was 40 years old, had three children, and lived with her partner, a medical doctor. She had graduated in economics, and offered courses in the subject (counseling for companies in crisis, crisis management, insolvency law). In addition, Mrs. L was a trained alternative practitioner and gave seminars in this area, also in the “Castle Hotel”. She was a friend of Mr. A and had been told about the financial situation of the hotel during a New Year’s Eve celebration (2004/2005). She once stayed as a child in the hotel for a holiday, and also knew the IGPP because a friend of hers had been involved in a poltergeist case during adolescence. Prof. Hans Bender had examined the case and written a psychological report for the authorities.

Mrs. L had a significant tendency towards alternative medical science. Furthermore, she carried out tarot card readings, although only for her family and friends. Since her childhood, she had had a pronounced intuition and sensitivity, which was well known to her acquaintances. At times she had had the reputation that no one could go anywhere with her without something dramatic happening. These incidents often had the character of meaningful coincidences in the sense that she was accidentally present at places where help was needed. However, she did not want to use this kind of intuition professionally. On the contrary: she liked to work in economics because it was so close to reality and one avoided the risk of “spacing out”.

The unusual phenomena that Mrs. L had experienced in the hotel had a different quality to those of the others. On the one hand, she had felt a specific sensitivity for states of consciousness that are usually difficult to access; on the other hand, she had experienced changes in personality, which she usually did not recognize as belonging to

herself, seeing them as directly connected to the place. She mainly perceived the changes in personality as an increased openness, argumentativeness, and bluntness in contact with counterparts. She reported gaining knowledge about other people in an inexplicable way, whereby she found herself in a proxy position making accusations of, or at least specifying, an injustice that had occurred. She had also experienced olfactory hallucinations as well as clairvoyant perceptions. However, she explicitly distinguished her experiences from those reported by the employees of the hotel. She had not seen ghosts. Nevertheless, she had regularly tripped in front of the painting of Adele; she found this strange, but thought it was probably only a result of the huge importance given to the picture.

Mrs. L emphasized the particular personal relationship with the hotel that she believed to be responsible for the experienced phenomena. For her, this place built a bridge to something unconscious. It functioned as a catalyst for psychical processes. Being a sensitive person, the hotel had not only had an effect on her self-perception but also on the perception of other people. However, she did not have a stringent model to explain this influence. Her approach, which was strongly oriented to systemic ideas sensu Hellinger (magic of the place, function as proxies), characterized her interpretation of the accounts of the hotel staff. Although some of her statements indicate that she did not generally reject a spiritualist hypothesis, she emphasized the significance of the difficult and existentially threatening situation of the employees which bonded them together into a rather homogenous group in this regard. As a result of this, a group dynamic had developed that promoted spiritualist ideas and respective experiences. The particular personality-changing effect of the hotel worried Mrs. L—and even frightened her a little. She did not feel very comfortable there and was not able to sleep very well. Normally, she would have avoided offering seminars there but she felt obliged to do so because Mr. A was relying on them.

Mrs. L had had a broad spectrum of experiences regarding alternative as well as conventional psychological models and methods; she also possessed knowledge of parapsychology and esoteric world views. Contrary to the first impression based on the statements of Mr. A, she did not seem to actively promote the thematization of the unusual phenomena. Her influence has to be considered as indirect, providing alternative ideological models which strongly fascinated Mr. A, who then applied them to the actual situation at the hotel. Mrs. L dissociated herself from the idealistic image that Mr. A had created of her as a "medium". With her psychological-systemic approach, she came to plausible interpretations of the psychodynamic processes which had fostered the haunting phenomena reported by the people concerned.

Mrs. M

Mrs. M had been managing director of the “Castle Hotel” from January 1997 to July 2003. She had scarcely dealt with parapsychological topics up until that point. In addition to atmospheric phenomena (changes in lighting conditions, a musty smell in a seminar room), she reported feeling watched while passing the pictures. However, the most convincing phenomena she had experienced involved room No. 428, one of the two “problem rooms” as she called them. These were the occurrences with the receiver lying beside the telephone and the bathtub being full of water (see above). The second “problem room” was room No. 434, the room alleged to have belonged to Adele, or the “death chamber”. However, she did not mention concrete problems.

Mrs. M dealt with the phenomena in a quite sober and matter-of-fact manner. She always tried to find conventional explanations, but accepted that there may have been none available for some phenomena. This had to be accepted as it was without making a big deal out of it, unlike the hotel employees. Although it was generally thought during her time there “that something is different [...] from other buildings”, every old building has something special and of its own. She was of the opinion that the hotel could have something like a “soul” which was probably connected with Adele B. When any incidences happened, it was quasi jokingly said: “Oh, Adele is haunting again today”. Mrs. M apparently did not have concrete hypotheses about the occurrences, and displayed no strong need for clarification. The two most plausible explanatory models of the more recent incidences for her were that the stories had been invented, or the events were the result of drug-induced hallucinations that were then boasted about.

The dominating impression received during the interview of Mrs. M was her wish for distinction. She began by announcing her motive for participating: so that the examination team could get to know at least *one* relatively critical voice. She aimed to clearly dissociate herself from the current hotel staff (she explicitly excluded Mr. G whom she knew from the past). In her view, everything was going downhill, and the atmosphere was no longer good since she had left in 2003. However, her statements include several obvious misjudgments of the actual situation at the “Castle Hotel”.

Mrs. N

Mrs. N was about 40 years old and had worked at the “Castle Hotel” from 1991 to 2003, under different managing directors, as a general assistant involved in accounting, pay slips, executive housekeeping, and reception duties. She had left the hotel two years previously because the situation was no longer sustainable for her. The period with the last director had been very problematic, mainly with regard to financial aspects. She

had not occupied herself with parapsychological issues before she worked at the "Castle Hotel".

During her time at the hotel, she did not experience many extraordinary, or spectacular, occurrences. Her experiences mainly involved atmospheric phenomena, such as the feeling of a presence as well as changes in the lighting in the hotel that appeared to indicate the situation at the time and also imminent occurrences. Furthermore, she had acquired the impression that the faces on the paintings of "Adele" and "The Bishop" changed their expression if one communicated with them in a certain way.

Mrs. N did not have concrete explanatory models for the phenomena, but she was convinced that there was "something", that the phenomena had to be considered as extraordinary. During the time she worked at the hotel, she had been preoccupied with the phenomena themselves as well as the fact that she was not able to explain the negative development of the hotel operation despite all the efforts of the employees. Thus, she had gone to a person with "spiritual power" to get information or an answer. He diagnosed water veins, which had to be suppressed, as a cause for the problematic situation. However, a more plausible explanation for her had been provided by a massage therapist with an esoteric worldview, who had offered his services in the hotel during the 1990s. He confirmed her impression that there was "something", namely souls that had not found the way into the light. He recommended talking to them.

And so I occasionally sat down on the stairs and simply talked in my mind to, what do I know, to something, and, um, then it was ok again.

Mrs. N considered it possible that the phenomena came to light less clearly due to the attention she had given to the "ghosts", as had been the case during the last months with the current hotel staff. Her strategy of dealing with the phenomena was similar to that of Mr. G, aiming at a peaceful coexistence and respecting certain needs of the "ghosts". She went further in that she had asked them for help: in situations of extreme distress (shortage of money, difficult working condition) she had sent a hurried prayer "upwards", which had worked more than once. Although she had not directed her prayers to someone in particular, she could imagine that a deceased person could have helped. She also had the feeling that the clergyman in the painting would take positive care of the fate of the hotel, and that therefore, the picture should remain in the entrance area.

Mrs. N made a down-to-earth impression during the interview. She characterized herself as not fearful, a "realistic person" who, however, was open-minded with regard to topics in the field of parapsychology. She did not usually talk much about her perceptions for fear of encountering a lack of understanding. There are certain similarities between her interpretation of the phenomena and Mr. G's, so that it remains unclear

whether she had taken on his view, and which role the massage therapist had regarding her belief system.

Overview of the Interpretations

“Legends”

The stories about the history of the “Castle Hotel” provided by the interviewees are based on a fragmented, largely unreliable, and partly highly speculative knowledge base. They seem to have been handed down over the years. The framework is formed, on the one hand, by the glorious past of the luxury hotel, and on the other, by the knowledge about the temporary function of the building as a hospital during the war. Further “legend-forming” factors are the underground passageways in the nearby mountain slope as well as the unclear spatial situation in the basement with two walled-up doors or corridors. The figure of Adele B., the “hotel queen”, who took care of the hotel matters in a noble manner and made this her purpose in life, also builds an important element. With these elements, various “legends” can be created, which can all be found in the accounts of the interviewed people:

- As one of the most ritzy German hotels at the turn of the century and until World War II, it was also used for secret political meetings.
- In the basement, there are connections to secret passageways in the nearby mountain slope through which it is possible to access and leave the hotel undetected.
- Many people died in the hotel when it was used as a hospital during the war.
- Bodies of the deceased were stored in the basement because of the cool temperature there.
- In the past, some persons were walled in alive in the basement.
- Deceased souls, who have not yet found their way into the light, are housemates. They are not malicious but only like to occasionally move around. A peaceful coexistence is possible on the basis of mutual respect.
- The hotel has a soul and leads a life of its own, reflecting its history; it influences individuals staying in the hotel (leads to personality changes, retains employees, induces extraordinary experiences such as prophetic dreams, out-of-body experiences, etc.)
- A morphic field interweaving through the building has certain effects on the perceptions and behavior of people residing or working in it.
- The building is cursed in some way. Nobody is able to make money with it.
- Some individuals are fatefully connected with the hotel and always have to come back. Otherwise they feel unwell; they fail outside the hotel.

- There is the possibility that a “parallel world” exists where the hotel business of around 1900 is still active.
- Room No. 434 was a death chamber.¹²
- Room No. 434 was the former room of Adele B.
- Adele B. could have been violently killed in the hotel, for example, by being pushed down the stairs.
- Adele B. takes care of the hotel’s affairs even after her death—in a positive and negative way: she is partly seen as a kind of “good ghost of the building”, partly as the one who tries to hinder the success of the current managing director because she does not appreciate the recent developments.
- The young woman dressed in white in the painting on the staircase is Adele B. The painting reacts to mental affection, and has an important role with regard to the operation of the hotel (when she began work at the hotel in the early 1990s, Mrs. N was jocosely told: if you are passing Adele then speak to her!).
- The painting of the clergyman dressed in black in the entrance area is also important for the hotel. It has a guardian or protective function and should not be removed from its place at the reception. It also reacts to mental affection.
- If there are negative influences “from beyond”, then they are rather related to the “black picture in the front” (the clergyman); positive influences “from beyond” with the white Adele.
- A thirteen-armed (!) chandelier in the reception area, of which only twelve arms work (!), functions as an indicator for current and forthcoming misfortune (bursting bulbs).

The current form of the legends seems to have been strongly influenced by Mrs. N, Mr. G, and Mrs. L, whereby the forced thematization of unusual occurrences by Mr. A during the past two months may also have played a significant role in their dissemination. Direct or indirect references to the explanatory models and hypotheses of the first three people can be found almost everywhere. This is not surprising because Mrs. N and Mr. G, as long-time employees of the hotel, built a connection to the past. Mrs. L also had a relationship with the hotel’s past and was said to be an expert on paranormal issues.

The role of a “talk” on the history of the hotel, which was allegedly held by Mrs. L on New Year’s Eve 2004/2005 remains unclear, but it could probably have been important for the

12 This interpretation is obviously promoted by the particular shape of the room. It includes a separated room which has a small inspection window in the wall. Some understand this strange “room in the room” as a walk-in closet, others as a death chamber that can be looked into from the outside.

more recent establishment of some “stories”. Mrs. L herself was not able to reconstruct the event clearly, and tended to a different interpretation from Mr. A. He was highly impressed and perceived her “as if somebody else had spoken through her”.¹³ In this context, the talk was about parallel worlds at least—a similar interpretation was made by Mrs. C (that “here in the building, there is life somewhere on another level”).¹⁴ During the interview, Mrs. L gave some information about the hotel of unknown origin. It could partly have been prior knowledge she gained in the context of her former occupation as liquidator of companies in the town where the “Castle Hotel” was situated, while one gained the impression that the information was partly gained by other (mediumistic?) means. According to her, the hotel had the reputation of not bringing good luck to its owner:

[A]t the bank, for example, um, the district savings bank, at top management level, the building is hardly given a chance. No matter which tenant may come. Because it is said: “This is cursed anyway”.

Prior to the phase of escalation, the extraordinary occurrences at the hotel were not talked about very much. Mrs. E, for instance, stated that she did not hear anything about hauntings during her first two years working there. This had changed significantly, especially after Mr. A interviewed the employees on these topics. This led to a general mixing of accounts and explanatory models, and it is difficult to assign the reported legends to particular individuals.

Explanatory models and reactions

The explanatory models are closely linked to the legends about the building. We most frequently found a spiritualist explanation of the phenomena, with different variants: a rather unspecific one refers back to the time when the hotel was used as a hospital. It held a connection to many people who experienced a violent and early death during the war. According to esoteric ideas and folklore beliefs, this can lead to a situation where the deceased individuals are not able to find “the way into the light”, i. e. that they still hold a connection to this life as ghosts (Finucane, 1982). However, as long as they cause no harm and do not behave maliciously, there is no reason to react in a specific way. As Mr. G and Mrs. N both reported doing, one can occasionally talk to the “ghosts” as a way of appreciating their existence.

13 On that noteworthy evening, Mrs. L experienced a strong personality change that was accompanied by clairvoyance (?) of a sort, and resulted in a conflict with her life partner.

14 Considering this idea in combination with the automatically moving elevator, the TV series *The Kingdom* by Lars van Trier inevitably comes into mind. In this script, a parallel world also exists in a hospital, with the elevator as a juncture much frequented by ghosts.

This type of strategy was not reported by the other people interviewed. Although there was a clear tendency not to attribute bad intentions to the “something”, the perceived phenomena evoked disquiet, and even fear. Coping strategies included, for example, not going through certain corridors after dark and leaving the lights on during the night. However, according to the managing director, Mr. B, this did not have a significant effect on the workflow of the ongoing hotel operation.

An alternative spiritualist explanation considered the “hotel queen”, Adele B., to be the cause of the phenomena. She was still taking care of the hotel’s business issues and sometimes gave signs to express her intentions. In a similar way, the picture of the clergyman was considered as an entity with the ability to influence the occurrences in the hotel. Both paintings demanded respect, which was expressed in specific behaviors (e. g. mentally talking to the pictures).

In addition to deceased people, the hotel itself was seen as an animated subject causing unusual phenomena. The idea is that objects store information from their past, or that they build a sort of a morphic field.

A real, living person (e. g. employee) was not considered to be the cause of the phenomena. Admittedly, the cook, Mr. D, was considered to possess a particular sensibility but strange occurrences took place without his presence.

Obviously, all interview partners also entertained conventional explanations (coincidence, perception errors, current fluctuations, etc.). They reported attempts to test the reality status of perceptions—intersubjectively, if possible—in order to protect themselves from self-delusions. Nobody explicitly made an allegation of fraud. Only Mrs. M went a little in this direction by describing the reports of the more recent occurrences as boasting and an expression of the inventiveness of certain hotel employees.

Results of Historical Research¹⁵

The “Castle Hotel” in X. had been managed by family B. since 1900. At the end of the 1870s, Otto B. senior first founded a luxurious spa hotel in close proximity to the train station, which became an attraction particularly for international spa guests. Especially English visitors enjoyed spending time in X. Otto B. senior had a house chapel built and

15 These paragraphs are directly based on a comprehensive report by historian Uwe Schellinger (IGPP), who carried out the research on the hotel’s history. His work, including scholarly apparatus, image material, and sources and references, is available as part of the final examination report at the IGPP (IGPP archive, W/1: Abschlussbericht “Schlosshotel Waldlust”, TFM 2005/1). All names of individuals and sites are changed in this abbreviated version for the sake of anonymization. Therefore, the dates are also only approximate.

engaged an Anglican chaplain who took pastoral care of the English-speaking guests. Towards the end of the 19th century, the successful hotel-owning family B. decided to build a further hotel on the outskirts of X. The “Castle Hotel” opened in spring 1900, with only 12 rooms to begin with. The press reported that it was an “establishment that, for its kind, offers the highest level of modern equipment that can be provided and quite sophisticated furnishings”. A few years later, the hotel was considerably enlarged. During the period after this enlargement and before World War I, the building experienced its first golden era. The records of X. reveal the high number of wealthy foreign guests at the “Castle Hotel”, many of them from overseas, including the USA. There were also numerous spa guests from the international political and arts scenes, as well as the German and European aristocracy.

The “Castle Hotel” survived World War I largely unscathed. However, business was not a quarter as good as in previous years, due to the absence of foreign guests. The family then sold the hotel near the train station and further enlarged the “Castle Hotel” by the addition of a south wing. They were successful in maintaining the high level of fame of the hotel after the war, and even increased it during the 1920s and 1930s. Regularly, various leading figures of international society stayed at the hotel.

With World War II, the situation changed once more. In the run-up to the French campaign, members of the commanding staff of the Armed Forces took up quarters in the “Castle Hotel” and used it as a stronghold from November 1939 to the middle of June 1940. The hotel was painted in military camouflage colors. During the war, air-raid shelters were established in the nearby former mine tunnels. At the beginning of 1942, a military hospital was installed in the “Castle Hotel” as was the case with other hotels and sanatoriums in the town. Despite devastating attacks on town X. by the Allies towards the end of war, the “Castle Hotel” remained completely spared because of its location at the periphery. A few months after the end of World War II, the building, then utterly decayed through its use during the war, was closed as a hospital and was soon after authorized for civil uses by the occupying forces. However, its use as a spa was obviously out of question at this point in time. Other ways to maintain and finance the building had to be found. Several possibilities were considered, but the hotel owners, family B., wished to reactivate the hotel business in the long term. At the beginning of 1947, Adele B. therefore asked the responsible county commissioner for permission to establish a private hospital. The building should serve as an “auxiliary hospital” for several medical doctors based in X. The request was granted, and the medical operation commenced in the “Castle Hotel” in spring 1947. It enabled the family to renovate the building step by step. Hotel operation was resumed at the end of 1948—in the same building as the hospital. The rooms for hotel guests were on the first and second floors, while the hospital was

established on floors 4 and 5. However, this dual function was only tolerated for a short time. Inspections initiated by the ministry of the interior brought grievances to light regarding the spatial arrangement and medical equipment, and also the management. Thus, the ministry rejected a new request for running a private hospital in addition to the hotel in early 1950.

The death of the popular hotel director Adele B. at the end of 1949 thus occurred during a very critical period in the context of the new consolidation of the hotel operation. Adele B. had successfully run the hotel since 1900, together with her husband, Otto B. junior. When he died in 1935, she became the sole owner of the hotel. She apparently fulfilled her role not only with great energy and organizational skills but also great charisma. Her excellent reputation had already reached far beyond X. during her lifetime. Her death was quite surprising and sudden, despite her sickly health and great age, because she personally took care of the concerns of the hotel until the last. Even on the morning of her death, she personally tidied and cleaned rooms in the "Castle Hotel". Since the end of war, and even in her last months of life, she relentlessly supported the continuation of the hotel business and dealt with the relevant authorities. She was not granted the chance to see her beloved hotel in a renewed upturn. The painting of the woman in white clothes that was still hanging in the hotel did actually depict the young Adele B.

After the death of Adele B., joint heirs acted as the operator of the "Castle Hotel", headed by the youngest member of the family who had a bad reputation. Although the glamorous image of the early years had almost disappeared, a fairly well functioning hotel business could be established for a further two decades. From the mid 1950s, daily dance and entertainment events were held, and new postcards were printed. This recovery period continued until the 1960s. The decisive turning point came with the death of the last family owner in the mid 1970s. The hotel came under the hammer because none of the remaining family members were able, or willing, to continue to operate it.

The disposal of the building from the family estate accelerated the decline of the hotel business. Several consecutive changes of ownership took place, and the operation stagnated. At the end of the 1970s, the hotel was completely closed for a period of four years. After a renovation phase, the building reopened as a sports hotel. However, the hotel operation abated again. The first half of the 1990s brought further changes of ownership; the "Castle Hotel" stood empty for several years and its structure became increasingly decayed.

In the mid 1990s, the former "Castle Hotel", which was already publicly labeled as a "hotel ruin" at that time, got another new chance and was bought by a foreign real estate

company. Again, the building had to undergo a major, and expensive, renovation, and reopened at the end of 1994. However, problems occurred with the management a few weeks later, which brought significant unrest and instability.

In summary, it can be said that with the “Castle Hotel”, we encounter one of the “castles of the bourgeoisie” of the German Empire, which was well known far beyond X. The high time of the hotel was clearly the twenties and thirties in the 20th century, after it had become the main residence of family B., and the building had been enlarged. One of the keys to its success was certainly the personalities of the hotelier couple Otto B. junior and Adele B., who knew how to convey bourgeois noblesse as well as business integrity. Adele’s winning role can hardly be overestimated in this regard. The demise of the tradition-rich spa hotel came in different stages, and can initially be ascribed to the wartime events between 1939 and 1945. The once well known “Castle Hotel” never fully recovered from this massive break, which paralyzed it over many years. Big difficulties occurred especially during the first post-war decade when the hotel business was jeopardized, and the descendants of the charismatic “hotel queen” Adele B. were unsuitable for the serious management of the hotel. After a certain renaissance during the 1950s and 1960s, however at a lower level than before the war, it went permanently downhill when it was removed from the family estate. None of the various new owners were successful with the “Castle Hotel”. The financial success, and failure, seem to be strikingly connected with the good reputation of the old-established family B. and their related cultural and social capital. Despite new ideas and marketing strategies, the successors of the hotelier family B. in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s by no means had this social and cultural capital that largely exceeds pure financial power.

Summarizing Evaluation

Historical Importance, “Legends” and Social Dynamics – the Emergence of a Haunted Hotel

The designation “haunted hotel” does not refer to a “normal” person-bound RSPK case with a usually limited duration¹⁶ but indicates specific properties of a place or location. They are held to be responsible for the extraordinary experiences of people there. In order to reconstruct the origin of this designation, a thorough examination of the development of the psychosocial situation is needed as well as the particularities of the place, which distinguish it from other similar places.

16 Person-bound RSPK cases seldom last longer than half of a year, and are in most cases shorter (Roll, 1974, 1977; Huesmann & Schriever, 1989).

As can be seen, the local and historical constellation of the hotel context as well as the psychosocial situation of the staff provided very good conditions for the occurrence of extraordinary experiences. The problem arises in differentiating place-bound and person-bound components, which could be closely mixed.¹⁷ In the case of the “Castle Hotel”, fragments of fateful stories or myths exist, which have become entwined with the place but lack clarity and tradition in comparison with “classic” haunted places. They are based on speculations and superficial historical knowledge. But we also encounter a psychosocial system characterized by the burdensome living conditions of single staff members. Moreover, Mr. D, who experienced the most unusual occurrences in the hotel, displayed some typical characteristics of a focus person (severe psychological stress, position as an outsider). However, he was not thought to be the cause of the phenomena because the occurrences were not always associated with his presence.

It is important that no material damage happened and thus the phenomena were not destructive, or behaving mischievously. Therefore, people were not forced to deal intensively with the causes of the strange phenomena. All explanatory models could exist simultaneously without the need to make a decision. One could—depending on the circumstances or the social role one was expected to play—advocate a more skeptical or believing position, or take a more distanced “as if” point of view, as seems to have been the case with Mr. B. Contrary to clear person-centered RSPK cases, the extraordinary experiences of the people concerned did not lead to psychological strain covering the “real” problems. Therefore, it is not surprising that no need for action was mentioned. Even the thematization seems to have rather decreased when existential problems increased:

[A] while ago, we talked about it more often, also with Mr. A. However, in recent times not so much. Well, everybody has his or her own problems at the moment, and, let me say, last year it was more often than this year. [...] Because this year we are more concerned with: Will the building remain? Will we get an extension on the lease? And so on, and so on. Thus, momentarily everything is still in question (Mrs. F).

The idea to suggest an examination by the IGPP consequently came, not on behalf of those staff members who had had extraordinary experiences, but from a newcomer, almost an outsider, who had not had haunting experiences with strong subjective evidence himself, but had a strong intrinsic interest in esoteric and occult topics. Therefore, he was not concerned with the cessation of such phenomena but with the determination of their (ontological) nature or an assessment of plausibility by a team of experts.

17 Cf. Gauld & Cornell (1979) for the differentiation of person-bound (poltergeists), place-bound (hauntings), and intermediate cases. See also chapter “RSPK Investigations” (Mayer & Schetsche) of this volume.

Some aspects of a haunting hypothesis could have quite beneficial effects (in a way) for the staff: it reduces cognitive dissonance. Thus, the idea of the existence of a “good ghost of the building” (e.g. Adele B.) could provide something comfortable, amusing, or calming, maybe in the sense that in bad times the good ghost watches over the building. But also: if things nevertheless go wrong, one can externalize the responsibility, at least partly. Who is able to fight against the will of the ghostly world? The interpretation of Mr. A, for instance, could go in this direction. His personal failure with the blues festival project had forced him to move into the hotel. Although the building for him “in principle should actually be a place of sadness”, he had “lost his heart to it” and was fascinated by and attracted to it.

In order to obtain a function as a (beneficial) actor, the hotel had to be personalized and mystified in a certain way: it needed something very special which distinguished it from other buildings. The occurrence of unusual or strange incidents against the background of a particular—glorious, partly obscure, and definitely fateful—history supported such a mystification as well as the cohesion of the staff, which became a united community of fate. This development corresponded with the escalation phase of the phenomena, and probably presupposed the specific composition of the staff, which was constituted during this time period. Mr. B played thereby a decisive role. He was able to improve the team spirit of the staff by applying his non-hierarchic management style and improving the working conditions despite the continued external crisis situation.

Yet however plausible such a development might appear, it can only explain the more recent manifestations and their dynamics. The causal essence of the complex case is not covered. Extraordinary experiences had already been had by the former staff and RSPK-like phenomena had occurred.¹⁸ Even former employees, who were not connected with the building by being part of the community of fate, considered it to be a very special hotel.¹⁹ One could argue that the hotel employees were already in existential difficulties in the 1990s, and thus had similar working conditions to the current staff. This is true (however, the staff was significantly larger at that time and included 27 employees), but it also applies to many other hotels and is related to a general tourism crisis in this area. It can be assumed that such RSPK phenomena and extraordinary experiences occur only

18 It was just dealt with differently, and rarely talked about: “well, one does not necessarily attribute things much importance, and, yes, one simply forgets them again”.

19 Mrs. M reported that there was “something different” at the “Castle Hotel” compared with other hotels. However, she had also perceived a general downfall and loss of the special charm since she stopped working there.

very rarely.²⁰ The difference from other hotels in a comparable situation is the historical dimension, as well as the myths that have developed over time, and are still developing. The historical facts are (see the corresp. section):

- The “Castle Hotel” has a great past as a high-quality hotel and was frequently visited by celebrities at that time.
- There was a person (Adele B.) who identified herself in a special way with the hotel and also navigated it through challenging times.
- During World War II, the hotel was used as hospital.
- After World War II and the death of Adele B. in 1949, the hotel never returned to its temporary noblesse and importance.
- After the sale at auction of the hotel in 1974, there were several changes of ownership accompanied by a downward turn of the hotel business.
- After the death of Adele B., some cases of bad behavior among the managing directors occurred, which damaged the reputation of the hotel.

A significant element in the transformation into a “haunted hotel” seems to be the combination of a magnificent past and historical importance with the existence of a deceased person who strongly identified herself with the building, all of which is linked to a fateful historical turning point (World War II).²¹

20 However, this is a speculation and requires validation; it would be an interesting research topic.

21 Some astonishing parallels can be found in a report on a “haunted castle” in the German town of Coswig. It was published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on April 17, 2004. The “haunted castle” was a mansion with a great past, and was first lived in by the composer and pianist Eugen D’Albert, together with his second wife, Teresa Carreña in a luxurious environment. After their divorce, the wealthy Swiss couple Paul and Elisabeth Matter moved in. Paul Matter died in 1947, his wife Elisabeth in 1961. After a long period of neglect, the house was rebuilt as a cultural center. After the reopening, phenomena which were comparable to those of the “Castle Hotel” began to occur: the feeling of the presence of something or someone, appearances of “a kind of a white veil”, animals behaving strangely, dysfunction of electric devices, etc. The reactions and explanatory models of the people concerned also reveal strong parallels. The employees adjusted to the situation by making “a sort of truce with the ghosts”. One staff member occasionally talked to the ghosts. Two alternative explanations for the poltergeist phenomena are mentioned. The first concerns the previous owner Elisabeth Matter:

During her time, the mansion actually resembled a haunted castle [...]. The park was totally overgrown, the house dilapidated. Elisabeth Matter was never able to manage her social relegation from a lady of the society to an impoverished old woman without a retirement pension in the GDR (German Democratic Republic – G.M.) [...]. “In the mansion, tenants were compulsorily accommodated. They dealt with the furniture very carelessly and dumped their garbage in the park.” Elisabeth Matter bequeathed the house to the town of Coswig in 1961 with the condition of making “a pioneer house (socialist child and youth center – G.M.) or cultural house” out of it.

Presumptions about the history of the hotel form a central component of the emergence of the haunting myth. These lead attention, prime perception, promote the experience of subjective evidence, and thereby amplify the creation of myths again. The unclear and fragmentary character of the knowledge base can definitely be of advantage, for instance, when Mrs. F is able to connect the perception of a woman's cry with the idea of a violent death of Adele B., or walled-up corridors in the basement stimulate all kinds of imagined historical atrocities or secret operations. An unclear spatial situation on the ground floor and an outdated domestic electrical system contribute to the overall myth-conducive situation. A further important detail is that there is no identifiable concrete event as the starting point of a series of extraordinary incidents. The haunting hypothesis has been handed down through staff changes. Mrs. N, whose experience as an employee at the "Castle Hotel" went back the longest, did not remember an initial event. However, a haunting myth of this kind will hardly emerge only on the basis of some "fireside chats". Some occurrences with strong subjective evidence are needed. Such incidences did happen during a period prior to the escalation, when it can be assumed that the staff did not have such an RSPK-inclined composition. This speaks for a place-centered component of the occurrences.

Concluding Considerations

The stepwise approach proved to be a good decision because we were initially unable to assess whether an extensive examination would make sense and how big the required effort would be. As shown with the interviews, a differentiated picture of the case's complexity emerged by degrees. Therefore, the initial assumption that the request could be part of a more or less sophisticated marketing strategy gradually lost plausibility.

From the outset, the assessment of the "genuineness" of the allegedly paranormal phenomena was subordinate because the post-hoc approach did not promise respective meaningful data. However, this was not relevant for the examination of the psychosocial dynamics and the factors influencing the emerging myth of a haunting. On the other hand, it was important to determine whether the accounts were authentic. This seemed to be the case by and large. Due to the setting of priorities, this report was more a person-centered than a phenomenon-centered reconstruction, despite the fact that place-bound elements were likely to be included in the case. However, our approach was not instrument-based, despite assumptions that measurement of environmental data can provide

Therefore, it is suspected that she now strays restlessly around to enjoy the mansion's old splendor.

The second explanation considers the mysterious death of the founder of the mansion, Pastor Gustav Theodor Keßler, as the cause of the RSPK phenomena.

information about, or even be used as evidence for, paranormal activity (see chapter “RSPK Investigations” of this volume); direct observation of the phenomena was not practical due to their spontaneous character in combination with their relative rarity compared with, for instance, a mainly person-bound “hot” poltergeist case.

When the present does not look all that rosy, and the future is totally open, historical aspects can gain a steadily increasing importance—providing a contrasting image of how the situation could be. The history of the hotel, with all its glamorous and dark aspects, projected into the present, ubiquitously and with great power, in the many artifacts and pictures belonging to the hotel interior, but also in the traces of decay and dissolution, which could only poorly, and with difficulty, be concealed. The employees living day to day in the hotel could hardly escape this influence. The staff may have changed but the situation remained saturated with history ... and the ghosts of the past made their presence felt ... The image of the downfall of an important object steeped in history seems to provide a suitable pattern for the emergence of a myth of a haunted place, as is also shown by the astonishing parallels to the case of the “haunted castle” in Coswig (see footnote 21). The few remaining people that were still in the process of upholding the history of the “Castle Hotel” were thereby participating in the importance that it had obtained through its glorious past. The haunting and its reception could be interpreted as an attempt to connect with a tradition and draw strength from it when things are not going well in the present.

The interviews show that there were various methods of dealing with extraordinary experiences at the hotel. These involved forms of unagitated engagement with a strong individual touch corresponding with personal beliefs and experiences, as well as strongly affected and dramatizing approaches. The reported phenomena and individual experiences were similarly distinct and manifold.

The haunting incidences did not have such an important thematic role during another period that was just as difficult for the hotel as the recent one regarding the working conditions and financial situation. Even allegedly strong RSPK phenomena, such as the filled bathtub and the receiver lying beside the telephone despite a sealed door, were dealt with under the category “problem room”, and some of the unusual occurrences were simply forgotten afterwards. This changed with the change in management and staff. Several factors may have played an important role: (a) the staff was strongly reduced; (b) many of the employees lived in the hotel; (c) the team moved closer together and formed a sort of community of fate because of the non-hierarchical management style of the new managing director; (d) with Mr. D, someone joined the staff who had characteristics of a focus person (strong psychological stress); (e) an active interest in the historical dimension of the hotel arose; and (f) a managing director arrived who seemed to strongly promote the haunting hypothesis.

An assessment of the nature of the single occurrences is difficult. The reports themselves largely appear very authentic. The reasons for this, in addition to the personal impressions of the investigators, are the diverse inconsistencies among single interviewees as well as the different interpretations. These do not negate the remaining core collection of extraordinary experiences which are partly intersubjectively verified. According to our current knowledge, some of the earlier incidents seem to be “harder” than most of the more recent phenomena. The building provided optimal conditions for manifold forms of perception errors as well as malfunctions of technical devices and installations due to the outdated technology that was in need of renovation. It is very likely that causes for some of the reported phenomena could be found with a thorough investigation of this field.²² However, exactly the same characteristics make the hotel an apt place for the occurrence of genuine paranormal phenomena. Thus, it is absolutely possible that some of the reported occurrences were indeed of this kind. The strategies for objectification by the concerned individuals seem to be appropriate. Nevertheless, one has to abstain from a clear assessment. A detailed phenomenon-related scientific examination could probably help but the effort would be huge, and without guarantee of success.

Two important characteristics should be mentioned: (a) in contrast to person-bound poltergeist phenomena, no significant material damage had occurred so far (the burst bulbs could rather be seen as synchronistic indicators than victims of destructiveness), and a teasing or malevolent component was lacking; (b) artefacts in the hotel were ascribed a significant meaning. The paintings of Adele B. and “The Bishop” were understood as visible carriers of otherworldly forces or energies. The important and glorious history of the hotel was “stored” therein. They stood exemplarily for the whole building and other artifacts that were charged with history, and produced a respective “field”. The terminology borrowed from physics seems to be particularly suitable in this case: it can be found in some of the explanatory models provided, but also reflects reported effects and subjective feelings. It allows phenomena such as changes in personality, meaningful extraordinary dreams, and altered states of consciousness such as out-of-body experiences to be understood and integrated.

Some of the existing myths about the history of the hotel could be confirmed with historical research. For instance, the painting of “Adele” actually was a picture of Adele B. as a young woman. Others were refuted, for example, the idea that Adele B. suffered a

22 This has to be considered in particular if one takes the sensitization for unusual phenomena into account. It becomes clearly visible with the incident of the somewhat strangely dressed, black-haired lady who was received in the hotel twice as a physical person—she chatted with staff members, drank a glass of wine at the bar, paid her bill with real (loose) cash—and nevertheless occurred in the account under the category of extraordinary experiences and incidents.

premature and violent death. Facts were also brought to light that could have promoted the creation of myths. For example, the fourth floor, which was particularly suspected by the staff as being haunted, was temporarily used as a hospital, while the hotel business was continued on the first floor, or the hotel was often subjected to “problematic” managing directors after the death of Adele B.

The importance of various aspects of passing on information can hardly be overestimated with regard to the emergence of a “haunted hotel”: fragmented knowledge about historical facts is likewise handed down as myths, explanatory models, and personal experiences—with mutual dependencies. Taken together, a conglomerate results that creates new myths and experiences and maintains the big haunting myth. Features of such an evolution can be detected through an overview of the interview data, seeing how, for example, an explanatory model for the unusual occurrences, conceived and propagated by a massage therapist working at the hotel during the 1990s, spread out and became part of the tradition. Or how alleged experiences of Mrs. L (she herself relativized them) were reflected in the explanatory models of other interviewees. We are possibly confronted with a haunted place in *statu nascendi*, which is just about to develop its own persistent haunting myth ... This will not be achieved if the historical dimension of the building is increasingly gutted, i. e. if the selling of historical objects continues, which has obviously happened several times during the recent past ... or the wrecking ball puts an end to the whole haunting.

Aftermath—the Impact of an Investigation on the Investigated Subject

Ensuring the anonymity of the people concerned is a crucial element of social research. It is intended to protect them from the disadvantages and harm that can occur due to their disclosures and openness toward the investigators. This is a matter of course with almost every study and issue, but is particularly important when extraordinary experiences are involved, due to the danger of social stigmatization (e. g. Mayer & Schetsche, 2016). In certain cases, it is even necessary to keep the investigated places secret in order to protect them from too much public attention. Such attention could easily lead to their damage, or even destruction, as Waskul & Waskul (2016) showed with the example of “Loon Lake Cemetery”, a place which became well known as a so-called paranormal hot spot. Therefore, we changed the relevant names and avoided giving precise information about the site, which is difficult with a location of historical significance when historical facts are important for the case. The people who were interviewed received a short version of the investigation report. It was beyond our control how they dealt with it, i. e. if some of them preferred to suspend the anonymization. Be that as it may—not very long after our investigation, a new chapter in the hotel’s history started. Initially, it began

with an end: the hotel business was finally given up in October 2005. The building then stood empty for some years and slowly started to decay. A local charitable association dedicated to preserving historical buildings began to take care of the hotel because its private owner was not able or willing to do so. They developed a concept for a future use of the building that should provide enough money to prevent further decomposition. For example, cultural events such as concerts and art exhibitions are expected to take place there. In October 2010, a film crew chose the hotel as the shooting location for a horror movie.²³ In May 2011, two ghost hunting groups carried out a “paranormal investigation”, accompanied by a TV crew (cf. Cunow, 2011). Both events resulted in respective media coverage which disclosed the location as well as the true name of the “hotel queen”. Although the ghost hunting groups could not detect any paranormal activity with their technical equipment—the headline of a newspaper report described the results as “tödlich langweilig” [deadly boring]—the location became increasingly known as a paranormal hot spot in the ghost hunting scene as well as an attractive location for photo shoots in the so-called (in Germany) “lost places” scene.²⁴ In October 2011, the report of our investigation of the case was published as part of the German version of this volume, including a detailed description of all reported allegedly paranormal phenomena (Mayer & Schetsche, 2011). However, being a specialist book, the volume has not reached a wide readership. An article about the eerie occurrences in the abandoned Black Forest hotel by Huwiler (2015/2018), published in September 2015 in a nationwide online travel magazine, apparently had much more influence on further developments. The author’s text is based strongly on our report. However, there seemed to be no more need to keep the place a secret as it had already been disclosed during the media coverage of the horror movie and the investigation of the ghost hunting groups. Furthermore, and this was certainly the main reason, it would not make any sense to publish a report about a fascinating place in a travel magazine without providing detailed information about the location. The interesting point about the text is that it used the pseudonym “Adele” or “Adi” for the “hotel queen”, despite the fact that the site and true name of the hotel were mentioned. The large influence of our report on further depictions of the hotel is supported by the fact that our pseudonym is now established in the scene (on websites, etc.), according to the director of the above-mentioned charitable association. In 2017, an extensive TV documentary on “lost places” in southwest Germany

23 The movie was a joint final project of four film students and is entitled *Bela Kiss: Prologue* (2013, Director: Lucien Förstner; see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1830495/?ref_=nv_sr_1)

24 The “lost places” scene is closely linked with, or almost identical to, the urban exploration scene. However, the modern ruins do not necessarily have to be in cities or villages, as the term “urban” suggests.

was produced which included footage of the “Castle Hotel” and this was aired in March 2018. The association’s director spoke of the glorious past life of the building that is still perceptible or imaginable at least, despite the signs of deterioration. The difficulties of maintaining it in its present condition are obvious—a condition that is an intermediate state characterized by a balance between preservation and gradual decay which makes it attractive as a special backdrop for fashion photography, wedding celebrations, concerts, and exhibitions, but also for ghost hunting and eerie adventure nights. The French garden designer and author Gilles Clément coined the term “the Third Landscape” (Clément, 2010). It denominates an interstitial space between the “natural” landscape unexploited by humans and the space that is characterized by human activities, and protected from the wilderness outside. The Third Landscape can be found in ruins abandoned by humans and gradually retaken by nature, an undecided space without function, a sort of intermediate realm. The “Castle Hotel” does not exactly belong to this kind of ruin and space. However, it also provides such an intermediate realm with an undecided state. The combination of pseudonyms and real names could be seen as a symbol for the creation of a new reality based on facts and fiction. The report of the investigation transmuted into a creepy ghost story, turning sober open questions into rhetoric ones, pregnant with meaning. It could also be seen as a shining example of the influence a researcher can have on the field or subject researched (e. g. Al-Natour, 2011). This influence is inevitable but nevertheless has to be taken into account. However, sometimes the situation is very complex and the motivations and aims of the involved parties are so manifold that it is impossible to foresee further developments. In this specific case, it may have helped to prevent the historic building from finally being torn down.

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DEAD MONKS WALKING

METHODS AND EXPERIENCES FROM THE PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING CENTRE (FREIBURG/GERMANY) FOR DEALING WITH POLTERGEIST PHENOMENA

Manuela v. Lucadou & Sarah Pohl

“Please help us!”—with these words, family H. contacted the Parapsychological Counseling Center in Freiburg, Germany, in 2016. The written, telephone, and personal contact with the large family evoked the image of a complex haunt, in which the influence of localized elements could not, at first, be ruled out. We chose this case for our contribution in order to illustrate the dynamics of a haunted family in an especially vivid way. In addition, it is perfect for showing our methodological approach to investigating haunting cases based on our theoretical haunting model as well as a systemic approach, and the consulting work that results from it. “Are these manifestations caused by deceased monks, or have our daughters called up something demonic?” The mother asked herself this question, thus expressing the two hypotheses the family had created to explain the phenomena. To provide a first impression of this family, its background and characteristics, we will present a short case report.

“What will help? How can we get rid of the ghost?” These are frequently asked questions. Particular emphasis will therefore be put on interventions that can be useful when dealing with haunting cases. Basically, there are a large number of methods for supporting affected people, which enable them to deal with their experiences in a responsible and solution-oriented way, and ideally lead to the successful integration of the phenomena into their own biography and world concept. However, some methods have proven to be particularly useful. We will introduce them briefly. Finally, as this specific case could be “solved” in the end, we will describe the development of the family and the changes that happened within the family system.

The Parapsychological Counseling Center

In 1989, the Parapsychological Counseling Center was founded by the “Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Parapsychologie” [Scientific Society for the Promotion of Parapsychology e. V.] (WGFP) in Freiburg, with the aim of explaining the field of parapsychology and unusual human experiences, and contributing to a better under-

standing of the phenomena associated with it (Zahradnik & Lucadou, 2012). Since then, the advice center has apparently found a wide acceptance in the population, and has received a steadily increasing number of inquiries (more than 3,000 per year). The Parapsychological Counseling Center deals with a broad field of subjects, such as unusual human experiences, haunting, magic, witchcraft, occultism, psychotechniques, fortune tellers, and clairvoyants, but also the increasing esoteric market, as well as problems with sects or other spiritual groups (Zahradnik & Lucadou, 2012). Currently, four permanent employees work in the counseling center. In addition, we are assisted by two freelancers who provide supervision and support in computer technology. For those seeking help, there are various ways to get in touch with the Parapsychological Counseling Center. The former initial contacts by letter have shifted increasingly into the digital domain. Thus, the advice center receives about 60 e-mails of initial approach every month (Wald, 2010). The first contact with family H. also happened by e-mail.

As we fulfill an active counseling function, our case report can be characterized as being based on “participatory observation”. This means that we observe the family’s patterns of interaction and reaction. Interacting with the family in a professional context allows us to gain access to the field in a rather natural and easygoing way. In general, we do not document our observations during the visit but do so afterwards, as is usual for participant observation (Diekmann, 1997: 461f.). Observers can change a system and influence the behavior of the people involved. To minimize this influence, it is important to keep the circumstances as natural as possible. It is for this reason that we do not make audio recordings of conversations with those seeking help. The act of recording intervenes in the counseling situation and can change the context, so that the process of building up an empathic and congruent relationship may be disturbed, finally leading to a diminution of the authenticity of the described experiences. In most cases, our documentation is made retrospectively, based on the handwritten notes we make during the conversations. Thus, we experience a lot of openness from our clients and an intense counseling relationship.

Our work follows a specific understanding of haunting, adapted from a theoretical haunting model proposed by Walter von Lucadou which we will briefly present. Lucadou advocates the hypothesis that haunting is a kind of psychosomatic reaction shifted to the outside world. It could be, for example, a reply to difficult circumstances, personal conflicts or changes, or a change of job, for example (Lucadou, 2000). At this point, we can leave open the question of whether haunting is always necessarily expressing a “cry for help” from the soul (Bender, 1977). Systemic considerations rather show that the haunting itself may already represent the solution for a certain situation or change, and that the underlying themes show a high degree of variation in individual

emotional stress. This way of looking at the “problem behind the problem” in a less dramatic manner, focusing on the client’s resources, can be very helpful, as we will see in the last paragraph.

Model-Oriented Considerations to this Case

First, we have to ask ourselves the question whether it makes sense to distinguish, with regard to this case, between haunting, i. e. phenomena linked to a specific place, and poltergeist phenomena, i. e. phenomena linked to an individual person (cf. Mayer & Schetsche, “RSPK Investigations”, in this volume). Here, some narrative elements linked to the place—referring to the deceased monks—seem to support the hypothesis of haunting. However, it is not clear whether the reference to these events in the past is important with regard to the case (cf. Potts, 2006: 83); we could not find any interaction between the narratives and person-related factors, and therefore that would have entailed entering a highly speculative field.

Instead of making the distinction between haunting and poltergeist phenomena, it is more helpful to follow the idea of a continuum (Machado, 2009: 117–121). This allows place-linked elements to be understood as one structural factor among many, all of them with different degrees of influence, and prevents the restriction of the perspective to only the historical narrative of a place. At the same time, this extended view that integrates structural factors (cf. Mayer & Schetsche, “RSPK Investigations”, in this volume) focuses more on general systemic components and offers many different possibilities for potential changes and solutions for those seeking help. This becomes especially clear in the present case, as place-linked factors may have had an influence, but only came into play when specific structural constellations of problems arose.

At first sight, the house definitely fulfills some of the criteria that bring to mind the idea of haunting (cf. Bonin, 1988: 465). For example, corporal and other punishments close to maltreatment seem to have been daily fare at the former boarding school. For that reason, it had a very bad reputation throughout the region. We consider the information about the methods of education practiced by the monks as an important factor, drawing our attention directly to the family’s education style. It can be illuminating to investigate the history of a place, allowing eventual relationships between historical events and system-specific “blind spots” to be found. At the same time, when researching about place-related phenomena, it is essential to exclude possible physical origins for their manifestation, such as rats, mice, martens, humidity, cold spots or airstreams. However, in this case, a clear person-related connection appeared.

This leads us to the question about the significance of person-related factors for haunting¹ in general and, consequently, for to need to draw attention to the issue of the so-called focus person. The “focus person” is a person who is generally present when unusual phenomena are occurring, and who is thought to trigger them. He or she often enjoys good health and tends to keep him- or herself out of any unpleasant or problematic matters. Periods of affective or emotional distress may turn the focus person’s hidden problems “inside-out”; haunting then appears as a sort of psycho-somatic reaction, which is shifted to the external, physical world. Actually, focus persons often have so-called “blind spots”. To bring it down to a simple level, we could say that these suppressed themes move to the outside, evoking Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis (RSPK) in the focus person’s surroundings.

The Model of Pragmatic Information (MPI) describes haunting and poltergeist phenomena as meaningful phenomena happening in psycho-physical systems (and also being perceptible for outsiders) (Lucadou, 2015). A kind of interaction between inner (psychic) and outer (physical) systems occurs, called “entanglement” (a term borrowed from Quantum Theory) by the General Quantum Theory (GQT).² The MPI allows quantitative predictions and is therefore especially helpful for gaining a better understanding of those affected. It emphasizes that psi phenomena are evoked by the “meaning” created in a system or situation. However, these phenomena are not intentionally applicable to this interaction, and an attempt to “use” them would destroy the non-locality of the system. That is why psi phenomena can be experienced, but not used in a practical way (Lucadou, 2015). This means that even though focus persons evoke phenomena in their surroundings, every attempt to “produce” them intentionally has to fail (except if manipulation is at play). Another important aspect becomes clear: in cases of haunting or poltergeists, the main issue is to find out the message or meaning behind the phenomena. However, it is not always obvious and sometimes needs methodical aid to decode this message (see the last section of this contribution).

Many studies examining focus persons have produced quite different hypotheses about their psychological state and specific characteristics (Belz & Fach, 2015; Huesmann & Schriever, 1989; Mischo, 1983; Roll, 1977). Mischo, for example, sees actual conflicts, psychological instability, a high degree of excitability and a low degree of

1 According to the above-mentioned difficulty of clearly differentiating hauntings and poltergeist phenomena (RSPK) we will use the term “haunting” in a broad sense in the following.

2 The “Model of Pragmatic Information” (MPI) and the “General Quantum Theory” (GQT) are non-reductionist models with approaches that have proven to be quite successful in aiding the understanding of psi phenomena.

frustration tolerance as characteristic elements related to focus persons (Mischo, 1970). Some hypotheses, which rather stress the idea of focus persons suffering primarily from psychopathological problems, may be refuted through recent case studies. Fach, for example, provides direction with his investigations regarding focus persons. By grouping phenomena into specific classes, he was able to detect fundamental human conflicts, as for example the area of tension between autonomy and attachment, and relate them to unusual experiences (Belz & Fach, 2015).

Lucadou's theories about the structure of unusual phenomena are pivotal to our understanding and offer possible answers to the questions of what causes them, and whether they can be classified as telekinetic (Lucadou, 2000). The term "organizational closed system" (Varela, 1981) must be emphasized, which provides a framework to explain the difficulties concerning scientific observability and the resulting "macroscopic fuzziness". Lucadou summarizes:

A quite natural explanation for the strange elusiveness of haunting arises from the interplay between reliability and autonomy, or confirmation and first emergence, which must change with each interaction with the system, but must remain constant in the sum, because there is only a limited influence (pragmatic information) at its disposal. Moreover, it also offers an explanation for the "mechanisms" underlying haunting, and it becomes obvious why haunting is inherent to social systems (Lucadou, 2000: 226).³

Our experience in the counseling office clearly shows that the descriptions of haunting cases, based mainly on their phenomenology and the people concerned, have to be supplemented with a system-oriented approach. In this context, a systemic genesis of the haunting is necessary.

First, we can see that the chronological sequences of haunting phenomena show some typical patterns (Lucadou, 2000). In general, phenomena start very suddenly for the people involved and then increase in frequency and intensity. This initial phase is called the *surprise phase*. There are often observers at this early stage who can provide credible witness accounts of the events. Typically, people are still searching for "natural" explanations for the phenomena. The surprise phase is followed by the *displacement phase*, drawing perspective and attention to the occurrences themselves. The individuals concerned want to get "to the bottom of the things" and start to observe intensively. Phenomena then often shift: expected events fail to appear whereas new, unexpected phenomena occur in other places (Lucadou, 2000). During this phase, the focus person is usually identified. Depending on the belief system of those concerned, he or she "becomes" a witch, or

3 All translations of quotations are made by the authors.

psi-gifted, or psychic or a saint. These are attributions that are not at all helpful for the focus person but externalize or obscure the underlying causes even more. In the third phase, the *decline phase*, it is usually known that the focus person has a problem. The external pressure increases, and the public becomes aware of the case. This leads to the fourth and final phase, the *suppression phase*. The commonly accepted order of reality and systems of belief does not allow the anarchy of the haunting (cf. Mayer, “The Authority Strikes Back”, and Evrard, “The ‘Amnéville RSPK Case’”, in this volume). The spook is then successfully displaced. However, the people concerned are the losers and doubly damaged: on the one hand, their reputation is ruined, and they are dismissed as impostors, liars, or wackos, and on the other hand, the underlying problem is not solved, due to the focus on the external reactions (also characteristic of externalization), but only temporarily displaced by the new problems that have appeared in the external environment.

We do not usually experience active haunting phenomena when making home visits. The phenomenon of “non-observability” has been sufficiently described in the literature (for example Roll, 1976; Lucadou, 2000) and seems to be one of the main characteristics of haunting. Bender (1952: 160) writes:

(Who) wants to take photographs of haunting phenomena or film them, or tries to record the sound, has to deal with the difficulty that—their actuality not yet being proven—the phenomena seem to escape our critical control. The impression is imposing that intelligent powers are making a fool of the observer, producing a phenomenon just where it cannot be recorded.

Lucadou makes an important distinction between “naïve observers” and “critical observers”. Phenomena do not occur when “critical observers” are present (Lucadou, 2000). The inability of the “critical observer” to observe such phenomena is possibly a result of his or her distance to the system or to the subject, a kind of “not being part of the system”. This hypothesis is supported by the observations of our team. In a type of thematic displacement reaction (countertransference), a counselor can sometimes become part of the entangled system, whether through a connection with the subject or through an intensive personal relationship.⁴ Considering this, a self-reflexive handling of

4 During the examination of cases including paranormal phenomena, a high degree of entanglement with one’s own life themes or biographic elements might lead to maintenance of the phenomena in some way, even though one keeps up the role of the critical observer. To give an example: one of our staff members was conducting a long conversation with a focus person in a haunting case. In the course of the conversation, it became apparent that the phenomena started after the client’s sister passed away. She had died in a very dramatic way: she burned to death in her own apartment while she was pregnant. The haunting phenomena showed a clear connection to this situation; for example, the sirens of a toy fire engine started

personal limits, life themes, and fears during and after counseling is of great significance and helps to preserve mental health. However, such reactions are rather an exception. Thus, when planning a home visit, it is important to inform the people seeking help that it is unlikely that any phenomena will occur during our presence. People often feel some “burden of proof” and are afraid that they will not be taken seriously if nothing happens during the exploration.

It is even more probable that something will be produced for them (the observers). This is not necessarily done in bad faith. The “production” can be a composite work of the group. Their, astonishingly simple, moral justification of such manipulation is often that the people concerned just “know” what it was “really” like, and do not see any harm in giving the phenomena a “helping hand”. (Lucadou, 2000: 7)

Therefore, it can be a great relief for the people concerned when the situation is clarified and any mutual expectations are discussed before a home visit is made.

People frequently expect us to enter the house with lots of technical equipment in order to make measurements that will provide evidence for the existence of ghosts, demons, etc. The activities of various ghost hunting groups, as well as the response of the media, encourage such ideas (Mayer, 2010), or at least offer a causal explanation. This search for measurement and provability of the experience is totally understandable and explains the great demand for the above-mentioned services. A purely psychological exploration would certainly not fulfill this need. Thus, at the beginning of a home visit, we first “inspect the crime scene”, which means that, together with the people involved, we reconstruct what happened when, where, and in whose presence. From a psychological point of view, home visits make absolute sense, because they enable us to experience people in their everyday surroundings, helping us to better understand their situation. Moreover, especially in the case of big family systems, home visits are helpful as they bring us in direct contact with the family structures.

In the end, it is not so important to clarify or ‘solve’ a haunting case—is it psychokinesis, telekinesis, a ghost, or fraud—but to ask the question: “What is the message of the haunting phenomena?” This practical attitude has proven more helpful for both

frequently even though there were no batteries in it. Personal objects of the deceased woman “acted” in a strange way, and gas and sulfur smells were perceptible. During the conversation, when the sister’s death was being talked about, the sirens of the toy started again; at the same time, a real fire engine drove past the counseling office. Together, the counselor and the client checked whether there were batteries inside the toy. This was definitely not the case. The use of manipulations to augment credibility could also be excluded. In fact, the staff member herself had suffered a very dramatic burn injury a few years ago, and was also pregnant at the time, which gave her a high affinity for the topic.

the people concerned and the helper system. If the phenomena cause fear and panic, the explanatory model of the parapsychological counseling office with its psycho-educational effect can be useful. We have to take into account that the world view of people encountering paranormal phenomena may be turned upside down, and they often have difficulties integrating their experiences into their concept of reality, not to mention difficulties in communicating them. For this reason, we focus on the answer to this central question about the message and determine which methods could help in understanding the hidden meaning behind the haunting phenomena. Lucadou (2000: 226) writes:

The advantage of a system-theoretical approach consists of the fact that it is at first not necessary to check the authenticity of each single phenomenon, because the crucial interactions between the affected people and their observers do not necessarily need to be “paranormal”.

While doing so, we do not take on the role of a judge who decides whether a phenomenon was “real” or not. We leave the sovereignty of interpretation with the people who experienced the phenomena.

The Case of the “Dead Monks Walking...?”

Report of the Contact Person About the Phenomena and the Family Situation

Mrs. S., a 39-year-old mother of six children, contacted our counseling office in May 2016. During the previous few weeks, her daughter Miriam had experienced various inexplicable phenomena. At that point in time, Mrs. S. was pregnant and felt physically very burdened. The family of eight lives in an isolated former boarding school in Baden-Württemberg together with five other families, where they form a kind of communal family. Altogether, 14 children, aged between 1 and 15 years, and 12 adults live in the community. The family belongs to a denomination of the Pentecostal movement. This is a spiritual movement of all confessions which emphasizes special gifts of grace from the Holy Ghost that, according to their faith, are conferred by God.⁵ The charismatic renewal movement is unusual due to its very heterogeneous organizational structures. Most of the members remain true to their original church (Hocken, 2006; Kavunkal, 2001); in this case, the majority of the members are Catholic. Typical elements of the church service are periods of ecstasy while singing; prayer is characterized by the

5 The movement began in the 1960s as an inner-church movement particularly within many free churches, as well as in Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches. The term is used synonymously with the Pentecostal movement.

laying on of hands. The family maintains an intensive exchange with the other five families belonging to the denomination.⁶

Mrs. S. told us that four years ago, when the family had just moved into the abandoned boarding school, she heard strange noises in the house. Her husband heard them too. Especially in the former dining room of the boarding school, they could clearly hear chairs moving and pots rattling, again and again. Also, the door to their bedroom opened by itself several times, and they could hear steps walking through the room. Recently, however, these phenomena from the past had played a rather secondary role.⁷ The family approached the counseling office because of the phenomena that had happened primarily close to their eldest daughter Miriam, and which had started abruptly, three months previously.

Hello, I am writing to you because I am at a loss: I am very worried about my eldest daughter Miriam. She is fourteen years old, and for some time now we have had serious problems with her, going far beyond typical puberty conflicts [...].

This is how Mrs. S. introduced her e-mail. She continued describing their special way of life determined by their religious persuasion, as she suspected the reason for at least some of the difficulties with her daughter was a rebellion against the parental faith. She saw an expression for this rebellion in various occult magic practices that Miriam, together with her sister Clara and a friend of theirs from another family, were experimenting with (cf. Treitel, 2004). She mentioned glass tilting and using the pendulum. Mrs. S., in line with the other adult members of the charismatic community, is rather opposed to this kind of practice, which is quite common for the Pentecostal milieu (Davis, 2006). The occult is considered to emerge from a source that is definitely not God, and therefore may come from dark powers opposed to the divine will. Thus, the parents had concluded that there must be an occult or demonic influence. Mrs. S. had not yet experienced the inexplicable phenomena herself, but had heard of them from her second-eldest daughter Clara, who had been present when some of the phenomena happened and thus felt very confused.

Mrs. S. described the situation as follows:

Books fly through the room, thumping against the wall with full force, but nobody is ever hurt. At night, Miriam can hear rumbling and footsteps in the attic, even though the attic is not accessible, so nobody can be there. It seems to have become even worse recently, since my husband and I went on holiday for a few days with

6 Excerpts of the exchange with the family are provided in an anonymized form. The personal and local details are also anonymized to protect the family.

7 At that time, the family initiated a house blessing, and a priest advised them to pray when such phenomena occurred because they were highly likely to be caused by deceased souls.

the younger children. Miriam did not want to join us, and so we allowed her to stay at home with her best friend Hannah. During this time, the girls moved into our family flat. And there, things must have escalated: apparently at night, doors were banging, and all the lights in the flat turned on and off by themselves. The two girls became so scared that they called Hannah's parents for help.

They all examined the flat together, locking up every room they had checked. And they found: just nothing! But Hannah's mother, whom I regard as being trustworthy, told me that she had also witnessed some strange incidents. She had heard footsteps in the flat, too, and noticed that lights had been turned on in rooms that definitely could not have been entered. She is a mature woman and, in fact, very critical concerning these things. She tried to react as normally as possible towards the girls, but as soon as we were back from our holiday, she wanted to talk with me.

Even though Hannah's parents were now involved, things went on like this during the following nights. I can hardly believe it, but Hannah's mother told me that the radio turned on by itself and played loud music, although the power cord was disconnected, and no batteries were in the set...! [...] Another morning, the girls noticed that all the water taps were fully opened, and inexplicable wet stains were on the floor all over the flat. And all the time, that rumbling and banging again and again...

Besides these phenomena, she mentioned the apparition of a little boy that Miriam claimed to have seen at night. Something that the girls had experienced in the private chapel seemed to have been especially impressive: the girls were sitting around in there, not for prayer, but because they appreciated the uncanny atmosphere arising from the candles and the splashing fountain. They were just chatting when the bells, which can only be operated with a pull cable, suddenly started clanging. Since then, the girls had been very afraid, fearing that their parents might be right and that their occult experiments might have attracted demonic creatures. Apart from Clara, Hannah was often present when haunting phenomena occurred.

Mrs. S. also talked about the history of the location in her e-mail. She told us about former boarders who had reported the traumatizing experiences they had had at this school. People in the surrounding villages also knew lots of stories about the boarding school and its sadistic monks. This was the basis of the hypothesis that the haunting phenomena could be connected with the location's history. Mrs. S. was very much in favor of a home visit. She thought that the girls would be more willing to talk with us at home. The mail was followed by a long telephone conversation with Mrs. S., during which she reported new incidents that even she was partly able to witness. Considering the strong connection of the occurrences with the location's history in the view of the people concerned, we agreed to a home visit.

Home Visit

The building is very isolated and lies at a distance of more than one kilometer from the next village. The children's school is fifteen kilometers away, the father's job about ten kilometers. This isolation, as well as their dependence on public transport or being driven by their parents, strongly limits the children's choice of friends and, at the same time, especially strengthens the solidarity within the group. The surroundings of the former boarding school offer not only lots of play area to the children, but also sufficient retreat possibilities; there are old barns, a trailer, and spacious meadows at their disposal. The family cultivates their own vegetables. The house itself has three floors. At the time of our visit, the ground floor contained administration rooms, former class rooms, nowadays used as chapel and seminar rooms, and a large kitchen, as well as a laundry room. The dark rear part of the ground floor was unexploited. The four families were living in separated units on the first floor. The second floor was completely empty, except for one newly renovated room. Miriam had moved there because the growing family needed a room for the new baby. Altogether, six rooms were at the family's disposal: the parents' bedroom, Miriam's old room, which was being decorated for the baby, Clara's room, a room for Leon, the only boy in the family, one common room shared by the three youngest children, and finally a very large room, originally the dining room, but now used as a living and playing room. The furnishings were made of natural and ecological materials, such as solid wood, or wool and cork for the flooring; the father had made most of the furnishings himself. Mrs. S. explained that their dream of a self-sufficient life close to nature had become true there. The family did not own a television because watching television was considered to be harmful, but there was a computer. Its use, allowed only for the older children, was strictly regulated. The long, cold corridors, together with the tiled walls, reminiscent of the 1970s, and the very high ceiling, created a strange contrast to the family's natural room setup. There were also many areas in need of renovation. Miriam had her own bathroom. She could reach the family flat via two staircases.

Our home visit took four hours. We made time for a long conversation with Mrs. S., Hannah's mother, and the girls, firstly in the living room and later on in Clara's room. The conversation took place in an agreeable atmosphere. First, we talked in detail about the incidents. We visited the scene together with the girls, and drew up a retrospective haunting diary with them (see explanation below), going even further into detail. To gain a better overview of the incidents, we arranged them on a time line. Afterwards, we asked everybody about their personal interpretation of the occurrences, because the integration of personal belief systems into the counseling process is very helpful for all those involved. Meanwhile, the parents and the girls kept asking us questions about the

dangers and the possible origins of the phenomena. We used this as an opportunity to inform them about our haunting model, explaining our theory about the typical development of a haunting case in four phases, and carefully approaching possible explanations for the haunting phenomena.

At this point, it is important to proceed very cautiously, because it is absolutely necessary to avoid a stigmatization of the potential focus person. This is why we applied a method called “story telling”, which means that we constructed a hypothetical haunting case story, leaving an eventual identification with the actors up to the listeners. Furthermore, we elaborated a sociogram with the help of the girls in order to understand the different group structures. By using respective scaling questions, we tried to find out which situations were most stressful. In addition, we were interested in situations or constellations when phenomena had never occurred so far. Finally, we tried to encourage the family members to deal with the phenomena differently, giving an example for a possible reframing by using the situation in the old chapel. We spent most of the time with the three girls, because it was soon obvious that this corresponded most to both the parents’ and the girls’ requests. Furthermore, it became clear that most of the phenomena occurred in the peer-group constellation. Finally, we held a conversation with the whole family about how to proceed in the future. With the help of Clara, who could easily adapt to a change in perspective regarding the phenomena, we explained new possibilities for handling them to the parents by focusing on their specific resources.

Systemic Approach with Families Affected by a Haunting

It became obvious that a systemic counseling approach was of particular importance in this case. Miriam and the two other girls were rebelling not only against their families, but also against the religious system they belonged to. As Miriam was able to clearly express her need for autonomy and dissociation, and seemed to be in a phase of open rebellion, these issues were rather unlikely to have set off the haunting phenomena. Therefore, it was important to take a closer look at the subsystems in which the most and the strongest phenomena were occurring. Surprisingly, this was the peer-group constellation. Most of the time, Hannah, and sometimes also Clara, were present when “something happened”. As we needed to handle several very different social systems in this case, we want to describe them in more detail in the following.

The Peer-Group

It is typical that, during puberty, the family of origin loses its influence and adolescents tend to spend much more time with peers than with their family. Peer groups form a

social group with similar attitudes and help each other to become independent of the parental home. Together with other peers, young people check out different forms of behavior as well as their limits. This is specific to the transitional phase from child to adult life (Harring et al., 2010). The relationship between parents and children is always asymmetric, due to the parents' educational role, whereas relationships amongst peers are voluntary and symmetric. However, an important factor for the constitution of peer groups is the area in which the family live (Kienbaum & Schuhrke, 2010). This point is especially significant with regard to this case. As we have seen, the family lives with three other families in a very isolated former boarding school, 3 kilometers away from the next village. Miriam's school is 25 kilometers away. It is easy to see that any contact with class mates outside the school environment required a certain logistic effort, even more so as the commuting area of her school is very large. So Miriam was not really free in her choice of peers. Cultural differences between the conservative, very rural, region on the one hand and the innovative free church community on the other made the task even more difficult. Miriam described feeling a kind of skepticism coming from her peers in the surrounding villages concerning her parents' membership of this community.

Generally, the three girls had not yet decided how to interpret the events. First, they were afraid that deceased monks could be making mischief; later they considered the presence of demons or witches as a possible cause.

The Extended Family

In the following, we will turn our attention to the extended family system. Miriam is the oldest of seven, soon eight siblings. The parents told us that they had deliberately decided to have a large family; nevertheless, they had planned to have six children, the last pregnancy with twins was unplanned. Miriam's move to the next floor had been a compromise, as the flat was too small for eight children. Mrs. L. mentioned that she often felt overwhelmed, having the feeling of already being unable to fulfill the needs of six children. She was of the opinion that the declining school performances of the two oldest girls were a sign of this lack of time and attention, and felt personally responsible for it. She told us that there was a traditional division of roles within the family. The father, with his job in the music school, earned the money. In his free time he cultivated the kitchen garden and continued the renovation of the house. Mrs. L. was fully occupied with the education of the children and the housekeeping, but she praised her husband for filling in whenever possible. Their communication was very respectful and appreciative. We got the impression that Mrs. L. dominated when the conversation was about organizational planning and decisions, whereas Mr. L. set the tone for value-related subjects.

There were strong coalitions amongst the siblings. The parents emphasized that they both wanted to lead a natural and self-sufficient life “with God” in a Christian community. With this lifestyle, they wanted to enable their children to grow up in a kind of “ideal world”. To achieve this aim, the parents were willing to accept a certain loss of comfort. Their attitude towards new media such as mobile phones and computers was very critical. They agreed that the children should not “go along with every trend”. Lots of conflicts within the family revolved around this media-critical attitude of the parents; Miriam in particular was very keen to have a TV and even a mobile. But the parents were determined not to succumb on this point as they suspected that these media have a demonic influence on children. Their only wish was to protect the children. The parents were of the opinion that occult influences were responsible for the phenomena. However, the mother had already considered alternative hypotheses, too. Thus, she had also taken the possibility of psychological factors into account.

The Religious Community

A further important systemic level of description refers to the religious community in which the family was living. Three years previously, the four families had decided to live together close to nature and oriented towards the Bible and Christian values. They had left their former homes and moved, some of them hundreds of kilometers, to their new common residence, which was not easy to find. Some members of the community had given up their previous professional activities and started to work outside their original profession. The community life is characterized by regular common prayer times. Morning prayer is held three times a week and evening prayer twice a week. Furthermore, a church service is held every Sunday. The younger children are sometimes taken by their parents to the prayers, whereas the older children are free to decide whether they want to participate or not. The families eat together at least once a week. Inside the community, some tensions have come to the surface. For example, Miriam’s parents complained about different expectations concerning the vegetable garden. Financial disagreements also seemed to exist. Private matters are discussed and settled within the community whenever possible. Prayer plays an essential role and is the most important strategy for solving problems. The community considered the girls’ renunciation of their parents’ faith to be the cause of the incidents.

Chronology of the Haunting Phenomena

We described Lucadou’s phase model of haunting phenomena above. Now we have to ask ourselves whether the haunting phenomena in the present case “fit” into this model. The haunting started very abruptly and surprisingly, when the parents were abroad and

Miriam and her friend were sleeping alone in the apartment. Doors were banging, footsteps could be heard, and through the fanlights, the girls could observe lights turning on and off in the whole apartment. At first, the girls thought that burglars were in the apartment and had set off the noises and light phenomena. Later, as the phenomena increased and conventional explanations were no longer sustainable, their interpretation began to change. Hannah's mother examined the apartment together with the girls and they found several wet spots. She also heard noises she could not allocate. The light in the back room was switching on and off the whole time. More people turned their attention to the phenomena: Hannah's parents became involved and later also other members of the community. During this phase, the phenomena were interpreted differently depending on the individual belief system of the people concerned. A religious, Christian interpretation by the adults was obvious, while the adolescents preferred the hypothesis of the "dead monks".

At this stage, the *decline phase*, outsiders tend to already classify the phenomena as belonging to a certain person or group. For example, Miriam's father blamed the girls, believing their occult experiments to be responsible for the haunting, and therefore called for an immediate termination of this kind of activity. It is typical for this phase that people try to stop the phenomena through the help of experts such as exorcists, priests, etc. So did this family. The girls told us that their parents had invited a priest, a specialist in this area, who said some prayers and purified their rooms with incense. It is also typical that the expectations of the environment that "something will happen" create a kind of "pressure to perform", which finally leads to a decline in the phenomena (this is meant by decline phase). Outsiders reject spiritualist interpretations and accuse the concerned individuals of manipulation. In this case, a decline effect had not yet occurred at the time of our home visit; however, the father's remarks showed that the responsibility for the phenomena was clearly delegated to a certain person (Miriam). Her psychical and religious integrity were questioned. These are the first signs that the decline phase has begun. During the last phase of the classical haunting model, the suspicion of manipulation becomes explicit and is articulated more or less openly; witnesses tend to withdraw their former statements (cf. Bender & Mischo, 1978).

Systemic Characteristics and Changes

As we will see in the following, three of the involved individuals were going through a radical change characteristic for many focus persons: puberty. This phase of life is characterized by themes such as distancing and separation from the parental home and a strong search for autonomy. In our case, this struggle for autonomy could have been even stronger than in other families, due to the very close relationships inside the religious

community. This special religious orientation, together with the local isolation of their home, made it more difficult for the girls to detach. They did not have, for instance, the possibility to go out spontaneously in the evening, but were dependent on their parents' good will to drive them. The strong set of values and standards even strengthened their search for autonomy. The girls' occult reorientation could be understood in this context as an unconscious way of distancing, expressing, on the other hand, unconscious fears and worries. The first steps in trying to free themselves involved facing the overwhelming moral power of their parents. We now had to consider possible correlations between the family system and the occurrences. Moreover, we had to reflect about particular features and characteristics in the family system in order to create hypotheses about the causes of the haunting phenomena. We noticed the following points:

- only women were present when phenomena happened
- a greater number of phenomena occurred when Miriam and Hannah were together
- no phenomena occurred where obvious conflicts existed (in the family)
- the phenomena permitted Miriam to seek her sisters'/friends'/family's closeness
- family conflicts were handled in a very open way
- there had been a split in the family's relationships with Miriam's move from the family apartment
- a difficult religious context, and rebellion against the religious values of the parents
- there seemed to be competing interests inside the peer group
- sex/gender issues

All three girls were in the midst of puberty and about to leave their parents and their religious belief system. The girls were very close to each other. They felt emotionally involved through their distancing from their home and were experimenting with some occult practices in a rather playful way. They themselves did not see any relation between the phenomena and their occult experiments. Miriam's move from the common apartment was a very ambivalent action, initiated by her parents, and represented the most important change in the family's world, together with the mother's pregnancy. On the one side, Miriam assured us that she felt released from the close family structures and happy about her own space. Nevertheless, there could have been a hidden yearning for community. Another current life topic was sexuality. The girls had started to be interested in the opposite sex and to have first love affairs. Sexuality was dealt with in a rather restrictive manner in the religious community, so this point could have held a certain potential for conflict for the girls.

Interventions—What to do if Somewhere is Haunted?

It is generally important and necessary to establish a trusting counseling situation when advising people with psycho-social problems. “The individual systemic practitioner and their relationship with the person seeking advice also play a crucial role as the context of the systemic work.” (Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2016: 199) Today, systemic approaches in particular support the idea of a cooperation model in therapy and counseling contexts, meaning that the process is understood as a joint search based on the wishes and needs of the person seeking advice. A continuous, friendly, caring, “affective framing” of the situation forms the basis of the relationship between client and counselor (Welter-Enderlin & Hildenbrand, 1998). This relationship between client and counselor is even more important in the setting of depth psychology approaches (Belz & Fach, 2015), bringing fundamental authority and attachment conflicts into focus. Taking this into account, counseling in the context of extraordinary experiences aims not only to use the law of entanglement theoretically (Atmanspacher, Römer, & Walach, 2002; Lucadou, 2015) in counseling experts, but also to apply it practically if possible.

The occurrence of a “haunting” can be described as a multifactorial event. Generally, particular attention can be paid to the interaction of the concerned people with their environment, as well as their need for autonomy and attachment (Grawe, 2004). Trigger mechanisms for a haunting can be manifold, according to our experience. Changes in the personal lifeworld seem to play a central role, for example leaving home, the beginning or ending of a relationship, the birth or death of a family member, a new job or redundancy, a journey or coming home, etc. These exterior changes can have effects on an individual level, on one’s need for autonomy and attachment, and thus produce tensions. It is also possible that unconscious topics emerge symbolically through haunting phenomena. In any case, a resource- and solution-orientated approach has proven especially helpful. Generally, this kind of experience should not be misunderstood as pathological expressions of a “sick soul”. In ideal circumstances, haunting can even help to find new, constructive solutions in periods of transition; the externalization of problems related to personal identity can protect the inner stability of the individuals concerned.

- *Psychoeducation* is the first and crucial point in our work. We inform the people involved in the haunting phenomena about their causes and characteristics. This helps to strengthen the autonomy of the individuals, who then learn that they can influence the phenomena themselves, and reduces their fear of losing control. The initial step in influencing the course of events consists of observing what happens, and later learning to “read” the symbolic language of the haunting. Miriam and her family, for instance, found it helpful to learn that their case was not an isolated one and that there are methods available for handling the phenomena.

- It can be very useful to take up the *Spiritual Interpretations* of the affected individuals to a certain degree, as they can be considered as playing the role of a “user interface” for the phenomena, helping to integrate the events into their subjective world concept (cf. Utsch, Anderssen-Reuster, Frick et al., 2017). People feel less fear of losing control if they manage to integrate their experiences inside their individual system of values and beliefs. We try, therefore, to use the same linguistic expressions as the people concerned. When Miriam, for example, spoke of the spirits of deceased monks, we used this image at first, too. But our aim was to draw attention to the following questions: “Which message could the deceased monks convey to you? How could they help you?” This reflects the way we understand our work: we do not feel responsible for telling people what they are allowed to believe. Only if they themselves express the wish to learn about alternative explanations, or in cases where interpretations are extremely frightening, we will offer alternative ways of looking at the issue.
- Another important method is the technique of “*Reframing*”. Generally, haunting is associated with fear, disgust, revulsion, and loss of control. Reframing means trying, together with the affected individuals, to modify their ideas of the disturbing situation and give it a positive meaning. Ideally, it becomes possible to see the haunting phenomena as a kind of solution for a hidden problem, which can have a temporary system-stabilizing function. Reframing the haunting phenomena involves changing their meaning. This tendency to look positively on suffering in the form of illness, haunting, etc., and to understand it as a “chance” should not be taken too far. It is clear that people will only be willing to change their interpretations if they still feel that their emotions of suffering and uncertainty are acknowledged. Therefore, it is essential not to play down the difficulties.
- *Respect for the problem*: It may sound trivial, but especially when working with “haunted families” it is crucial to get to know them in their disturbing situation and to provide space for a detailed description of the events. Otherwise, people will keep on providing new “proofs” and “occurrences” again and again, due to their impression that they have not yet sufficiently convinced us. Thus, they continue to regard the phenomena superficially instead of trying to understand their message. It is, therefore, necessary at first to invest lots of time and attention in the reports of those concerned, or to make a home visit, as we did with Miriam’s family. A precise routine in dealing with “haunted families” may lead counselors to introduce possible solution strategies too hastily.
- „*Vivid haunting diary*“: We identify the actual sites of haunting occurrences together, trying to provide space for the affected individuals to look at the situation phenomenologically and to let them make their own attempts at explaining the problem. Until they have the impression that the counselors have really understood the drama of their experiences, people will not be ready to change their

perspective and to work with the phenomena in a psychological way. In addition, on-site inspections can be useful for examining the possibility of alternative physical hypotheses. Furthermore, we learn more about the specific circumstances of the phenomena, as we encourage the individuals involved to remember not only the events themselves, but also what had been done, thought or spoken immediately before something happened. This is why it makes sense to carefully examine the “user surface” of the phenomena. Another reason is, of course, that on-site inspections offer the opportunity to acknowledge the possibility of physical alternative hypotheses for the occurrences.

- *Story telling*: The language of haunting phenomena is a metaphoric one, and people generally tend to express feelings figuratively (Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2016). Considering the psychoeducational aspect, it is better to tell concise stories about haunting cases, including their solutions, instead of giving abstract explanations about haunting in general. Story telling allows an adequate distance to be kept from the client’s experiences, the externalization is not affected, and at the same time, he or she hears about people in a comparable situation and how they managed to handle it. Depending on the age and situation of those concerned, it may be appropriate to adapt the stories, in order to reach a high degree of identification with the imaginary actors. Regarding Miriam’s case, we told the story of a young girl who had experienced similar phenomena to Miriam. Miriam was able to highly identify with the story and said that she finally started shuddering. When we told her the way the girl handled the haunting events as well as the solution, she became very thoughtful.
- *Scaling questions* can be helpful, especially if there are several people involved. Who suffers the most? To what extent do the different people feel disturbed? This can be useful in order to offer all those concerned the same opportunities to express themselves. Miriam, for example, felt most affected by the apparition of the little boy, whereas Hannah found the automatically playing radio to be the most remarkable and frightening phenomenon. Clara, however, seemed to be rather insecure and less excited than the two other girls.
- *Contextual embedding*: People often talk in great detail about what happens, being so fascinated and excited by the phenomena that they simply forget to consider the circumstances of the occurrences—their context. Contextualization of a haunting means that the situation in which a phenomenon occurs plays an essential role. The girls could remember the contextual details of only a few of the situations. Most clearly, they remembered the situation when they were sitting together in the chapel, talking about the boy Hannah had fallen in love with. At that very moment, the bells began to ring. Trying to interpret this situation symbolically, one could think that the alarm bells were possibly ringing for Miriam, hearing about the boy that Hannah was in love with. If we pursue this

image, we could interpret the running water taps as a symbol for suppressed or restrained sadness.

- *Questions about exceptions:* So far, we have focused on the observation of position and timing of the haunting phenomena. But it can also be a useful intervention to examine when or where nothing happens. With regard to the presented case, we found that practically nothing happened when the whole family was together. Such occurrences did not seem to be “necessary” then, as there was enough freedom to verbalize feelings, and this was used abundantly by the family’s teenagers.
- If we have already built a trustful relationship, we can sometimes support people with the *interpretation of symbols and metaphors*. However, it is essential not to interpret for them, but *with* them, always being aware that the sovereignty of interpretation lies with the affected individuals. This process can be encouraged by asking for the subjective meaning of certain objects. We use different methods, depending on the individual dispositions of the clients. Some gain more understanding of the phenomena through free association (written or oral), others find working artistically with meaningful symbols and objects that play a significant role in the haunting to be a better approach. Thus, we encourage people to deal with specific topics in a *creative way*.
- Most people concerned feel that a process of *normalization* is crucial, especially at the beginning of the conversation. They often emphasize that: “we are not mad” or “we are a totally normal family”. We must take this need for normalization into account and assure them that they are not the only ones, that other people experience these things too, and that it has nothing to do with being mad. Thus, we convey that we believe them and that we have a specific expertise in this field.
- *Working with time lines* can help to find possible connections between unusual experiences and different life events, possibly in the person’s past. Thereby, it may be possible to focus on changes that have occurred inside the system.
- *Installation of a camera:* As mentioned above, phenomena are typically “shy”, and, to some extent, beyond observation. Therefore, a first step towards getting rid of the terrifying or annoying phenomena can be to install a camera in the epicenter of the haunting, or wherever one wishes to be “safe”.
- *Externalization as a resource:* The process of externalization which takes place in haunting phenomena can also be basically considered as a resource and ability: it enables people to pull back from problems dominating their whole life, transforming them into “something” (a ghost, demon, monster). Externalization can create distance from problems possibly strongly connected to personal identity and allow the subject to be looked at in a more objectified way. Indeed, with haunting, the underlying problem tends not to be directly related to self-identity in the majority of cases.

- *Paradox intervention* can sometimes be useful. This means asking the people involved to produce a haunting event, to even wish that something will happen. In general, nothing will happen then. It thereby becomes obvious that their own attitudes and expectations can influence the probability of haunting phenomena decisively. Thus, they recover some of their self-control.
- *Rituals* can also help to gain a different view on, and to deal with, haunting phenomena. They help to overcome passivity and strengthen the affected individuals in their self-efficacy. When implementing new rituals, it is very important that they “fit” into the belief system of the people concerned. Furthermore, rituals should be developed individually and creatively together with those involved. In the case of this family, an exorcism had already taken place, which included some classical ritual acts (burning incense, saying prayers, etc.). However, Miriam did not experience a feeling of self-efficacy during these rituals; on the contrary, they increased her feelings of fear and powerlessness. Ideally, rituals should not only be carried out as a reaction to an event, but also used as a technique of prevention. They should be easy to conduct, which may positively influence the motivation for further, and more fundamental, changes. Rituals are useful for coping with situations of transition and system changes: Nowadays, however, we often no longer know about such specific rituals (cf. Heisig, 2013). In Miriam’s case, the family introduced some new rituals. Miriam’s mother decided to reserve one evening per month for a joint trip to the city with only one daughter. The aim was to pay particular attention to each daughter and to deliberately make time for her.
- *Changes*: The father suggested that Clara could also move to the upper floor, so Miriam would no longer be so alone and the family would have more space for the younger children. Clara liked this idea. In fact, we often experience that haunting phenomena can release positive changes and, if the people concerned are willing to accept these changes, they can significantly improve their quality of life. Such changes can sometimes be initiated through haunting phenomena, but are not necessarily directly connected with the haunting itself.
- Often, people who are seeking advice tend to *write down* their experiences in great detail before calling us. Generally, the act of writing can be considered as a first intervention when handling inexplicable experiences (but not only then). Numerous studies have confirmed the positive effects of expressive writing (Heimes, 2012, 2015; Pennebaker, 2009). It can help to embed the experiences into a narrative, to sort different fragments of feelings and impressions, and to create a consistent story out of them. This feeling of consistence and coherence is helpful for integrating experiences that exceed the normal frame of perception into one’s own life story. As Wüstenhagen writes: “Whoever has found a narrative for himself, who is able to talk about the indescribable, can also tell his fellow humans about it. He can escape from loneliness and share his experiences.”

(Wüstenhagen, 2016; translation by the authors) Thus, encouraging people to write down their unusual experiences provides an important first and, above all, self-controlled intervention.

- We also use the therapeutic effects of writing when asking people affected by haunting to keep a “*haunting diary*”. The positive influence of keeping a diary on mental health is well known and described. It is especially useful in a haunting context, as the diary can assume the role of a dialogue partner to whom one confides experiences that friends would reject. If people entrust themselves to a diary, this is at the same time an effective method for reducing stress, stabilizing social relationships and reducing psychic tension. The haunting diary does not only fulfill the above-mentioned functions for maintaining mental health, but even offers the chance of changing the dynamics of the haunting itself. The very act of observation makes a difference. A haunting diary does not view the phenomena superficially, but implements self-reference and directs attention towards inner-psychic processes, due to our request to write down not only what happens, but also what was thought or done immediately before.
- *External features:* People often provide more information about themselves through their physical appearance than through words. It is important though to carefully perceive first personal impressions. What was striking when we first met Miriam was her tomboy look; at first sight, she seemed to be a boy. She also dressed like a boy and practiced sport excessively. According to our hypothesis, the sex/gender topic was an important issue in the family and we therefore pursued it further. The children in the family were all girls, except for one boy. The new baby was expected to also be a girl. “It is bloody awful that my parents have so many children. They don’t have enough money or time. If we weren’t so many girls, maybe we would be less children. Probably my parents just want to have more boys. By the way, my brother cannot really be called a boy, he is half a girl.” This original quotation from Miriam makes clear that the sex/gender topic was a crucial point in the family, but remained rather unvoiced.

Epilogue

A few weeks later we receive the following e-mail:

Hello. I am Miriam from XXX. Do you remember me? You visited us a few weeks ago, and talked with me, my mother, and my sister. Lots of things have happened since then. I thought it would be nice to give you an update. It has rumbled a few more times, but I am not so afraid anymore, and so I stayed upstairs. My mother has given birth to the baby, it is really cute, but I am so glad that I do not live downstairs anymore! All that crying at night is just terrible. Clara often sleeps upstairs now, too. I think I have an idea what could be the reason for the haunting, and I am convinced that it has nothing to do with dead monks or demons, as my mother

believes...Perhaps the phenomena are really related to me and Hannah. But I won't say more about it. By the way, Hannah is with this stupid boy now! Clara also thinks that this is bloody stupid. We have both stopped being friends with her for the moment. Now that's what comes of it!! I will probably have to repeat the class this year, but I don't care at all at the moment. If everything is fine, I will move out from here in a few weeks. I have called the office for youth welfare and told them that I just can't stand it at home any longer. They were so nice and we talked about everything and I think that they found it odd, too, all that Christian stuff... Anyway, they could understand that I don't want to stay here and told me that I can move into a housing group, and that's what I will do. My mother thinks that this is shit, but anyway, she is fully occupied with the baby and should be glad if there is one less person under her roof! You see, lots of things have happened ... I just wanted to thank you again, for making so much time for us and especially that I don't have to be afraid anymore and can sleep quietly again. Clara will move into my room as soon as I have moved out, as the baby's crying is getting on her nerves, too.

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THE „AMNÉVILLE RSPK CASE“: AN ILLUSTRATION OF SOCIAL ELUSIVENESS?

Renaud Evrard

Introduction: So Far, so Close

In the summer of 2014, a case of a “spontaneously haunted house” in Amnéville, a town in east France, received short-lived international media coverage. By coincidence, the haunted house is less than 3 kilometers from mine. Despite this, I was not able to undertake any field research. I tried twice to enter into contact with the “haunted people” but never received any answer. The first time was at the beginning of the media coverage, when they already had plenty of so-called ghost hunters in their garden. The second time was a few weeks after the end of the coverage, when they seemed to ignore everything relating to the case.

Methodologically, my approach may appear peculiar, as it is neither a parapsychological field study (although the geographic proximity helped in finding people who felt “concerned” by the reported events), nor a psychological or sociological study, which would use questionnaires for a targeted sample. My study is more a cultural analysis of the Western media when confronted with an ostensible paranormal event, and my methodology simply involves the exhaustive collection of all information disseminated by the media and of some opportunistic testimonies made in response to the news.

In the end, I did not have any privileged access to confidential information from direct testimonies or police reports. My data consist only of reports or indirect testimonies from people who commented on the reported events. I have the same level of accessibility to information as anyone who wants to form his/her opinion from the media reports. Therefore, I will not cross the boundary between endo- and exo-systems (Lucadou, 1994) in order to reconstruct the exo-perspective.¹ The first part of this chapter is a description of the timeline of the events, as reported by the media.

Later, I will discuss the case from several theoretical perspectives, and focus on the epistemic status of the information. This may seem surprising as we are not in the area

1 Lucadou used this distinction, developed through “observational theories” and the “Heisenberg cut” in physics (Primas, 1992), between the endo-perspective of a participant in the system and the exo-perspective of the observer of the same system. The frontier between these perspectives is represented dynamically by the organizational closure. Each complex system needs this two-level description.

of experimental evidence, but rather in that of public opinion. However, it is precisely the same information which is available to anyone who wishes to build an opinion on the reality of the alleged facts. It is a type of knowledge related to the cultural boundaries of science (Gieryn, 1999), especially the way in which scientific knowledge is developed within the context of public exchange. This analysis will employ the concepts of *credibility* and *incredibility* of psi and non-psi assumptions as indicated by their media treatment, which echoes a social reality.

In this particular case, the media provided evidence in favor of the paranormal and the non-paranormal hypotheses, while following a social removal process described as the “suppression phase” in the application of the Model of Pragmatic Information (MPI) on “Recurrent Spontaneous Psycho-Kinesis” (RSPK) cases (Lucadou & Zahradnik, 2004). The MPI starts at the description level of very general system theories. It states roughly that psi-phenomena are non-local correlations in psycho-physical systems rather than signals or forces. Such non-local correlations, however, limit the psi-effects due to the conditions of the psycho-physical system, which are mainly described by the “meaning” of the situation, i. e. pragmatic information (see Lucadou, 1995, 2015). The second of the four predictions made by this model relates to the temporal development of RSPK cases. It describes four phases: the “surprise phase”, “displacement phase”, “decline phase”, and “suppression phase”. In the surprise phase, the RSPK activity starts rapidly with strong effects, but they are not attributed to a specific individual (the “focus person”). This happens in the displacement phase, when the phenomena usually change in an unpredictable way. In the decline phase, the meaning of the phenomena is understood and, as they are expected, they disappear. The final suppression phase can be understood as a kind of reaction of the society, and will be discussed at length in this chapter. These phases can be derived from a fundamental equation of the MPI, which describes the RSPK phenomena in complementary terms of “autonomy” and “reliability” (from the endo-system) and of “novelty” and “confirmation” (from the point of view of the exo-system). The RSPK dynamics are described as the dynamics of pragmatic information within a hierarchically nested system, which is created by the persons involved (focus person, naïve and critical observers) *and* the reaction of the society.

This model allowed me to formulate ideas on an Internet forum and to verify two predictions during the course of the Amnéville case. One aim of this chapter is to illustrate how this systems-theory approach in parapsychology may help in understanding spontaneous cases to which an experimental approach is hard to apply. For this purpose, I will introduce the challenging concept of “social elusiveness” and link it to “natural elusiveness” and Trickster theory.

Description of the Case

The Amnéville case involved three main protagonists: Dominique Hachette (60 years old), his wife Chantal Hachette (57), and her nephew and godson (12).

Wednesday 20th August 2014: A Wonderful Day

This case is strange because it developed very quickly. The first day involved numerous phenomena, and the intervention of naïve and critical observers. On the second day, journalists were already there and reported the events.

According to the claims of the family, the first phenomena occurred on Wednesday 20th August 2014 at 1:00 p.m. In the laundry room, everything that was on the washing machine and the dryer fell as if it had been thrown on the ground. Chantal and her godson/nephew were in the room. They also saw all the jam jars falling to the ground. Then things calmed down for a few hours.

Later in the afternoon, the unexplained displacement of objects was observed in all the rooms of this 100 m² residential building, except the toilets. I will describe some of them in detail later. Punches and shots were also heard. The cats slept and did not move. The same was also true of the birds, which stayed calm, according to Dominique (Dematte, 2014a).

At around 6:00 p.m., they asked in the neighborhood for some help and a neighbor even saw artificial flowers coming out of their pot in her direction when she tried to take pictures. When she stepped back, the flowers suddenly stopped dead in their trajectory (Dematte, 2014c). (She apparently recorded some videos that did not become public.)

They received the help of a brother-in-law, Pierre Rudoni, who was beaten on his back with the telephone. Dominique was hit on the back of his head with pillows! The godson was wounded on the hand.

They called the police in Hagondange (my town) to file an official report and the police came to the site at around 7:00 p.m. According to the family, when Dominique and the four policemen were all in the living room, the TV set fell over for the third time and they consequently fled the room (Dematte, 2014c).

Two local representatives then made a visit to the house at around 9:00 p.m. One of them, Armindo Dos Santos, who was in charge of urbanism, was trying to find a materialistic explanation when he saw a heavy flowerpot fall in the garden, 2 meters away from him. This had been embedded in the ground with a concrete slab. The teenage nephew/godson was very close to him at the time (Dematte, 2014b).

According to the family, the phenomena stopped at around 10:30 p.m. and they did not report the occurrence of any other phenomena during the following days.

Thursday 21st August

On Thursday 21st, the local and national press took pictures, made videos and carried out interviews with the protagonists. It seems they had been contacted by local representatives, and not by the Hachette family. Without any ethical caution, they gave full names and addresses. The first pictures were published online at 6:00 p.m., and a short film was available online the following day.

Dominique and his brother-in-law were questioned by the police. Dominique filed a complaint against X for “willful damages” and made a claim on his insurance (LorActu, 2014).

Friday 22nd August

The case made the first page of the local journal (*Le Républicain Lorrain*) (Dematte, 2014a) and was reprinted in several papers and online media. It soon made a huge buzz in France and abroad.

Locally, the news attracted a lot of visitors: curious people, ghost hunters, radiesthetists, and “other specialists of the paranormal who offer their services for free or for money” (according to the newspaper issue of the following day). In such a context, it was very difficult for me to offer my services as my “expertise” could easily have been confused with opportunist “pseudo-expertise”.

Two hypotheses were heard in the bars where the local population meet (Dematte, 2014b):

- A seismic hypothesis: the area is well known for its mining and metallurgical activities. Some thought that the “gradual collapse of the slag heap (the waste layer of a metallurgical plant)” may be an explanation. Of course, this hypothesis does not explain why only one house was affected, and only partially.
- A spiritualist hypothesis: the Moselle department is very marked by wars. According to some old memories, the street was built on a World War II camp for Russian prisoners, who may still continue to haunt this place.

Online, another hypothesis was offered, through a play-on-words or miswriting of the city’s name:

- A demoniac hypothesis: Amnéville became AmnEVIL...

The initial media coverage provided us with some information. There was a preview of this RSPK the preceding summer (2013): Chantal had heard voices and strange sounds. They called the official exorcist priest to bless the house (Dematte, 2014a).

The couple had had a bad history with their previous house, which they had to leave due to major mining damage. They then built this house and have lived in it since 2000. No information was given about the teenage nephew and the family dynamics.

On this day, I forwarded the news to the private Internet forum of the Association of Friends of the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI), a Parisian group devoted to scientific parapsychology. I publicly made my *first prediction*: “Within a week there will be a report to “restore normalcy” explaining that it was an insurance fraud or the kid was caught red-handed.” This prediction was made following Lucadou and Zahradnik’s (2004) model of the four phases of RSPK, in which the intervention of the media signals the entrance into the third phase of decline of the phenomena, followed by the fourth phase of social suppression. It seems quite logical that a society which is mainly skeptical about the genuineness of paranormal phenomena will not let such a strange event, supported by several witnesses and with no trivial explanations, go unanswered.

The Skeptics Strike Back

In France, we have a mathematician, Yves Lignon, now retired from the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail, who is always contacted by the media when something ostensibly paranormal occurs. On Sunday 24th August, Lignon gave an interview to a journalist from *Le Républicain Lorrain* claiming that this case is not a real poltergeist case (Dematte, 2014d). As an “expert”, he called into question the reliability of the testimonies and the fact that the poltergeist appeared as a sudden burst, whereas genuine poltergeist cases show an increase in activity. He also argued that we cannot have both apparitions and unexplained movements of objects in the same case. He announced his opinion on Facebook the same day, without there being any inquiry. They were just arguments from an academic authority. Lignon’s skepticism is peculiar as it comes from a self-proclaimed parapsychologist who does not doubt RSPK in general.

On the 28th August, exactly within the week I predicted, Yann Kindo (2014), an unknown skeptic, published a critical analysis on his blog. His paper was republished three days later by one of the most publicized French skeptical organizations, l’Association française pour l’information scientifique (AFIS, of which he is a member). He advocated a trivial cause: a children’s joke. His criticism focused on the local newspaper and on the journalist responsible for most of the local media coverage (Delphine Dematte). He

discussed their methods as “paranormal journalism”, that is to say pseudo-inquiries made only to sell more copies of the newspaper.

Nevertheless, he had an argument: the publication of the first report on the Amnéville case ended a summer series in *Le Républicain Lorrain* devoted to “The strange near you”. This series began on the 19th July and ended on the 21st August, exactly the day the journalists came to Amnéville. The articles explored various paranormal topics: the curse of a local castle, a woman who saw the Virgin 33 times, the true story of Joan of Arc, the strange stack of granite in the Vosges mountains, and, the day before the events (19th August), the RSPK case in Arc-Wattripont in Belgium (1993), a case very similar to that of Amnéville (Vanbockestal, 2015):

- Phenomena occurred only during one night
- Sounds and unexplained movement of objects
- Gendarmes were witnesses
- It was explained by the fraudulent activity of a mentally disturbed adult

There is, therefore, a strange coincidence as the Amnéville case seems to fit into a series of summer pseudo-investigations of X-files. This coincidence seems to discredit the receipt of the information because it narrows the border between fiction and reality. It would be hard to find a causal link between this series and the trigger for the Amnéville case, unless one believes that the protagonists were directly inspired by what they read (and especially attempted to reproduce the Arc-Wattripont case).

Despite this attempt to discredit the journalists covering the case, Kindo had no evidence of trickery supporting his explanation. Like Yves Lignon, Kindo blamed journalists for not having followed proper scientific method, but they did not follow it themselves with their speculative assertions. These two skeptical stances remained in the exo-perspective as they were only based on the press with no field investigation.

The Confessions

Nothing more happened during the next two weeks. The police closed their 3-week investigation by taking Chantal Hachette into custody on Monday 15th September. At the end of this custody, Chantal signed a confession admitting that she herself had ransacked her home during an attack of nerves, with the help of her godson. It is the latter who, “cleverly hidden in the house”, allegedly brought down the TV set (three times) during the first visit by the police. Thus, she was prosecuted for false accusations, and her husband was exonerated. She faced up to six months in prison and a €7,500 fine (LorActu, 2014). She was expected at the Metz Criminal Court on the 8th October after

examination by a psychiatric expert. At 8:00 p.m., *Le Républicain Lorrain* and other websites shared the news.

The following day, two reactions were observed. On account of these confessions, a lot of articles were published or updated to say that the case was resolved: the hysterical woman was found guilty! This opinion quickly became the dominant one, and still is, as few people kept enough interest in the case to follow its further developments.

I also observed a relief in my own professional environment (adult outpatient psychiatric service). Although everyone knew about the case from the beginning, the first time my colleagues spontaneously discussed it (before our formal weekly meeting) was after the publication of these confessions. If people feel free to discuss such a case only when a rational explanation is available, it is easy to imagine how this helps to spread skeptical information compared to disturbing information about the case.

Coincidentally, but with very bad timing, the Institut de recherche sur les expériences extraordinaires (INREES), a very media-oriented group dealing with paranormal and spiritual topics, chose that same Tuesday 16th September to publish an article entitled “Amneville: spirit, are you here?” (with the mistake in the name) on its website (INREES, 2014). A last-minute change in the article said that this case may be explained rationally but that many others were not. They quoted three experts: parapsychologist Paul-Louis Rabeyron, from the IMI; Father Brune, an adept of instrumental trans-communication; and Alain de Luzan, a “geobiologist”.

At the same time, I even entered into Internet discussions with some members of ghost-hunting groups who concluded that this case was a fake but not others.

These reactions show a social split into two trends, believers and disbelievers, who treat these confessions according to their own cognitive dissonance. As we know, for example from the work of gendarme and poltergeist researcher Emile Tizané (Baudouin, 2016; Tizané, 1951), confessions are often made during RSPK cases, but their value has to be scrupulously assessed as several of them are false confessions. Do the confessions help to explain the modus operandi of the phenomena? Are they produced under pressure? When should we abandon the presumption of innocence? The failure to ask these questions here showed how much these confessions helped to remove the initial dissonance.

Walter von Lucadou (2006) has also discussed the view that, in RSPK cases, we cannot totally distinguish between the psi and the manipulation hypotheses. He claimed that there is a macroscopic undecidability, rather than an accumulation of evidence. This may be a psychophysical property of RSPK events which are phenomena with an “inconsistent history”, as are phenomena in quantum mechanics.

Therefore, after the buzz around Chantal's confessions, and against all appearances, I made my second prediction on the Internet forum of the Friends of IMI (17th September): "We will not be able to discern between the psi and the manipulation hypotheses."

A "Non-lieu"

After the confessions, *Le Républicain Lorrain* only discussed the Amnéville case in its "Justice" column. On the 8th October, Chantal was judged by the Metz Criminal Court. However, the judge asked for a second psychiatric assessment because the first one, which concluded that the accused was psychologically vulnerable, was carried out by her referring physician and not by someone neutral. After a proper psychiatric examination, the Court finally cancelled the whole procedure on the 12th November. This mistrial or "nullity exception" was motivated by the fact that Chantal was illiterate, so she could not have read the confessions she signed.

The juridical part of the case therefore ended in a "non-lieu", which is a nice expression for "macroscopic undecidability". There was nothing left to support the main hypothesis (Chantal's manipulation), but also nothing against it. Nevertheless, something happened that we are unable to qualify with certainty. Very few articles spread this news, which requires a lot of tolerance for ambiguity, but other RSPK cases then received more media attention than usual in response to the Amnéville "hoax" (for instance, this one for which I was interviewed: Scigacz, 2014).

With regard to the scientific side, we must rely on the unscientific investigation carried out by the journalists and the police, as no scientific investigation was made. The conclusions of their reports are contradictory. Journalists collected testimonies one day after the events, and these testimonies are often supported by material observations (objects which were broken in an unusual way) or concomitant testimonies. The abnormal trajectory of the artificial flowers or the fall of the heavy flowerpot with nobody around are, for instance, events which are very difficult to explain. A scientist may have discussed the way these testimonies were collected, or the psychophysiology of perception, or conjuring tricks. However, what the policemen did was something very different: they took these abnormal events as granted and attempted to promote alternative natural explanations for them.

In the details of the police report published in the press (Fontvieille, 2014), police investigators explained the case through human intervention because:

- The objects found in the house had traces of skidding. They rubbed something, but why this is necessarily evidence of human intervention?

- An iron flew along a corridor before turning and passing through a window. Policemen claimed a magnet must have enabled this movement. However, they found no magnet with this power.
- The 12-year-old teenager was probably hidden in the room when the TV set fell down in the presence of four police officers. However, they did not try to reconstruct the scene to check this possibility.
- A neighbor had made a video in which, in the reflection of a mirror, Chantal can be seen throwing an object. However, this video was never made public and was not used as evidence of her guilt.

All in all, these explanations of the phenomena are untested assumptions. They suggested, at the same time, very simple as well as very complex frauds, involving two of the three main protagonists. One fraud should even have been carried out in the presence of the police officers, after Dominique innocently called them. The scientific status of these explanations is low, but their credibility is high as they were published in an official police report and they reflect prosaic phenomena that restore normalcy.

Other ambiguous elements occurred almost one year after the onset, when the skeptic Christophe Michel (2015) published a video about the “summer ghosts” on his YouTube channel “Hygiène mentale” [mental hygiene], still arguing that the media used paranormal topics during the summer slump for easy commercial gain. He claimed to be able to explain the Amnéville case through human manipulation, showing how the objects which were placed at a height above 1.5 meters were not broken and that heavier objects (like the sofa and the closets) were not moved. These are strange pieces of evidence, because they can only be applied if we consider the size and strength of all protagonists, and we do not have this information. Even if Dominique and Chantal look small, they can easily pick up objects at a height of over 1.5 meters by raising their arms. It may have been more difficult for the teenager, of whom we have no description. However, it is more comfortable to explain this difference by the objects being moved by human choice or constraint rather than by the operation of a paranormal force or spirit.

Table 1 summarizes the elements in favor of the paranormal hypothesis and the elements that discredit it:

Credit	Discredit
Abnormal physical phenomena	All phenomena may have been produced by normal human forces, so they are abnormal only according to the testimonies
Multiple testimonies	Testimonies were not collected using scientific methodology
Authoritative testimonies by policemen and local representatives	The police offered an alternative explanation in retrospect
Testimonies recorded very soon after the events	Testimonies were not collected using scientific methodology
No evidence of tricks or fraudulent manipulation	The police claimed to have some indications of fraudulent activity by Chantal and obtained her confession
The main protagonists immediately sought external observers	It may have been part of a plan to deceive their insurance company
The main protagonists immediately run an official complaint against X	It may have been part of a plan to deceive their insurance company
Chantal's confession was not accepted by the court as it had not been obtained in accordance with legal procedures	One of the main protagonists confessed that she was responsible for all the phenomena
It is very unlikely that journalists arranged the events, even if they were responsible for its media treatment	The local newspaper may have been biased in favor of the paranormal for commercial gain
The main protagonists were not the only witnesses of the events, and a collective fraud would involve a dozen people, including officials	The main protagonists may have been inspired by the RSPK case that had been published in the local newspaper the day before the events
We do not have information about the protagonists' sizes and strengths	Objects too heavy or too high were not moved
Skidding is not evidence of human intervention	Objects found in the house had traces of skidding

Table 1: Elements that credit or discredit the paranormal hypothesis

Discussion

What is the best way to understand all of these data? One might think it is just another judiciary mystery, classified because of a procedural problem. However, from a scientific perspective, I want to show that this case is a typical illustration of some parapsychological models of “macro-psychokinesis” phenomena. The absence of any genuine scientific

investigation of this case prevents us from reaching a conclusion in favor of the paranormal hypothesis, which is used here in a speculative way.

The Last Phases of a RSPK

Lucadou and Zahradnik's (2004) application of the MPI to RSPK describes four phases (see above). Due to the lack of data about the family history and dynamics, we cannot say anything about the first (“surprise”) and second (“displacement”) phases. We may identify the beginning of the third (“decline”) phase on Day +1, i. e. the 21st August, with the police investigation triggered by the complaint of “willful damages”, and the intervention of the mass media. During the decline phase:

- An ever-stronger external pressure to reproduce the phenomena and extract information about them is present
- Initial witnesses still claim the phenomena were genuine
- The stronger the pressure grows, the less the phenomena occur
- The person who evoked the events is found to make use of (apparent) fraud

Here, the pressure on the phenomena quickly reached a maximum with international media coverage. The police began their official inquiry, but no new phenomena occurred. According to them, they watched suspicious actions made by Chantal in the video recorded the day before by a neighbor, but did not openly discuss fraud.

The last phase, called the “suppression phase”, may have begun on the 15th September (Day +26) with Chantal's confession. Indeed, phenomena predicted by the MPI were observed from this day on:

- Fraud is openly discussed
- The people and witnesses involved are often ridiculed and discriminated against in the mass media
- The main protagonists deny their previous statements (as did the police)
- Debunking articles are published

This phase is called the “suppression phase” as it involves a social process which removes the dissonance produced by the alleged paranormal phenomena. Fanny Moser (1977: 30), after several observations, even termed it “a conspiracy to cover it up”. However, if we do not want to fall into conspiracy theories, we may ask what this “social suppression” is that appears in such a predictable manner?

Social Suppression

We may define “social suppression” as an attempt to defuse a paranormal history, a feedback loop that allows it to remain an “inconsistent history”. The main action is to make it less credible in order to reduce its diffusion capacity. Skeptical comments about the value of the testimonies, and the likely commercial interests of the protagonists and journalists, favored the discrediting of this case. The social sphere seems to contain people ready to emerge in order to play this skeptical role, regardless of the kind of problem raised.

The second action is to restore normalcy by giving credibility to an alternative and prosaic scenario. The writer Robert McLuhan (2010) called this second action “rational gravity”: rational alternative scenarios are proposed to eliminate the inconvenience generated by the presence of the paranormal. Gradually, one of these “phantom narratives” (McLuhan, 2010) is selected as the scenario that describes what really happened. It does not have to be coherent in its details, as it only needs to restore normalcy as the gravitational force which brings us back down to the ground.

Here, the fraud confessed by Chantal Hachette is the selected phantom narrative: it does not optimally explain all the observations, but it is normal enough to debunk the case, as in the “unmasking” scenes at the end of all Scooby-Doo’s adventures. It is easier to give in to this simplistic explanation rather than having to weigh the pros and cons of all the elements of the case. The cognitive cost of the paranormal hypothesis makes the absurd plausible and the unlikely likely. Historian Bertrand Méheust (1999) has described several cases of this rhetorical reversal using the figure of the “lupinambule”. In the Amnéville case, the “fraudulent magnet explanation” is for instance a very absurd one, which became plausible because it is far more rational than the hypothesis of an everyday object following an intelligent trajectory through the air.

This process of “rational gravity” is not fully respectful of the ambiguity of the phenomena, so it often generates a split between two symmetric communities: those who want to believe and those who want to disbelieve. Both will develop cognitively biased but consonant reading of the items under discussion. Those who stay in-between, saying they do not have enough information to make a conclusion are very rare. As shown in Table 1, such a “paranormal system” has just enough internal contradictions to not be logically reducible. The system does not make the decision between the paranormal and manipulation hypotheses on its own, allowing external systems to find support for any decision, any directional choice.

Natural and Social Elusiveness

“Natural” elusiveness refers to what is generally described in the parapsychological literature as the evasion and erosion of evidence at a phenomenological level. “Social” elusiveness concerns the discrediting of those who carry the evidence at a social level. If we understand that the scientific process is also cultural, through “credibility contests” (Gieryn, 1999), then we do not have to remove this social factor from our analysis. Both levels contribute to the macro-undecidability of psi phenomena (Lucadou, 2006).

Natural elusiveness has been discussed for a long time in parapsychology. According to Ulrich Timm’s rule (1981), extremely strong or stable psi performances are very likely based on conjuring, errors, and fraud. Confirmation of paranormal phenomena “in action” by means of video recording is lacking, as if these phenomena avoid critical observation (Bender, 1952). According to the MPI, psi effects have the ability to remain elusive, even when the psychological barricades have been eliminated. This prevents the experimenter from having complete control over the system or from making it reliable, as such conditions hinder the deployment of psi phenomena. This elusiveness manifests itself through several channels. If statistical analysis is applied to a measurement, the results may decline or displace so that they are not significant in the predicted way (Lucadou & Zahradnik, 2004). However, elusiveness was first described for RSPK cases (Lucadou, 1982). These spontaneous phenomena appeared at unexpected times or locations, and thwarted the devices put in place to catch them. Their behavior is often described as “tricky”, as they leave room for ambiguity. For instance, in old macro-PK experiments, ectoplasmic materializations were described as copying newspaper pictures or using artificial beards, suggesting obvious tricks (Evrard, 2016). In the Amnéville case, the issue of elevated or heavy objects not being moved is also suggestive of such a trick. It is as though the whole process allows “outs” for the skeptical interpretation, like self-sabotage. However, even these “outs” cannot explain all of the case without a subjective generalization or distortion.

There are some anthropomorphic or spiritualist interpretations of elusiveness which claim that an external intelligence is responsible for these tricks (Tizané, 1951; Kennedy, 2003). Bertrand Méheust and Jacques Vallée have developed different theories of elusiveness for UFO phenomena. They both agree that the UFO phenomenon is marked by two contradictory trends: a tendency to display and a tendency to slip away; in short, a paradoxical mixture of ostentation and dodge. They speculated on the existence of a “security system” which regulates the balance of these two trends, “dropping” the UFO sightings just before the time when they might be available to observation of a scientific nature. Vallée (1992) thinks that this process is manipulated by a “control system” driven by an external intelligence. Méheust (2012) only suggests that UFO and psi phenomena succeed in combining these two tendencies, arriving in some way at a zero-sum result, that is to say a macroscopic undecidability.

Even the psychologist John Beloff (1993) concluded his work on the history of parapsychology with a theory of elusiveness as an auto-regulation process driven by the conservative forces of nature (and, I can add, of culture) which vigorously tries to restore the status quo in response to violations of the natural (and cultural!) order.

However, these models of “natural elusiveness” treat “social elusiveness” separately: when the evidence balance is restored through social actions, this is explained through prosaic explanations (conspiracy, general level of skepticism, private life issues, etc.). The MPI suggests that some social actions are parts of the complex temporal development of the phenomena (Lucadou & Zahradnik, 2004). For instance, this hierarchical model describes several types of social actors (focus person, naïve observers, and critical observers) who all interact with the phenomena. In a certain way, we have to understand why the “social suppression” of RSPK phenomena also makes them possible. In such a strong case as in Amnéville, with a house devastated within half a day in front of many witnesses, social suppression is manifested in a very strong and visible way. This could help us to learn some lessons.

Let us take the coincidence between the Amnéville case and the summer series of *Le Républicain Lorrain* devoted to “The strange near you”, which was concluded the day before the RSPK onset by the description of a very similar RSPK case. If we remove the hypothesis that these articles were a direct inspiration for what happened in the Hachettes’ house, we face a very challenging coincidence. It is difficult to explain through “natural elusiveness” why a whole team of journalists chose to work on that topic at that time, and select the Arc-Wattripont case for publication in that particular issue. “Social elusiveness” may be required to account for such preparation of the system. In this case, this coincidence both mobilizes a paranormal context and provides elements for self-sabotage.

The properties of “social elusiveness” have best been described in the Trickster theory of the paranormal (Hansen, 2001). George P. Hansen identified social structures which have psi-friendly characteristics (liminality, marginality, anti-structure...) and others which are psi-phobic (hierarchy, centrality, bureaucratic power...). In our societies, the psi-phobic structures are those that we trust the most for everyday decisions, while we find the others barely credible. In sum, these social structures can be distributed according to a continuum of credibility. We can expect the psi-phobic structures to defuse the paranormal and restore normalcy. In the Amnéville case, even if a major local newspaper, local representatives, and four police officers were proponents of a paranormal history at the beginning, they eventually encouraged the discrediting of these phenomena through a mainstream skeptical discourse. In such a singular case, one could be tempted to criticize a particular person or institution, but it becomes interesting when it is understood that this scenario is repeated every time. It may not be a “conspiracy” *stricto sensu*, but

an auto-regulation process after the violations of cultural order. The social elusiveness may appear both as pre-conditioning (preparation of the social context) and as deconditioning (measurement of the social deviation). However, it also relies on phenomenological ambiguities, in addition to social tricks (like false confessions), to promote the “phantom narrative” which would add gravity to a rational orientation.

Conclusion

The application of the MPI to RSPK cases describes a circular phenomenon, the epistemic status of which is uncertain from the beginning until the end. The social suppression cancels the initial disturbance, as if nothing had happened. The important message from this French RSPK case has still not been determined because it seems to make sense only within the Hachette family, of which we actually know so little. Was this RSPK triggered by the typical “teenage dependence–autonomy conflict”? Did Chantal’s mental health disturb the whole family dynamics? They are still living in the same house, but what has this story changed in their life?

From the exo-perspective, we only observe an auto-regulation process which prevents the spreading of the inconvenience generated by the presence of the paranormal. For a skeptical mind, there is nothing to question here. However, for those who were caught in the endo-perspective, considering the social turmoil that led to the discrediting of their own observations must be disconcerting.

My approach of “social elusiveness” attempted to avoid some of the regular anthropomorphic biases. In accordance with the MPI, I suggest that some social actions are determined by the pragmatic information of psychophysical systems, without condemning social actors playing their roles. Even if there are injustices relating to the scientific debate about the reality of psi, there is not, on the one side, the nice family, and on the other, the bad deniers. We should rather see the complementary relationship between the microcosm of the endo-system and the macrocosm of the exo-system:

- Endo-systems are prepared to give others reasons to doubt
- Exo-systems need these flaws to collectively maintain stability through the restoration of normalcy
- The dynamics are the most important factor: a RSPK can have a beneficial function without convincing all the people outside; and, reciprocally, the general skepticism about RSPK may not prevent them from happening spontaneously

The interactions between RSPK cases and the mass media provide a very interesting model for the study of the social elusiveness which may apply to other areas of parapsychology.

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