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Possessed Science

THE SCIENCE OF SPIRIT POSSESSION AND ITS THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS

Giving Up the Ghost

SPIRIT RELEASE THERAPY
IN CLINICAL PSYCHIATRY

Talking Spirits

THE REALITIES OF
CONTEMPORARY
SPIRIT MEDIUMSHIP

Project Buckmaster

CAN THE SPR SAVE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH?

Inside 'The Rhine'

PLUS AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE KELLEY

Crowds and Catastrophes

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Ghosts in the Machines

THE FIRST SPIRIT COMMUNICATION DEVICES

Plus

A NEW COLUMN FROM
THE SPR'S PRESIDENT,
DR RICHARD BROUGHTON

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Leo Ruickbie

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David Ellis

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The Society for Psychical Research

The SPR was the first organisation established to examine allegedly paranormal phenomena using scientific principles. Our aim is to learn more about events and abilities commonly described as 'psychic' or 'paranormal' by supporting research, sharing information and encouraging debate. The SPR is a Registered Charity, established in 1882.

Membership

The SPR welcomes members of the general public, as well as students and researchers in all disciplines, to join. Membership does not imply acceptance of any particular opinion concerning the nature or reality of the phenomena examined, and the Society holds no corporate views. The minimum age for joining is 16, with reduced subscriptions for students, couples and senior citizens. To renew or apply for membership please visit the website at www.spr.ac.uk, telephone the Secretary, Peter Johnson, on 020 7937 8984, or email secretary@spr.ac.uk.

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The Problem with Spirits

What if, as has long been thought, spirits – of the dead or otherwise discarnate – were real? I ask, if only to challenge current assumptions, or, should we say, taboos?

People invoke Occam's Razor at the drop of a hat, usually to cut through other people's arguments and champion their own. So if we were to do that now, what would be the simplest and most elegant solution to the problem of the paranormal? Spirits – dead, discarnate or otherwise – spirits have the day.

So why do we, in the main, reject them? People may argue that spirits have no place in materialistic science. Indeed they do not. But that is not necessarily because science is materialistic. After all, materialistic science has given us Quantum Mechanics and String Theory, and all the rest, things far stranger than Horatio dreamt of in his philosophy, or chosen belief system.

I have never been a fan of Occam's Razor. It is just a rhetorical device. Even so, it still leaves us with the problem of spirits.

And perhaps the problem of science. Our President, Richard Broughton, begins his first column by raising the possibility that mainstream science has been deluding itself for years by the inherent tendency of scientists to fudge the results, not always intentionally, so that they match their expectations. It is a tendency that is exacerbated by an academic system that cries 'Publish! Publish! Publish!'

Dr Broughton also observes that the 'decline effect' so rampant in parapsychology is not parapsychology's problem alone. When previously established scientific results can no longer be replicated it leaves one with the curious feeling of falling, like Alice, down the rabbit hole.

As you read on in this issue, that feeling will only get worse. Dr Terence Palmer has written up the paper he presented at last year's SPR Conference on the subject of the science of spirit possession. Making some enquiries into the names he mentioned, I was delighted to receive an article from Dr Alan Sanderson, one of the pioneers of Spirit Release Therapy in the UK. Their case studies make alarming reading.

If spirits are not real, then why do people respond to them as if they were? And undergo successful treatment on that basis? Occam's Razor has surely been blunted by over use...

The cases stack up. Jack Hunter and Dr David Luke have graciously allowed me to reproduce an excerpt from their new anthology, *Talking With the Spirits: Ethnographies from Between the Worlds*, that showcases the diversity of contemporary spirit mediumship. The theoretical underpinning of this collection is to take these experiences seriously.

Collector Brandon Hodge joins us again with the first of his new series on spirit communication devices. It is a necessary historical reminder of the importance of 'spirits' in the ostensibly disenchanted, modernised and now digitised West. We are forced to reflect – and the venerable history of this Society will not let us forget – that the spirits are not something confined to the exotic cultures that were once the mainstay of anthropology.

We should take the cases studies offered by Palmer and Sanderson seriously, too, even if 'spirits' is not the answer we want to hear. Down the rabbit hole things can only become stranger. ♡

Dr Leo Ruickbie
Editor

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