The Paradox of Contemporary Paranormal Research

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Abstract

This essay involves a discussion of how actual progress in the heterodox sciences of parapsychology and psychical research has largely diminished in mainstream society, primarily due to the perpetuation and continual application of questionable, ineffective methodologies by many amateur paranormal research groups. Discussion topics include a critique of contemporary ‘ghost-hunting’ techniques and popular broadcast subject-matter programming, a critical analysis of modern methodologies, along with commentary on the ongoing importance of scientific, institutional research on the subject matter.

Psychical or paranormal research - the pursuit of evidence to validate the existence of psychic, supernatural, or preternatural phenomena using scientifically rigorous methodologies – has come to a crossroads in contemporary society. Mainstream, amateur ‘ghost-hunting’ activities appear to have managed to upstage institutional, science-driven, psychical research efforts, and the advent and application of innovative and objective methodologies and experiments in the field continues to languish and diminish. Consequently, the field now increasingly presents a paradox of purpose for its participants, both the tenured and the neophyte.

Parapsychology, as an acceptable scientific pursuit, first received authentication in the late 18th-century when two established organizations, the U.K.-based Society for Psychical Research (SPR), and the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR), rose to bring claims of spiritualistic and supernatural phenomena to the same level of critical analysis applied by many distinguished researchers and academic institutions during that era.

In 1882, the world was in the midst of intense and rapid intellectual acceleration; in London, England, Henry Sidgwick, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge University, collaborated with Trinity College Dons Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney to establish the SPR. Over the next half century, the society, chartered to investigate paranormal phenomena in a scientific and unbiased way, would see endorsement and support from prominent persons such as Alfred Lord Tennyson, Joseph Banks Rhine, Mark Twain, Carl Jung, and Arthur Conan Doyle, among others.

Through the 1950s, the SPR, and subsequently other reputable groups established after the charters built by the SPR, conducted rigorous research in various paranormal arenas; telepathy, reincarnation, remote viewing, clairvoyance and precognition, psychokinesis, and even the existence of apparitions and ghosts.
Continuing into the 1970s, leading universities in the United States and abroad; Stanford, UCLA, Duke, Princeton, the Universities of Amsterdam, Edinburgh, Derby, etc., continued to seek evidence of quantifiable paranormal activities. In time, government agencies across the world would also promulgate and fund research into paranormal studies (U.S. CIA/Air Force’s Stargate Project, U.K. Remote Viewing Research and their Ministry of Defense Remote Viewing Project, etc.). Even the major religious denominations, (i.e., the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences) began conducting investigations and producing essays and reports on subjects directly and indirectly related to ‘paranormal’ subject matter.

Inevitably, over time, the realization of an emergent absence of quantifiable evidence has largely resulted in the modern reduction of most public institutional funding and continuing research in the field. In 1996, renowned stage magician and paranormal skeptic James Randi announced a $1-million dollar reward to anyone who could provide evidence of supernatural capabilities while under strict scientific testing criteria, a challenge which, to this date, no single individual has successfully undertaken.

While some scientifically rigorous research does still continue in a few U.S. institutions (Universities of Virginia Department of Psychiatric Medicine and Arizona’s Veritas Laboratory) and in the United Kingdom (Universities of Cambridge, Liverpool Hope, Edinburgh, Northampton), along with other privately funded scientific institutions and agencies across the globe, most established institutions have ceased, or greatly reduced, their funding for research in the arena – the prevailing opinion by many academic governing bodies and research leaders is that paranormal research has (as of yet), failed to show any quantifiable or scientifically verifiable evidence of its existence.

Clearly, since the early 1900s, the study of parapsychology has experienced a historical ebb and flow in mainstream cultural acceptance. During the last two decades however, following the emerging popularity of the phenomena of ‘reality-based’ media programs, the increasingly mainstream popularity of paranormal research appeared to have reached a new height, while simultaneously maintaining its inherent merit to some as a legitimate scientific field of pursuit. A broadly diversified playfield, providing the opportunity for amateur ‘mediumship’ or ‘sensitive’ activities, and novice ghost-hunting expeditions and investigations, has increasingly buried authentic paranormal research under a new, populist disguise – one that often pits mockery against rigour; entertainment value against believability. Unfortunately in most cases, this ambiguity has worked to the detriment of the continuing, genuinely promulgated research being conducted in the field.

Certainly, on a positive note, the mainstreaming of paranormal research has effectively helped to publicise, and to increase the fields’ visibility to a larger scope of the public – of that, there is no doubt. New American and European broadcasts of popular televised ghost-hunting series have built a large cult following on both continents; previously esoteric paranormal research terms and equipment; (i.e.,
electro-voice phenomena [EVP], ‘matrixing’, electro-magnetic field [EMF] detectors, etc.), now appear as household items and common language. Publicity for the field, also, has encouraged those who might suspect paranormal activity on their properties or in their lives, to seek out ‘expert’ opinions and to invite investigations: consequently, more locations across the country and globe have been ‘opened up’ to paranormal research and visits from sensitives or psychics.

And consequently, thousands of individuals, hereby charmed, empowered, or inspired by pop-cultural recognition opportunities provided by this ‘neo-clairvoyant’ movement, now profess to know how to sense spirits, to conduct ‘clearings’, or how to ‘channel’ entities and communicate with the departed. While the vast majority of these emerging clairvoyants are certainly untested or unproven in their capabilities, the prospect of some individuals to be more sensitive, emphatic, or attuned, to the character/ residual history/energies present in a location or site does seem intuitively possible, and it should be noted that there are hundreds of historical and contemporary accounts (albeit not yet scientifically validated) of individuals who may indeed possess such capabilities.

Inadvertently Supporting the Skeptics

The underlying dilemma is the question about the level of actual ‘progress’ afforded the entire paranormal movement by the work of the amateur, mainstream ghost-hunting groups, along with those lavishly funded, televised teams which continue to glamorize and profit from the field.

Particularly problematic in the mainstreaming of paranormal research is that, with no universally accepted parameters, checks, balances or quality controls governing the many amateur paranormal researchers or sensitives active in the populist arena, the field is becoming increasingly dismissed as ‘pseudo-science’; accordingly, some legitimate research being conducted by groups applying quantifiable scientific methodologies (SPR, the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Society for Scientific Exploration, etc.), are judged ‘guilty by association’, and also met with greater degrees of skepticism and scorn. Moreover, popular televised field investigations – and almost every investigation conducted by amateur ghost hunting groups operating in the United States and abroad – are conducted using the same repetitive, ostensibly ineffectual methodologies and application of equipment, which, while certainly creating excellent visuals for broadcast media, simply perpetuate the myth that paranormal activity can be definitively validated by the application of such devices and questionable techniques.

With the continual application of such poor or sensationalised methodologies, institutional support and funding for legitimate or unique, evidence-based research studies may also be increasingly judged and rejected, as the growing umbrella of amateur and charlatan groups, and media-hungry investigation teams continue to impugn the integrity of the field of paranormal research overall.
It should be understood that televised productions involving paranormal investigations are produced for two primary purposes; 1) for their prime value as highly viewed, pop-culture entertainment, leading to… 2) for their ability to generate significant levels of revenue for their production companies. As such, these programs should never be considered as objective or documentary programming. Pop-culture television series (such as ‘Paranormal World’, ‘Scariest Places on Earth’, ‘Ghost Hunters International [GHI]’, etc.), while maintaining a degree of entertainment value, are, at best, only capable of perpetuating the myths associated with psychical research. In fact, one of the most popular amateur ghost hunting groups engaged in such ‘pulp parapsychology’, the Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS), has been substantively accused of fraud and the faking of broadcast ‘evidence’. It has also been widely reported that many of these television shows refuse to release raw, unedited stock footage from their investigations to researchers in order for them to examine the material for evidence of fraudulent activities. Despite such groups’ popularity with their audiences, controversies, such as what TAPS and some other groups generate, tend to set back, and diminish the overall integrity of the field.

The incorrect use of devices such as infrared (IR) thermometers and electromagnetic field (EMF) detectors is also common on such shows. Conclusions are persuasively presented by investigation leaders, based on subjective assessments of recordings or videotapes and personal interpretations, and without legitimately established baseline data or the application of genuinely scientific methodologies; tools are used without any precise understanding of how, or even if, their application has been established to prove the existence of apparitions, or the paranormal in general (assumptions such as ‘increases in magnetic fields or drops in temperature are always associated with the manifestation of an entity’, etc.); seemingly intentional misrepresentations or events, added to the application of artificial and sensational drama, are also commonplace. While these are certainly valid theatrical techniques for increasing viewership interest and publicity ratings, they do serve to, again, diminish the integrity of the field and, in the long run, weaken the public’s belief in, and support for, more rigorous and defined psychical research efforts.

Notwithstanding the fact that the field of paranormal research is intuitively ambiguous in its nature - and that the current lack of empirical evidence continues to dissuade many skeptics of the field’s validity, it would behoove us to remember William Cowper’s tenet that “the absence of proof is not necessarily a proof of absence.” Paranormal researchers should keep in mind the skeptic’s tendency to use (inappropriately even) the argumentum ad ignorantiam; that a premise is ‘false only because it has not been proven true’. In that light, it would behoove researchers and skeptics alike to extend the courtesy of the doubt to those who would claim clairvoyant capabilities, or those who claim to have accrued evidence of a genuine haunting; but that there must also, correspondingly, be the concession by these individuals to subject their evidence or capabilities to empirical tests or experiments, in order to establish and confirm validity.
A Contemporary Critique

A point of concern is the relatively simplicity of establishing a paranormal investigation cohort. Most proponents - however well intentioned - simply establish as website or create a social networking site, then promote themselves to like-minded individuals or enthusiasts, and then reactively associate with most people that respond to their proposed meeting schedules or informational postings. Few of these groups proactively establish or advertise pre-requisite codes-of-conduct, or outline the kind of critical analysis processes, *mission statement*, or objectives’ that allow for potential new members to carefully consider their engagement, or ideological affiliation, with one group over another.

And subsequently in many cases, some groups actively engage only those initiates who are *like-minded* (i.e., not skeptical or analytical of those claiming sensitive or psychic capabilities within the group), and then formulate a smaller, closed circle of specialists, shutting the door to individuals with new, different, or more productive skill-sets – it is often these sorts of groups that promote themselves as the ‘premier’ paranormal investigative group in a specific geographic focus area.

Ideally, the more credible paranormal research groups are capable of well-articulating their organizational objectives, methodologies, codes-of-conduct, and the more rigorous requirements of membership. Some of these groups will occasionally admit new initiates, and then engage them in an informal screening process, or require them to go on an informal *training investigation* before allowing them to join in on formal investigations. These more professional groups generally have a democratic leadership process and annual elections, regular meetings, a quantitative method (and willingness) to openly assess or routinely evaluate their use of psychics or sensitives who claim to possess paranormal or clairvoyant powers themselves, and produce professional post-investigative reports or analyses for all of their activities.

Professional groups also continually pursue advanced training in subjects such as behavioural psychology, historical research and investigation tactics, technical (photography, audio, video, surveillance, etc.), as well as privacy laws and regulations. A familiarity or understanding or personality disorders is also important, since issues related to substance abuse, domestic or sexual assault and abuse situations, dementia or other behavioural disorders, mental illness, or cognitive impairments could, in fact, be the underlying cause or contributing factors to the perceived paranormal activities reported. Reputable groups also commonly pursue formal recognition as a federally-registered organization, in order to adhere to the laws and expected codes of conduct – particularly since many of these groups are invited into private homes and properties in which personal liability, theft, and possible criminal activity can be a concern.

Professional groups will also work to prefer to seek affiliation with one of the existing scientific agencies engaged in paranormal research, i.e., the SPR, ASPR, the Parapsychological Association (P.A.), the Rhine Research Center and Institute for
Parapsychology, etc. Alternatively, most groups now try to affiliate with pop-culture groups (e.g., members of the ‘TAPS family’), and, while certainly capturing their share of Hollywood fame, do not share nearly the same level of credibility, nor do they conduct as rigorous, peer-reviewed experiments as conducted within the more genuine institutional research groups.

Perhaps the most significant impediment to an advance of the field caused by many of the pop-culture associations is that many amateur groups refuse to collaborate and share data, techniques, or case history with others in the field. The central objective of psychical research involves a collective effort to prove that preternatural phenomena is authentic; this pursuit is universal, and the implications, if discovered, would have an effect on every single person that had ever lived. In an ideal environment, this shared objective should yield a playing field in which all groups would collaborate and share investigation opportunities, leads, and the associated body of accrued knowledge, effectively testing cooperatively, and critiquing each others’ work or experiments in order to refine or improve on methodologies, theories, and, most accordingly, to cross-check and interpret results. Not unlike the process of peer review in scientific research, the world of paranormal research – from amateur to institutional levels – would progress much faster if only the participants became more proactive in collaborating on projects, investigations, and experiments.

Orbs

The presence of anomalous ‘orbs’ in visual imagery is perhaps the most definitive example of how controversial and, again, how subjective the interpretation of paranormal investigations can become. There is no verifiable evidence in paranormal research suggesting that orbs are any more than the blurred backscatter from a light source captured on film. Most orbs are simply a circular reflection of an air born particulate – usually outside of a camera’s depth-of-field focus plain – and transmitted on either film or video. ‘Matrixing’, a term now commonly used in paranormal research, is defined as interpreting something familiar (facial features or apparition) out of a randomly occurring, often symmetrical form.

Not unlike the stir surrounding the historical, human face-like shadow seen on one of Mars’ Cydonian Mesas, captured by the Viking 1 Martian Orbiter in July 1976, humans possess a natural tendency to try and classify or interpret random images in a familiar fashion. This is the most common explanation of perceived features seen by some inside orbs, including some orbs that might be made of crystalline particulates, which could be optically reflecting the facial features of the camera operator.

Artificial images containing orbs are easily created by blowing dust, or stirring up other suspended particulate in front of a camera or video lens. Lens flares, chromatic aberrations, moisture, or condensation also have the propensity to create spherical shapes on film or digital media. Dark orbs are created when an illumination
source is placed away from the lens opening, and a dust or dirt particulate floats in
front of that illumination, resulting in a shadow falling within the frame of the
camera. In some cases, suspended particles (feathers, sawdust, etc.) may even have
non-symmetrical forms, resulting in shadows which are subject to supplementary
matrixing by reviewers.

Pursuant to the fact that no definite preternatural linkage has been established,
orbs should not be considered as evidence of paranormal activity.

EVPS

In 1968, Dr. Konstatin Raudive, a Latvian psychologist and one of the early
proponents of modern EVP recording techniques, published his treatise entitled
Unhörbares wird hörbar (“What is inaudible becomes audible”). The book’s
contents accelerated an approach that, even today, is seen by many investigative
groups as the underpinning strategy in most paranormal field investigations. The
premise behind EVPs is that audible ‘messages from the dead’ require the least
amount of energy to transmit, so that it would be most likely for spirits or apparitions
to communicate in this form, rather than the more energy-requisite methods of
physical apparition or the movement of solid objects.

Most contemporary paranormal groups have vast catalogues of EVP; while
many of these EVP very likely represent examples of auditory pareidolia (interpreting
random sounds as voices in our own language) or ‘audio matrixing’, some samples
may present genuine paranormal phenomena. The challenge becomes how we might
effectively identify a baseline which could characterise a successful, or even
authentic, EVP.

Raudive and many others (Friedrich Jürgenson, Sarah Estep, Peter Bander, etc.)
have provided compelling data to suggest that some audio recording devices may be
capable of capturing audiotape from discarnate entities or the spirit world. What has
been noticeably absent in scientific discourse of natural explanations however, is
discussion about the possible longevity of radio transmissions, and whether
electronically transmitted sounds might possible be perpetually captured in the
ethereal void in a format that may be played back randomly – particularly when an
individual human ear is making efforts to discern a specific ‘voice’ or ‘message’
originating from a distinct person or interest or departed relative. Specifically, each
human presence on earth may leave a record of dialogue at some point in history:
perhaps the earth itself, or magnetic field around the earth, or an alternative,
heretofore unknown dimension, provides a vehicle suitable to audio-record human
voices in the firmament somewhere, and when EVP devices are used to locate and
isolate those communications, our selective hearing helps us to filter out the white
noise and discern (or audio-matrix) voices that we seek to hear (pareidolia again).

The most important element to consider, however, is that the audio recorded
from EVPs is often far too subjective to present any specific or definitive evidence of
paranormal activity – while the techniques itself is relatively easy to apply, there does not seem to be any logical explanation that voices or sounds discernable on the same, real-time level, or frequencies audible to humans during the playback (without processing) should not have be simultaneously audible during the act of initial recording.

Arguably, we must acknowledge that our understanding of the full spectrum and breadth of our electronic media (and possibly the realms, dimensions, worlds, frequencies, realities, etc. that our broadcast radio and television waves might reach - and vice versa), has yet to be fully understood. We do know that humankind’s use of electronic signals and recording instruments are sensitive and sophisticated enough to record, analyse, and transmit data collected from the outer planets of our solar system, or even from the ends of the known universe (NASA’s COBE satellite), so it would be presumptuous and cavalier of us to ignore the possibility that these technologies might not have the ability to provide a conduit into other, heretofore undiscovered dimensions or realms.

EMF Detectors

Electromagnetic fields are present around any object which possesses an electrical charge. As one of the four fundamental forces of nature, EMFs are not necessarily preternatural by definition. The positive aspect of that premise is that EMFs and increases or decreases in measured milligauss readings are, hereby, physically measurable. The conundrum however, is that, since EMFs are a scientifically proven, naturally occurring phenomena, can variations in EMF fields, thereby, truly be influenced by supernatural forces?

This would present another paradox in itself - the seemingly absurd notion that ‘paranormal’ activity would be observable, or quantifiable, through ‘normal,’ or non-paranormal, technologies. This paradox itself may define the futility of the current investigative methodologies and tools applied by the contemporary paranormal investigator.

Somewhere in the evolution of psychical research, a theory was set forth that, paranormal apparitions, in the process of manifesting or passing through an area, would cause a variation in EMFs recorded at that site. It should be noted that this theory has never been quantifiably validated – that the theory continues to this day as simply that… a theory.

Far too many paranormal researchers assume that, when dynamic fluctuations in EMFs occur, and all known causes are ruled out, that the sole diagnosis remaining is that some form of paranormal cause can be validated. Some television programs (i.e., Paranormal State) place a singular focus on EMF increases as providing definitive proof that paranormal activity exists. Instead, EMF detectors should primarily be used to determine and rule out natural causes of suspected paranormal activity, instead of providing praeve faci evidence of ghostly activity or the manifestation of
an apparition. There are far too many natural occurring reasons why EMF fluctuations happen in the field, and there is still no body of scientific data to support the theory that ghostly manifestations generate EMF increases or ‘spikes’.

Now accordingly, recognising that EMF detectors record fields that operate on level governed by quantum mechanics, and that quantum mechanics involve principles operating at the atomic level of matter (and further, that some of these principles appear to act against the expectations that we would expect natural systems to behave), perhaps there is some heretofore unverified relationship between the increase in milligauss readings, and the apparent dimension-shift or apparition of ghosts. While the possibility should remain open in our minds, we need to understand that, until a plausible connection has been established, that EMF increases, like orbs, should also not be considered as definite evidence of paranormal activity.

Psychics and Sensitives

Professional groups should also understand that the underlying purpose of paranormal research is to obtain quantifiable evidence that scientifically proves the existence of phenomena or realms outside of the current body of knowledge. Very often, the impressions of sensitives, psychics, or others who claim the unverifiable ability to ‘channel energies’ or spirits, are given significant validity during an investigation – even when those abilities are reportedly ‘validated’ or ‘verified’ by other psychics or sensitives in a group, the value of such information is questionable at best, unless it can also be additionally validated using a quantifiable methodology, such as audio or videotaped evidence, historical research or client verification, official records, etc.

Frequently, sensitives or psychics in a group sometimes appear more interested in showcasing their own personalities, or building up a group identity to address their own individual psychological needs. Commonplace with those more established groups, sensitives begin with a team, then either branch out on their own as a result of group friction, or co-join with others who have collaborated or validated their impressions during investigations, and form macro-factions within, or ultimately, apart from the larger group. In many of the newer groups experiencing dynamic membership stages, there appear to be more stable cohorts of technical specialists (techs), who tend to remain with one group longer that do the sensitives (perhaps due to the more dynamic or capricious nature of their personalities).

In any event, the more successful groups manage to combine skilled technicians with a small number of sensitives, who most effectively deliver their skill-sets on a quieter level, and who do not use them to predispose or ‘telegraph’ the tenor or cadence of investigations. Effective sensitives document their field observations privately, and then afterward use their skills to independently validate or elucidate data collected during the investigation, or during the investigation, they subtly suggest room, location, or area shifts where they are inclined to interpret that more productive data or possible audio-video evidence might be collected. Sensitive-
collected data – due to the presently subjective or unverifiable nature of its credibility – should not be substantially included in any client out-brief or field report.

Paranormal researchers who do claim psychic capabilities should ultimately understand the importance of credibility, and they should not feel threatened nor challenged if requested to show evidence of a skill that, at best invalidated, can only be considered as a subjective ‘impression’ or ‘interpretation’ of a site or location. Groups utilizing sensitives or psychics among their investigation teams should also be willing to engage their sensitives to controlled (voluntary) Zener Card\textsuperscript{iii} or Ganzfeld\textsuperscript{iv} experimentation. In order to provide transparency and disclosure to clients, the results from those experiments might also be openly and willingly shared, if desired, with any subject for whom those sensitives or psychics might conduct future group investigations.

Due to the inherently sentient or spiritual nature of the human conditions, it would seem that the human mind (i.e., the senses of true psychic or sensitives) should provide the most objective analysis tool to determine whether something is of normal or paranormal origin. With the proper pre-screening controls, checks, and balances, the human mind (insomuch as we still do not understand its full potential and capabilities) may, in fact, provide the best medium to assess psychical events.

Notwithstanding my prior criticism of the use of sensitives as a tool for psychical research, I do believe that experiments exploring the inert capabilities of the human mind present one of the most promising (albeit unrevealed) prospects for definitive inter-dimensional contact. The operative notion is that sensitives, when used to facilitate such contact, must first be thoroughly vetted for capability, competence, and credibility (and not accepted uncontested), prior to their adoption as a viable investigative element on paranormal teams.

**On Other Methodologies**

Oftentimes, paranormal investigations depicted on popular broadcast television shows present ghost hunting teams entering ethnically diverse locations (i.e. GHI’s investigations of Banffy and Poienari Castles in Romania, Cachtice and Predjama Castles in Slovenia, etc.), then conducting their communication or EVP sessions using the English language. Arguably, the transition into an otherworldly dimension does not come complete with universal translation services; if the intention were to communicate or provoke responses from disembodied entities, it would seem obvious that a familiar language (and even vernacular, if the era preceded contemporary times over a century or more) should be applied in the effort. Most amateur groups on television, however, storm into foreign investigation sites and proceed to announce their presence and engage the entities in the English language (e.g., GHI investigation of Karosta Prison in Latvia, and Borgvattnet Vicarage in Sweden), expecting to earn credible results.
Additionally, assumptions are commonly made that spirits or entities have the desire (if not the capacity) to respond to comments or questions asked from those remaining on the worldly plain. In the case where a perceived or research-supported historical rationale justifying ‘interaction’ (i.e., unexpected death, tragedy, remorse for deeds undone or done unjustly, etc.), the prospect might indeed be supported. Yet there seems to be an absurdity in the notion that individuals, having passed from the trappings of the mortal realm, into the afterworld (or even into some level of purgatory or interim state of being) would have the capability to transcend inter-dimensional boundaries, and create a coherent channel of communication with earthly audiences.

Contemporary understanding of the space-time continuum and the laws of physics supports the premise that linear time only moves forward, and that travel backward in time is not, in practical terms, theoretically possible. Hereby, it is valid to think that any spirit that had passed onward from our dimension, and who is continuing the existential journey forward through the theoretical space-time continuum, would be (in accord with the laws of physics) unable to communicate backward into the past, to the chronological spot on the linear space-time continuum where the communicating paranormal researchers resides.

Notwithstanding that this hypothesis does not account for the possibility that future paranormal researchers might be able to develop methodologies to communicate forward along the linear space-time continuum, into the future, toward the direction in which the forward-passing spirit may be travelling. But it is safe to say that most, if not all, paranormal researchers are quite likely not aware of such a premise, and are thereby not inclined to even consider the prospect that spirits may not, according to the laws of physics, be able to interact with those remaining on the mortal plain, nor perhaps even recognize the fact that they now travel a different path than do those here on the earthly realm.

The current, repetitive research methodologies applied by most amateur groups are not effective enough to produce definitive evidence of inter-dimensional response or communication. Accordingly, there is a consensus among behavioural psychologists that certain, powerful human emotions are more likely to solicit responses from other humans (including those passed, if, accordingly, they are still able to sense earthbound emotions); these emotions include sexual attraction/desire, anger, and/or distress. In order to move the field forward and explore more innovative methods, it might be suitable to apply this knowledge during paranormal investigations. Experiments designed to create or influence preternatural responses might be more successful if such emotions, or circumstances involving such emotions, are used as triggers or perhaps even as lures. Some televised programs have shown paranormal researchers using taunts or other antagonistic attempts to provoke an angry response from apparitions by using insults, challenges, mockery, and even profanity.
While considered distasteful or irreverent to some researchers, the act of provoking a response from a passed spirit, from a psychological standpoint, is a valid, albeit uncomfortable, methodology fitting for further exploration and experimentation under the appropriate conditions.

In the early 1970s, a cohort of the Toronto Society for Psychical Research (TSPR), lead by paranormal researcher Alan Owen, conducted an experiment in which they ‘visualised’ the existence of a historical mid-1600 character named ‘Philip Aylesfordxv.’ The intent of the experiment was to examine whether meditation and visualization (in this case, a group’s effort to collectively image and manifest an artificial personality) could actually result in the manifestation, or apparition, of paranormal origin. The positive results of the controlled experiment (which included psychokinetic phenomena recorded on video and on live television) suggest that the collective subconscious of a group of focused individuals may have an effect on the outcome of paranormal or (in this case psychokinetic) investigations or experiments.

This prospect should also be taken into consideration during field investigations. Paranormal research teams – particularly the smaller, amateur groups commonly chartered in cities around the world, mostly seek to validate individually-held beliefs that the supernatural does exist. If evidence of manifestations occur as a result of a groups’ inherent desire (visualization) to see such activity, the evidence could certainly be characterized as paranormal, albeit anthropogenic (internal), versus non-anthropogenic, or preternatural (external) in origin.

Summary

Contemporary psychical research methodologies have, as of yet, failed to produce sufficient proof that a paranormal world exists. Mainstream ghost-hunting activities conducted largely by amateur and casual paranormal groups continue to lack the scientific rigour, ingenuity or innovativeness to move the field ahead and potentially bring new results, or definitive evidence, into existence. Participants in paranormal research efforts – both amateur and institutional, must continue to recognize that true progress in these arenas would best occur when ineffective methodologies are retired and new, scientifically defensible methods are conceived, implemented, and executed. Most importantly however, the current paranormal research community must adopt a willingness to cease sensationalizing the field and to vocally reject the ambiguity resulting from poorly conducted or disingenuous research.

Despite the current lack of emergent evidence, psychical research does still present a potential conduit into alternative dimensions and realities that we, as a collective, may not yet find universally plausible, nor in some cases, palatable. While some evidence does exist to suggest that some individuals may have actually experienced trace or fleeting glimpses into the realms of the paranormal or into alternate realities and/or dimensions, it is apparent that the majority of our culture
would find the emergence of a metaphysical element to life as a shocking, unsettling occurrence.

Ironically, while the majority of sentient human beings are inherently spiritual in nature, the broadcast acceptance of paranormal phenomena continues to fluctuate, even as a vast majority of cultures continue to express devout and orthodox belief in the world’s various religions, or in a higher deity, prayer and divine intervention. In fact, what is considered as prayer to some people may also simply be a manifestation of psychokinesis\textsuperscript{xvi}; what may be consider divine revelation to some could simply be evidence of telepathy, remote viewing, or ‘thought-transference’. In this capacity, while there may be a distinct dichotomy in the conceptual approach between religion and a belief in the paranormal; the underlying importance of religion as a fundamental control mechanism governing societal behaviour, morality, laws and ethics, must not be undervalued.

Alternatively, while the pragmatic advantage that we, as a society, extract from a belief in the paranormal, may not yet be universally apparent nor outwardly beneficial as that of our collective embrace of religion, there are still some very significant reasons for us to pursue paranormal research – even as a large segment of the scientific community see the fields as pseudoscience.

If we are able to effectively prove the existence of ghosts, we will, in essence, have been able to prove in the existence of God (or of the Goddess!).

That, in itself, would be an inconceivable accomplishment for all of humankind, and, that prospect alone, perhaps, might underscore the prime purpose of why we, as a society, should continue pursuing, promoting, and promulgating more ambitious and evolutionary studies and explorations in the realm of psychical and paranormal research.

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\textit{Michael Kundu became an associate member of the U.K. Society for Psychical Research in 1986; today he remains active with the Washington State Ghost Society (WSGS). A Canadian ex-patriot living in the United States, Kundu writes from his home in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State.}

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