



**BOOK AND
MULTIMEDIA
REVIEW**

Paranormal Ruptures: Critical Approaches to Exceptional Experiences

Renaud Evrard

Laboratory Interpsy, Universi-
ty of Lorraine, France

Renaud.evrard@univ-lorraine.fr



ISBN: 978-1954528734

Paranormal Ruptures: Critical
Approaches to Exceptional
Experiences: Beyond The Fray
Publishing.

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20243093>

PLATINUM OPEN ACCESS



Creative Commons License 4.0.
CC-BY-NC. Attribution required.
No commercial use.

This book, edited by Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of West Georgia, Jake Glazier, contains ten chapters, a preface, and an introduction. According to the title, the aim is to join two fields: *critical theories* and *exceptional experiences*. I am more familiar with the latter, so I was more surprised by the critical approaches. I do not think there are a lot of readers who master both sides; therefore, a great quality of the book is that it creates that connection. It can become the first of a long series of bookstore' UFOs.

The preface by Robin Wooffitt is based on his own story: How a teenager with huge questions about the boundaries of reality went to a sociology department (and became a great professor there) even while the door seemed close to research into the "paranormal." Although some other psychologists succeed in embracing this liminal field, Wooffitt captures how social and human sciences are necessary to give the full picture of what is going on with such intimate experiences interpreted as paranormal, supernatural, or anomalous.

In his introduction, Jake Glazier lists some contributions from critical theories to exceptional experiences but shows there are only a few, and more are expected. "These forays, while laudable, nonetheless, pale in comparison to the impact that critical theory has had on the social sciences (Parker, 2015), cultural studies (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000), and the academy more generally (Lyotard, 1984)." He discussed such authors as Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway, Derrida, Abraham, and Torok, who offer potential entries into the book's topic. Unfortunately, I didn't catch where critical approaches begin and end or how authors can be recruited to say something relevant to paranormal tropes. Glazier even concluded by expanding critical theory properly to the paranormal, which is inherently subversive, "insofar as it expands and challenges normative models while, simultaneously, generating fresh ways to understand our co-constitutive relationship with others, importantly including non-humans, and our larger ecosystems." In some ways, the book is about how the paranormal challenges thinking everywhere it is introduced.

On such bases, it is not surprising that the book proceeds forward in many directions. This can be seen as a deficit or as a quality. Readers will always be surprised by the chosen perspectives, which are always original. They have to be really open-minded and curious, as it is unlikely that readers will enter the book with knowledge of all the various subjects, which include Lacanian psychoanalysis, ufology, sasquatch research, exceptional experiences, anthropology, fractals, esotericism, phenomenology, artificial intelligence, and others. The effects created by this multifariousness can induce a kind of discomfort, with some readers likely to develop more affinity with some chapters than with the whole book. However, this provides a kind of *work-in-progress* process in-



side the reader: What subject area or chapter is useful to dig into in order to understand the richness of the world better?

The introduction provides summaries of each chapter, but they are still very technical, merging high-level academic approaches with unusual phenomena. The feeling of being lost or unable to understand where the book is going, the reader may appeal for more reassuring guidance. This is found in the first chapter. Chapter 1, by Jake Glazier, gives five clear subtopics: (1) strategic ontologies; (2) positionality and the experimenter effect; (3) exceptional experiences as subjugated knowledge; (4) minor science and traversing cartographies; (5) and post-media battles over narratives. They are all very relevant despite the cryptic vocabulary, which requires systematic use of a decoder.

“Strategic ontologies” seems a way to subvert “hegemonic ontology” (often in singular). This subversive function is one among those played by parapsychology (Evrard, 2016). “Positionality” brings the “psi experimenter effect” as a huge challenge for (philosophy of) sciences (as explained by Rabeyron, 2020, quoted once in Chapter 4). It is interesting that Glazier focuses on the notion of “hegemony” as that which studies of psi and exceptional experiences are fighting. In Germany, Anna Lux and Sylvia Paleschek (2016) talked about *non-hegemonic knowledge* for parapsychology and other marginalized or rejected forms of knowledge. Alternatively, Glazier refers to Foucault’s *subjugated knowledge*. It can be interesting to read sociologist Michael Schetsche (2013) regarding the social control exerted on exceptional experiences (in general, German researchers’ contributions to the book topic have not been taken into account).

In the same vein, the concept of “minor science” at the periphery of the mainstream replicates the same idea. Glazier describes how the battle playground is also inevitably mediatic (information war). Skeptical Guerrilla on Wikipedia may have been chosen as a good concrete illustration of this (Murphy-Morgan et al., 2021).

Cartographies and transversality are described as critical interventions to scout and represent the terrain before integrating it into our research practices and thinking. This and the conclusion may be connected with “reflexive anomalistics,” the epistemology developed by German researchers for many years (Mayer & Schetsche, 2016). A balance should be reached to be as much interested in modeling “truths” as in identifying research dynamics.

Chapter 2 by David S. B. Mitchell advances the demarginalization of cryptozoology research, another domain inside anomalistics. The author analyzes the data as another kind of “apparition experience” as provided in

the field of parapsychology and exceptional experiences, as they recovered several of their characteristics (like “supernormal abilities of hirsute hunters”). He describes tricksterian entities with violent and sexual goals. The notion of “Simianization of the Other” provides a nice bridge with Lacanian psychoanalysis, which helps introduce the atmosphere of paranoia and fear around these experiences and their study. In some ways, this unusual field can be largely connected with topics discussed in other areas.

Chapter 3 by Jack Hunter resumes the concept of “high strangeness” taken from an anthropological perspective. It is interesting to see layers in the paranormal, where parapsychologists can see ufology as stranger than the phenomena they are studying or the reverse. Beyond these discipline boundaries, every individual has their own “boggle threshold,” as articulated by Renée Haynes (1980). “High strangeness” emerged from ufological research, where it constitutes an ordinal variable that helps categorize observations. This nomad concept is a good example of cross-fertility in anomalistics. Hunter defines high strangeness experiences as *complex paranormal experiences with multiple, often overlapping, contributing factors*. This is totally unspecific; therefore, Hunter refers to a book he recently edited (Hunter, 2023). “Weirdness,” “wrongness,” “peculiarity,” “Oz factor”, are very blurred and relative concepts. Hunter nevertheless found it useful to introduce alternative experiences of existence, like altered states of consciousness, trans-mediumisation, and intersubjective participation. There is a kind of theoretical fecundity for this intermediary domain, thanks to the audacity of the “high strangeness” concept that urges researchers not to avoid but to seek the weirdest things.

Psychology professor Christine Simmonds-Moore explored a new avenue in Chapter 4 with “fractals,” inspired by transpersonal researcher Marks-Tarlow and his collaborators (2020). The literature review is great and shows many entanglements between fractals and psychology. It is a pity she missed how fractals have been used for decades in the experimental psychokinesis research by Walter von Lucadou (Walach et al., 2020), even if his theoretical contributions are mentioned. She shows a huge connection between fractals and liminality, which opens doors to other constructs like transliminality, transubjectivity, and entanglement correlations. Her conclusion explained the goal she pursued:

A fractal lens allows parapsychology to embrace the inherently liminal and fractal-like nature of consciousness and anomalous information transfer (psi) and to promote different ways of exploring and understanding these phenomena. By so doing, this can result in new insights and

provides a framework for making sense of these phenomena, which will facilitate their acceptability and allow us to reclaim the anomalous. Such an approach honors the trickster-like nature of psi phenomena (e.g., Hansen, 2001) that moves away from reifying psi phenomena as objects, researchers as skeptics versus believers, and participants as sheep versus goats and replaces them in their embedded, interconnected, meaningful, and relational context that is based on resonance (self-similarity). In terms of psi research, this implies that there should be less focus on 'finding psi', and rather, more focus on fostering the liminal (fractal) spaces where psi emerges.

Chapter 5 by Claude Berghmans explores the concept of "Thought-Form" through various perspectives, especially esotericism, a knowledge often rejected from "science-prone" anomalistics, parapsychology, and anthropology. The analysis represents a tentative reification of the mind, useful to explain some pervasive good and bad effects (like the energetic existence of trauma in a subtle world), especially explored in alternative therapeutic settings. In this alternative reality, "humans have subtle bodies which represent several energetic layers manifesting themselves in a multidimensional reality." Berghmans covers a large amount of literature and asked for more research on "thoughts-forms" as the topic has not yet been systemically explored in scientific circles.

Chapter 6 by Anastasia Wasko linked parapsychology, psychosynthesis, and the trickster archetype. In my opinion, this chapter is weaker than the others, as always in collective books. The main ideas of psychosynthesis are promoted in an almost uncritical way, deploring how Western science seems not ready to discuss spirituality while there already is a lot of research on this area. Recent research by Francesco Baroni (2023) might have been useful to explore the link with parapsychology.

Timothy J. Beck explores in Chapter 7, "Algorithm Magic and Neurodivergent Belief in a Post-Normal World." This is another conceptual glimpse that associates the paranormal with something apparently unrelated: neurodiversity. But in fact, many people use this new word to promote tolerance, social justice, and alternative ways to identify themselves. This converges when *post-normal* possibilities (Walker, 2021, quoted in the chapter) are said to overlap with traditional conversations about the *paranormal*. It looks like heterodoxies tend to blend together (Evrard, 2014a), as Hansen (2001) has already guessed. A good example can be the Hearing Voices Movement (see Evrard, 2014b), where people subvert psychiatric catego-

ries to promote their own non-normative interpretations of their experiences. The chapter may have been better if the author had chosen one specific case on which to apply his ideas.

Stephen Webley and Peter Zackariasson used Chapter 8 to analyze the aftereffects of the renaming from UFO to UAP. The gain in respectability in ufology seems to introduce internal boundary-work as to "discipline heterodoxies" (Hess, 1992). Thus, a cut is tentatively made between pop culture and serious research. In the same vein, "psi" is differentiated from "paranormal" again and again. This opportunity let the authors apply Lacanian theory to some ufologists and to the field in general and to conclude:

The substitution of "phenomena" for "object" suggests a symbolic transformation, emphasizing a departure from a narrow focus on the materiality of sightings towards a more open-ended exploration of diverse occurrences. This linguistic change reflects a collective effort to broaden our understanding of these phenomena and acknowledge the discursive lack of authority surrounding them.

But even the Lacanian concepts are used in a non-sophisticated way and do not provide important insights.

Chapter 9 by John L. Roberts talked about the film *Ariel Phenomenon*, which depicted an incident in Zimbabwe in 1994, with an exceptional number of witnesses, 62 children, who ranged in age between 6-12, of differing ethnic backgrounds. Group sightings of UFOs/UAPs, particularly those involving children, introduce several questions that solicited a psycho-social model of understanding. The dominant framework offers several hypotheses to account for such anomalies: false memory, memory distortion, heightened levels of fantasy, blurred boundaries between subject and fantasy, dreams and reveries, dissociative disorder, memories screening trauma, and the deception-proneness of children. How do UFO researchers find their way through all these prosaic explanations? Even with such an amount of witnesses? Differences between adults' and children's cognitive and perceptual abilities are then discussed by the various actors and reflect a never-ending debate (Bacon & Ruickbie, 2020).

Christopher Senn is the author of the last chapter, exploring artificial intelligence (AI) through its latest developments and associated scandals. What if the Internet is a living organism? This is a tremendous starter for this chapter. The chapter then explores how various computer engineers claim that AI went much further than what they expected, moving on to Sci-Fi themes of the good

old days (like hive-mind artificial intelligence, new forms of sentience, AI's rights, and human laws). Methodologically, Senn cleverly shows how social sciences can be qualified to discuss natural sciences and technologies:

“C.G. Jung (1991) began his book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* by admitting that, as a psychologist, he was not qualified to testify as to whether or not extraterrestrials began invading our world in the 1950s but could only deal with the psychic aspects of ufology. I must similarly confess that I am not qualified to deal with the specifics of modern computer programming languages or the endless nuances of the mind-boggling algorithms of artificial neurons. However, it appears that no one else completely understands them either.”

AI is part of our modern myths and anomalies, and researchers are clearly trained to face them. This chapter is very lively and funny, behind the strong reflections it carries. Just like this book, in the end.

REFERENCES

- Bacon, S., & Ruickbie, L. (Eds.) (2020). *The cultural construction of monstrous children: Essays on anomalous children from 1595 to the present day*. Anthem Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv20pxz1b>
- Baroni, F. (2023). Introduction. Roberto Assagioli and parapsychology. In K. Sørensen (Dir.), *Psychosynthesis and Parapsychology, 2nd edition* (pp. 9–32). <https://kennethsorensen.dk/en/product/psychosynthesis-and-parapsychology/>
- Evrard, R. (2014a). Heterodoxies' merging: Lacanian approaches to exceptional experiences. *Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology*, 2(1), 5–13.
- Evrard, R. (2014b). From symptom to difference: “Hearing voices” and exceptional experiences. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 78(3), 129–148.
- Evrard, R. (2016). The orthodoxization of psychology in France at the turn of the 20th century. In A. Lux, & S. Paletschek (Dir.), *Okkultismus im Gehäuse. Institutionalisierungen von Parapsychologie im 20. Jahrhundert in internationaler Perspektive* (pp. 173-199). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466638-007>
- Fuery P., & Mansfield N. (2000). *Cultural studies and critical theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Hansen, G. P. (2001). *The trickster and the paranormal*. Xlibris Corporation.
- Haynes, R. (1980). The boggle threshold. *Antennae*, 92–97.
- Hess, D. J. (1992). Disciplining heterodoxy, circumventing discipline: Parapsychology, anthropologically. In D. Hess & L. Layne (Eds.), *Knowledge and society vol. 9: The anthropology of science and technology* (pp. 191–222). JAI Press.
- Hunter, J. (2023). *Deep weird: The varieties of high strangeness experience*. August Night Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1991). *Flying saucers: A modern myth of things seen in the sky*. Psychology Press.
- Lux, A., & Paletschek, S. (2016). *Okkultismus im Gehäuse: Institutionalisierungen der Parapsychologie im 20. Jahrhundert im internationalen Vergleich* (p. 433). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466638>
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772278>
- Marks-Tarlow, T., Shapiro, Y., Wolf, K. P., & Friedman, H. L. (Eds.). (2020). *A fractal epistemology for a scientific psychology: Bridging the personal with the transpersonal*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Mayer, G., & Schetsche, M. (2016). On anomalistics research: The paradigm of reflexive anomalistics. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 30(3), 374-397.
- Murphy-Morgan, C., McLuhan, R., & Cooper, C. E. (2021, July). Parapsychology's battle for the internet: A critical insight into the Wiki problem. In *Cyberpsychology Section Annual Conference 2021: Future Directions, Challenges and Opportunities in Cyberpsychology*.
- Parker I. (Ed.) (2015). *Handbook of critical psychology*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315726526>
- Rabeyron, T. (2020). Why most research findings about psi are false: The replicability crisis, the psi paradox, and the myth of Sisyphus. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 562992. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.562992>
- Schetsche, M. (2013). Pathologization as strategy for securing the wirklichkeit: The example of paranormal experiences. In M. Dellwing & M. Harbusch (Eds.), *Krankheitskonstruktionen und Krankheitstreiberi* (pp. 271–286.) Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18784-6_11
- Walach, H., Horan, M., Hinterberger, T., & von Lucadou, W. (2020). Evidence for anomalistic correlations between human behavior and a random event generator: Result of an independent replication of a micro-PK experiment. *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 7(2), 173-188. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cns0000199>
- Walker, N. (2021). *Neuroqueer heresies: Notes on the neurodiversity paradigm, autistic empowerment, and postnormal possibilities*. Autonomous Press.