Making sense of the paranormal: the interactional construction of unexplained experiences.

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Chapter 2: The (absent) body in research on paranormal phenomena

In the last chapter we outlined our intention to analyse the ways in which participants' bodies are centrally involved in the ways they make sense of events during paranormal investigations. Our argument is that sense making practices are embodied interactional practices, just as much as they are verbal, and in this and subsequent chapters we outline some key features of the body as a site for, and tool in, interpretations of events on a moment-by-moment basis.

The body is a relatively recent focus of sociological attention. For most of the discipline's history the body was largely ignored in favour of the mind and its attributes in relation to institutions and macro social processes. Sociology has explored the self, identity, knowledge, ideas, and ideologies more than embodiment, gesture, and gaze. Yet, as many have argued, the body was implicit in these core sociological concerns. A social class actor misguided by false class consciousness is not an incorporeal form, but is an embodied actor; the concept of the looking glass self proposes that our sense of identity emerges from our interpretations of others' interpretations of us, and these are displayed through gestures as much as they through spoken words; and it is hard to imagine how a sociology of the family could be complete without an understanding of the embodied affections, intimacies or aggressions that constitute everyday familial relationships. The body was always there, central to sociological concerns, yet never quite catching the gaze of the discipline; in Crossley's words, the body was an absent presence (Crossly, 2012).

This is also true of research on anomalous experiences. The earliest formal investigations of paranormal claims were conducted by members of the Society for Psychical Research, which was founded in 1882 as a response to claims of contact with the dead associated with spiritualism and secular mediumship (Broughton, 1991; Gauld, 1968). Mediumship at the time was associated with a range of physical events, which, it was claimed, demonstrated the presence of spirits; many of these centred around, or involved the body. In her historical account of the emergence of mediumship in England, Oppenheim describes the range of physical events which occur at seances.

> Some [mediums] specialized in particular effects, whereas others offered a broad repertoire of manifestations. That repertoire might include the materialization of entire spirit bodies - 'full form materialization' - in addition to the more commonplace rapping, table tilting, and the emergence of spirit hands. Reports of seances also told of furniture cavorting around the room, objects floating in the air, mediums levitating, musical instruments playing tunes by themselves, bells ringing, tambourines jangling, strange breezes blowing, weird lights glowing, alluring fragrances and ethereal music wafting through the air. From the bodies of some mediums a strange foamy, frothy or filmy substance, dubbed ectoplasm, might be seen to condense. (Oppenheim, 1985: 8)

It could be argued that the core phenomena offered to demonstrate the authenticity of mediumship and the objective reality of spirits were embodied. Participants in seances felt the gentle caress of spirit hands upon their own. Ectoplasm would extrude from mediums' bodies and form into physical spirit entities, capable (it was claimed) of interacting with the living bodies of people attending the séance. The medium Daniel Dunglas Home was reported to be able to levitate, hold hot coals without injury or pain, and even stretch his body, thereby increasing his height (Lamont, 2005). Given the clear centrality of embodied phenomenon to the phenomena that largely led to the formal study of paranormal claims, it is difficult to grasp how psychical research, and later, parapsychology, came to overlook the body.

But the body was overlooked; as in sociology, in research on anomalous experiences the body has been an absent presence. This is not a minor matter. In the first part of this chapter, we explain why the body's absent presence in research on anomalous experiences is significant. We do this by examining three areas of research: Ian Stevenson's pioneering work on evidence for reincarnation; the ganzfeld studies of extra-sensory perception in experimental parapsychology, and the occurrence and impact of anomalous communications in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. In each case, we show the way the body is central to the phenomena under study, and how research on these experiences may be enriched by explicit attention to their embodied qualities. In this way we identify key features to explore in our analysis of embodied interactions in the paranormal group data.

Ian Stevenson and the evidence for reincarnation

In this section we discuss Ian Stevenson's decades long investigation of evidence that a person's personality, can, after they die, be reborn in another body. Trained as a psychiatrist, Stevenson worked at the University of Virginia School of Medicine (eventually going on to establish the Division of Perceptual Studies, founded specifically to study paranormal phenomena). He began collecting evidence that seemed to suggest the personality of a deceased person could be reborn in another body in 1953 (Stevenson, 1970), and published numerous papers and books presenting his evidence and his interpretations. Towards the end of his career, he wrote two monographs. The first, entitled *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects* (Stevenson, 1997a) was, in his words, a 'medical monograph' (Stevenson, 1997b: xiii), an exhaustive catalogue of his accumulated evidence for reincarnation (over 2000 pages across two volumes). At the same time, he published a shorter companion volume which excluded much of the extensive documentation, and instead focused on summary reports of hundreds of case studies (though some photographic evidence was included). It is this second volume, *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect* (Stevenson, 1997b), that we draw on to discuss his work on evidence for reincarnation.

Although not unknown in the west, most of the cases that Stevenson and his colleagues investigated came from parts of the world where belief in reincarnation was a cultural tradition or core religious belief, such as regions of Turkey, Lebanon, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma, as it was then known) and West Africa. His commitment to investigating cases of possible reincarnation was quite extraordinary. He spent years travelling the world, interviewing children who claimed to be reincarnated personalities, and their families; he also attempted to locate and interview friends and family of the person now ostensibly reincarnated in a new body. In addition to interviews with relevant people, he collected more

objective kinds of evidence, such as pathologists' reports on bodies of people who had died in violent circumstances, and whose personality seemed to continue in a reincarnated form.

A striking feature of his data was that most cases involved children who claimed to remember a previous life. From the age of about two, up to until they were about eight, these children would speak of the past lives as if they were entirely real. So convinced were they of their prior existence that they would often find it difficult to distinguish between their current life and the one they claimed to have had previously. They might draw a distinction between their current parents and their parents before. They would describe their previously adult lives: which village or town they lived in, and their family home, and their husbands or wives and their children. Children would often recall the way that their previous life had ended. In fact

> A few children enact in their play the mode of death in the previous life, especially if it ended in suicide. One child who remembered a life that ended in suicidal hanging had the macabre habit of walking around with a piece of rope attached around his neck. Two children who remembered drowning themselves used to play at drowning. (Stevenson, 1997b: 8)

In many cases, the child might request that they visit the town or village where, in their previous life, they had lived. Parents would report that during these visits, the child seemed to know people and places they had not previously encountered, and about which they should have no knowledge.

For Stevenson, birth marks and defects on the body of the child were an important source of evidence about the reality of reincarnation. He reasoned that any correspondence between marks on the body of young children and marks on, or injuries to, the deceased person before their death (and which reflect the circumstances of their death) might be suggestive of the objective reality of some form of paranormal process, whereby a non-corporeal personality could manifest in another body. He was not interested in the mundane kinds of birth marks that most people have, but those that were unusual or conspicuous: 'hairless areas of puckered, scarlike tissue, often raised above surrounding tissues or depressed below them; a few are of decreased pigmentation. Some are bleeding or oozing when the baby is born' (Stevenson, 1997b:3). He was also interested in more severe forms of bodily impairment, such as disabilities, and missing digits and limbs. Stevenson even considered the possibility that, were the reality of reincarnation confirmed by the evidence, that it would offer an account for why some people but not others are born with unusual marks on their body or are born with bodily defects. Furthermore, it would explain why these appeared on, or afflicted, that part of the body, as opposed to elsewhere.

In his abridged account of the evidence for reincarnation, Stevenson provides hundreds of cases of birth marks and birth defects which were attributed to a previous personality. Here is an example that illustrates the evidential significance of birthmarks (and Stevenson's pursuit of objective scientific evidence).

> Metin Köybaşi was born in the village of Hatun Köy, near Iskenderun, Turkey, on June 11, 1963. Even before his birth, he had provisionally identified, on the basis of dreams his parents had had, as the reincarnation of a relative (Haşim Köybasi), who had been killed some 5 months before, during a postelection riot in the village.
>
> At his birth Metin was found to have a birthmark on the right side of the front of his neck. It was a small area of increased pigmentation. No informant told me to

> what wound this birthmark corresponded, and I did not know until I examined the postmortem report on Haşim Köybasi. This showed that the bullet which killed Haşim had entered his head behind the left ear and almost exited on the right side of the front of the neck. It did not, however, fully penetrate the skin; as sometimes happens, the resistance of the skin stopped the bullet before it exited. The pathologist had made a small incision and extracted the bullet. The birthmark therefore corresponded to the pathologist's postmortem wound…
>
> Like many other children…Metin showed powerful attitudes of vengefulness toward the man who had shot Haşim. He once tried to take his father's gun and shoot this person, but was fortunately restrained. (Stevenson, 1997b: 43-44)

Ostensibly, claims of reincarnation concern the *non-corporeal* personality, its continued existence despite the demise of the physical body, and processes which allow a return in the form of a new baby's body. Stevenson's work, however, focuses on the evidence provided by the *body*. His examination of correspondences between birth marks and defects on the living, and the various marks on the body of the deceased, provides evidence suggestive of paranormal processes which pose radical challenges to mainstream western scientific assumption of the material basis of consciousness and mind. But even if we take a sceptical view of the evidence compiled by Stevenson, the body is still relevant. Stevenson acknowledges that his cases come from countries and cultures in which there is acceptance of reincarnation. In these cultures, bodies of new-born babies may be inspected for signs of reincarnation. Indeed, he observes that in one interview a village elder lamented the fact the newer generation of parents no longer know how to inspect babies' bodies for signs of a reincarnated personality. So, in a culture in which parents may be predisposed to observe the body as a site on which evidence of reincarnation may be inscribed in embodied form, we may conclude that claims to reincarnation are a result of self-fulfilling prophecy which arise from culturally informed expectations and beliefs. In both the sceptical and more convinced perspective, the body is central to our understanding reports of reincarnation.

The role of the body requires more attention. Stevenson's data were primarily interviews with the child, the parents, and friends and family of the deceased person, and medical evidence. What was missing was an investigation of the child's body in everyday life. Given that the parents may have been raised in a culture predisposing them to believe in reincarnation, and in which the evidence for that process was to be found on the body, how did they interact with their child in the routine of family life? Where their expectations manifest in the way they held their child, or comported the body as they taught her how to tie laces, or hold eating implements, or a toothbrush? Were suspicions of reincarnation reflected in their gaze? How do parents talk to a child when there are grounds to believe that their child expresses the personality and memories of another? What are the intersecting verbal and embodied interactions through which the idea of 'their' child is negotiated, confirmed, or resisted? How can parents see the child as their own when the body bears the wounds of another? If the sceptical view has merit, it seems obvious that these are the everyday moments out of which will emerge the confirmation that reincarnation has occurred. And for those who are persuaded by Stevenson's evidence, then it is in these everyday embodied and verbal practices that the impact of reincarnation will be most keenly felt.

The ganzfeld experiment and extrasensory perception

Parapsychology is the study of experiences such as telepathy and clairvoyance that suggest anomalous interaction between people and their environment. They are said to be anomalous in that they seem to occur outside the known sensorimotor channels of communication. Although it emerged from early investigation of mediumship and spontaneous cases of apparitional phenomena (Gurney, Myers and Podmore, 1886), since the 1930s, parapsychology has adopted a distinctly scientific approach, reflecting the way that the parent discipline of psychology modelled itself on the methods of the natural sciences. The dominant methodological paradigm is the laboratory-based experiment, usually with members of the public as participants. The experimental orientation of the discipline can be seen in pretty much all serious introductions to or overviews of the field (for example, Broughton, 1991; Cardeña, Palmer and Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015; Edge, Morris, Palmer and Rush, 1986; Irwin, 1997; Radin, 1997).

One of the key contemporary methodologies is the ganzfeld procedure; the description which follows is based on the procedure developed in a series of experiments conducted at the University of Edinburgh Koestler Parapsychology Unit during the 1990s (Honorton *et al*, 1990; Morris, *et al*, 1995). The discussion that follows comes from a conversation analytic study of experimenter-subject interaction from the Edinburgh ganzfeld experiments (Wooffitt, 2007; Wooffitt and Allistone, 2008; Wooffitt and Holt, 2010; 2011,).

During the experiment, a sender is shown a video clip randomly selected from a large database, and their task is to focus on an aspect of that clip and mentally project it to the participant in a different part of the building. After the sending period the participant is shown four video clips: the target and three others. On the basis of the images and sensations experienced during the sending phase, she or he has to nominate which clip they think the sender was trying to project. By chance, the participant will select the right clip 25% of the time, thereby given the experimenters a secure baseline from which to assess the statistical significance of above chance rates of correct identification, if they occur.

In the ganzfeld experiment research participants are placed in an environment that minimises sensory input. The theory is that psi (the term used in parapsychology to refer to the generic extra sensory capacity that may underpin all parapsychological phenomena) may be a weak form of signal transmission, and therefore the brain will be better able to detect that signal if is it in a state of reduced activity. To ensure the participant is relaxed and in a mild state of sensory deprivation, before the experiment they are played a relaxation tape through headphones. Through the actual sending period they are played white noise to further reduce sensory unput. They are alone in a room, seated in a comfortable chair, reclining, sometimes prone. The room is illuminated by a soft red light, and translucent goggles (that resemble halved ping pong balls) are placed across the participant's eyes to ensure there is a diffuse and homogenous light distribution over the retina. (An internet search for images related to 'ganzfeld' will illustrate the unusual conditions of a typical experiment.)

Immediately we can see the role of the body: the participant's body is isolated, separated from other bodies. They are in an unfamiliar environment, a room in a university building. The head is adorned with headphones and the translucent goggles, both of which are intended to induce a relaxed state in the mind and the body. Their bodies are positioned to facilitate relaxation. The experiment rests on a series of bodily regimes; and the participant's experience of the experiment (which typically lasts over an hour) is entirely determined by the way their body is isolated from other bodies, positioned, illuminated, and deprived of

normal external stimuli. This was significant to the experiment in two ways, neither of which were systemically addressed in the published accounts of the experimental results.

During the sending period, the participant is required to describe out loud the images, thoughts and experiences that impinged upon their consciousness. This introspective report is important to the experimenter; it was argued that if psi was a real but unusual form of communication, the reported imagery could provide clues as to how psi manifests in consciousness and interacts with other cognitive functions. The participants' verbal reports of their experience during the sending period, called the mentations, are recorded. Analysis of the recordings reveal that on occasions the participants reflect on their own bodily states as a way of trying to make sense of the imagery and sensations they experience. Here is an extract from the start of one of the mentation reports.

Extract 1: (From Wooffitt and Holt, 2011: 59. 'P' is the participant.)

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1    P:   the first thing I notice is um for a start that my body doesn't
2         feel (1.3) quite as though I'm sitting in a chair it- it's as
3         though my arms feel this uh they were  the other way up than they
4         were to start off with and bu- I'm I'm not sort've sitting in the
5         same position (1.5) that almost as though it e- the feeling that
6         you might get if you're sort've drifting in space
7         (20.3)
8         there seems to be some sort've impression of um: (1.3)
9         I mean maybe it's the it's the noise that's reminding me of the
10        sea but s'rt've sitting on a- a- a- a- cliff on on on the top of
11        a hill an- (1.3) not so much hearing the sea as j'st s'rt've
12        staring out at a big expanse of of of sea
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The participant is fully aware that they are taking part in an experiment to test for extrasensory communication, and that someone is trying mentally to project images into their consciousness. They have been told that the imagery they experience during the sending period is invaluable because it might reveal how psi works. So, they are predisposed to consider their inner experience as potentially originating not in their own mind, but in the mind of someone else. It is unsurprising, therefore, that participants try to reason as to the source of their experiences, and the body is a key resource in that reasoning process. Here the participant reports a sense of dissociation between his inner experience and the position he knows his body to be in. This acknowledges the possibility that his internal mental sensations may be informed by something other than his objective bodily circumstances. Later he reports hearing the sound of the sea (lines 9 to 12). However, this is rationalised by reference to the white noise he is hearing through the headphones. In this case, a phenomenon of consciousness is explained in non-paranormal terms. In this short series of reports, then, the body is invoked both to facilitate a potential paranormal interpretation and to account for a sensation in rational, non-paranormal terms.

During the mentation report, the experimenter listens (through headphones) and takes notes of what the participant said. At the end of the sending period, when the mentation report is complete, the experimenter engages via the headphones with the participants. At this point they go through the mentation review. This allows the experimenter to check the accuracy of their record of the mention, but it also provides the participant the opportunity to expand on and provide more details of their imagery during the sending period. The review consists of a series of stepwise phases: the experimenter reads out one item from their record, the participant confirms it (often by not saying anything) or corrects it and the experimenter

moves on to the next item from their record. Sometimes the participants expand upon their imagery. When this occurs, the experimenter would usually receipt this expansion with 'okay' and invariably this marks the end of that expansion sequence, and they move on to the next item from the experimenter's record.

On occasion, the experimenter receipts the expansion with 'mm hm'. When this happens, the participants speak again, thereby demonstrating that they hear the experimenter's 'mm hm' as signalling that their prior expansion was somehow incomplete. In their subsequent, talk, in various ways, participants now cast doubt on the imagery they had just reported. In these doubt-marked expansion sequences (Wooffitt, 2007) the body might be invoked to find a non-paranormal explanation for internal imagery. In the following case, in line 1 the experimenter ('E') receipts the confirmation of prior imagery (not shown in this transcript) and moves into the next item reported by the participant: imagery of a chair in a pyramid.

Extract 2: (From Wooffitt, 2007: 485-486)

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1     E:    °˙(n)hh° °o:kay,° (tk).˙hh and then I think the final
2           thing you said was uh:: (.) ˙h something like a chair (.) >in<
3           in a pyramid?
3     P:    °(n)hh° yeah, >saw the< (.) the triangle thing again and then
4           (.) °.˙h° >something< which reminded me of like, (.) um, (0.5)
5           ˙h an upright chair like um:, (1.5) °(n)hhh° (.) um:? >°so-°<
6           like a black chair,
7           (1.4)
8     E:    m:hm
9           (0.5)
10    P:    not like the one I'm sitting on or °anything° jus:::t °uh:°
11          (3.5) >I don't know,< it  was >sort of< °uhm:(h)° (2.1) >like a
12          s-< like a sort of padded chai(hh)r or  something °˙h° >it was
13          just< from the side that I saw it, so >it  was like< an ell
14          shape (.) °.˙h°  [that =
15    E:                     [°mhm°
16    P:    = suggested a chair:
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Here the experimenter reports the last imagery from the mentation, an image of a 'chair in a pyramid'. The participant expands upon this imagery, describing how this imagery relate to prior imagery, and then clarifying the image by reference to a physical chair. There is a gap of 1.5 seconds (line 5) then he says '>°so-°< like a black chair,', which summarises the prior turn. There is evidence that at this point, the participant has completed the turn: he does not say any more, and his last turn components did not project further talk was coming. When the experimenter acknowledges this expansion turn, he does not use 'okay' but says instead 'm:hm' (line 8).

Sounds such as 'mm hm' and 'uh huh' might seem minor (and they are often omitted from social science research papers that use interview transcripts), but they do important work in interaction. They can be used by a speaker to display that they are passing on an opportunity to take a turn as there is an expectation that the speaker has more to say, or should say more (Jefferson, 1984; Schegloff, 1982). This is what happens in this extract: following the 'mm hm' expansion receipt, the participant resumes his expansion. But in this post 'mm hm' turn, his stance and tone are markedly different. He is now clearly circumspect about what the imagery actually was, and hesitant of his own confidence in what he had just moments before reported without hesitation or equivocation. There is an explicit doubt marker, 'I don't know'. The post expansion turn is marked by perturbations and hesitations (such as intra turn

gaps, word stretching, and so on). But most relevant, he begins with a report of what the imagery *is not* like, and to do this he invokes his knowledge of his own body's circumstances at that moment.

Why does this matter? The design of the ganzfeld rests on the participant's decision as to which video clip he or she thinks the sender was projecting. That decision is informed by their imagery during the sending phase. The participant's uncertainty (displayed here as an interactional contingency, a response to one form of turn receipt over another) will impact on their decision during the judging phase. The success rate of the experiment may be influenced by the participant's reasoning about their imagery and sensations, and the circumstances of their body at that moment are a key resource in that reasoning.

The ganzfeld experimental methodology is important in parapsychology because it seems to offer replicable demonstration of extrasensory communication (Bem and Honorton, 1994; Bierman, 1995; Broughton and Alexander, 1995; Hyman and Honorton, 1986; Morris *et al.*, 1995; Parker, Grams and Pettersson, 1998). But the relevant scientific literature on the ganzfeld studies, from both advocate and sceptic, does not address the role of the body in the research process. Yet the ganzfeld, like many classic social psychology experiments, is a form of participatory theatre (Brannigan, 2004). While the participants in the ganzfeld were not deliberately misled about the purpose of the experiment (as happened, for example, in Milgram's obedience studies), they were required to play a part, to take on the role of experimental subject. And that role involved their physical isolation from other bodies, the manipulation of their body, and the various procedures employed to prepare their bodies for the experiment. That series of embodied conditions offered a set of resources by which the participants could reason about their experiences, and that reasoning would then inform their choices in the crucial judging phase of the experiment. The scientific value of the ganzfeld methodology in determining the objective reality of psi is inextricably linked to the bodies of the participants in those experiments.

Psychoanalysis and the porous self

It may seem odd that, in a discussion of the body and anomalous experiences, we turn to psychoanalysis, as it is taken to be concerned with mental health and the unconscious mind. However, anomalous forms of communication have been observed in psychoanalytic therapy since Freud, and the body is implicit in the way that psychoanalysis has addressed these ostensibly paranormal communications throughout its history. Sometimes, the body is explicitly tied to moments between patient and therapist that in other contexts would be classed as telepathic experiences.

The key issue here is the relationship between the intersubjectivity of the patient and the therapist. There is evidence that these independent subjectivities may influence each other through means we do not yet understand. The implication of these interacting intersubjectivities is that our assumptions about self as an independent entity - a subjectivity residing in a physically discrete body - may be less secure than we think. Stolorow has argued that relatively recent psychoanalytic approaches, that emphasise the interaction between patient and therapist, suggest that

> psychological phenomena, including even unconscious conflicts and defenses, are understood as properties of an intersubjective system...taking form at the interface of

> interacting subjectivities. Inexorably, we are led to question the very concept of an isolated mind or psyche. (Stolorow, 1991: 176)

This is an exciting proposal. But if we are to move beyond thinking of the mind in isolation from other minds, then we have to acknowledge the physical form in which that isolation is taken to manifest: as a property of the brain, in a head. This is so obvious that it is easily overlooked. Our sense of self is, for most people, associated with the play of consciousness upon the world, an awareness that seems to be behind the eyes. The body, particularly, the head, is the absent presence in proposals to treat the mind as a radically intersubjective and relational phenomenon.

Historical studies of research into the unconscious mind have shown that there is a long-standing link between unusual forms of communication and phenomena now recognised as dissociative states (Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970). Mesmer used the term *rapport* to capture the mysterious intimacies between therapist and patient in therapeutic consultations. Freud developed the concept of transference to capture affective relationships with his patient which seemed inexplicable in terms of normal means of communication. There is wide recognition that there is a relationship between paranormal communication and transference. Luckhurst argued that the concept of transference makes no sense without the concept of telepathy (Luckhurst, 2002). Similarly, the text on the cover of edited collection on psychoanalysis and the paranormal asks: 'What is the medium through which counter-transference, projective identification, unconscious communication all happen - if not telepathy?' (Totton, 2003). When Freud began his therapeutic work, he would sit facing the patient, body facing body. But he later changed his practices, instead sitting behind the patient, and out of sight. Although ostensibly this was designed to facilitate a more scientific and detached analysis of the patient's free association (Campbell and Pile 2015), it would suggest that Freud recognised the embodied dimensions of the mysterious phenomena he tried to capture with the concept of transference, despite his ambivalence on the topic of telepathy (Campbell and Pile, 2010; Massicotte, 2014; Thurschwell, 1999).

Since Freud, there has been occasional investigation of telepathy-like experiences in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Early work was brought together in a collection in 1953 that included Freud's writings on anomalous (or 'occult') phenomena (Devereux, 1953). In 1956 the eminent psychoanalyst Michael Balint wrote of his experiences of telepathy in clinical settings (Balint, 1956). Strean and Coleman-Nelson (1962) argued that telepathic events in clinical practice conformed to same psychodynamic laws as unconscious mental activity. Weiler (1967) proposed that most psychotherapists have experienced psi like events in therapy, and on the basis of his own data, he argued that the unconscious minds of two individuals can become aligned in a way not yet accounted for by Newtonian physics, a position supported by, among other psychoanalysts, Altman (2007), Cambray (2011), De Peyer (2016), Ehrenwald (1956), Eshel (2016), Major and Miller (1981), Meerloo (1968) and Rosenbaum (2011).

There has been even greater interest in telepathy in what has come to be known as relational psychoanalysis, which has become a popular psychoanalytic approach since the 1980s. Here, the analytic focus is less on the therapist's objective examination of the patient's unconscious processes; indeed, some core Freudian theories are rejected (Wooffitt, 2017). Instead, psychoanalytic therapy is viewed as the 'science of the intersubjective' (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984: 41). The interplay and relationality of the patient's and analyst's subjective worlds are taken to be central in understanding what happens in therapy. Intersubjectivity in

therapy is said to be an emergent property, independent of, and not reducible to, the combined subjectivities of the individual patient and analyst, and which is an independent agency (Altman, 2002; Benjamin, 2004; Ogden, 2004). In short, it is argued that in therapy 'the minds of analysand and analyst [are] essentially permeable to each other, with their confluence generating a 'third subjectivity', an intersubjectivity, distinctly different from the forms of subjectivity either brings, by itself, to the analytic encounter' (Mitchell and Aron, 1999: 460). The idea that minds are 'essentially permeable' leads us to Stolorow's conclusion that 'we are led to question the very concept of an isolated mind or psyche' (Stolorow 1991: 176). And if minds are permeable, so too are the bodies that house them. In the relational psychoanalytic literature, there is an openness to the reality of telepathy in therapy (Burton, 2012, de Peyer, 2014, 2016; Wooffitt, 2019) and a willingness to think critically about the view of the person as a separate entity bounded by the skin, apparently contained within the body.

The embodied dimension to the permeability of minds is often reflected in the focus on embodied affect: how changes in sense of self are tied to intensely felt emotion and affect arising from the emergent intersubjectivity of the therapeutic session (Cimino and Correale, 2005; Schneider and Grady, 2014; Schwartz-Salant; 1988; Silverman, 1988). Reflecting on her own experience as group analyst, Roseneil draws attention to the role of the body in moments of connectedness:

> 'In thinking about the most puzzling, moving and mutative moments in my experiences as both member and conductor of group analytic groups – *the moments when affect passes through people like electricity, when the atmosphere palpably changes, when members are able to grasp another's psychic reality despite the inadequacy of language to represent its depth and complexity* – it is not for concepts of individual and society that I reach, [but the language of] relationality, of process, permeability, and trans-subjectivity.' (Roseneil, 2013: 207; emphasis added.)

We are not making a case for the objective existence of telepathy in psychoanalytic therapy. But any assessment of that case has to take account of the body in moments that stand as evidence for the permeable and trans-subjective mind. Experiences that suggest anomalous communication are not merely forms of as yet unexplained information exchange; they are moments in which minds and bodies resonate with each other (Miller, 2015), in which enigmatic intimacies are felt across the body (Pile, 2012), and in which 'the dialogue of the unconsciouses' (Bass, 2015) seems to manifest in corporeal form.

The body in paranormal group investigations: some preliminary remarks

In the previous sections we have outlined how the body has been an absent presence in the study or experience of paranormal phenomena, both in the field, in the laboratory, and in the therapeutic hour. The body is implicated in the phenomena being investigated and the way those phenomena are studied. We have emphasised that the body can be a resource by which people make sense of their experience and can inform their reflections on whether or not paranormal phenomena are occurring. We have shown that it is important not merely to recognise that the body is relevant, but that it is necessary to observe the body in naturally occurring interaction, and to explore how the body intersects with the organisation of sense making in talk.

To illustrate the kinds of empirical issues that we can explore in the embodied interactions in paranormal group investigations, we will briefly examine the sequence of events represented in following extract. This comes from a paranormal investigation conducted by three participants, and they are using a Ouija board to communicate with spirits. By this stage in the investigation, the planchette has moved several times, and has spelled out the word 'Munthob', which the participants take to be a name, a self-identification by the spirit presumed to be moving the planchette. In addition to the Ouija board, this group were also using a Gauss meter.

The extract begins as two of the participants say 'Munthob' in overlap, nearly at the same time.

Extract 3: Munthob 78-90 (Throughout, to title the extracts, we use the words used by the original investigation group to refer to the event/investigation; line numbers to indicate where in a master transcript this sequence was taken.)

```
78    B:    H[ello Munthob
79    A:     [Munth↑ob↑
80          [(Gauss can be heard increasing in the background)
81          [(B and A look at each other. B bites bottom lip)
82    C:    Its defini[tely Mu[nthorb
83    B:                     [hhhhhhhhhhhhhh Jesus
84                    [(B and A look at C)
85                           [(B Leans in towards table, closes
86          eyes and exhales. A and C look at B)
87    C:    [You alright
88          [(B's eyes squinting still leaning forwards)
89    B:    [Yeh, I think my eyes watering   (3.0)      Jesus::
90          [(B turns head to left and closes eyes briefly)
```

Immediately after 'Munthob' is said aloud, the Gauss meter starts to generate an increasingly loud noise. Participants A and B look towards each other, and in C states 'It's definitely Munthorb' (line 82; C pronounces the name with a clear 'r' sound at the end), proposing that the spirit, in response to the use of its name, had manipulated the local environment in a way registered by the change in the meter's volume. At this point B exhales heavily, and exclaims 'Jesus' whilst leaning towards the table and closing her eyes (lines 83 and 85). This attracts the attention of the other participants, A and C, who both turn their heads towards B. Following this activity, participant C asks if B is 'alright' (line 87) and B, still with her eyes squinted and leaning forwards, comments that her eyes are watering (line 89).

This is a crucial moment in the investigation, as the spirit seems to be interacting with the group. A candidate spirit name has been identified, and then, seemingly in response to the articulation of that name, the output of the Gauss meter begins to increase. And it is here that B's body becomes the focal point for group activities. She bites her bottom lip, leans forward, and she closes her eyes, a reaction to her eyes become teary, which is another bodily response. The earlier lengthy exhalation is also an embodied action, as it is a direct transfer of air from inside to outside the body. The lean forward and the closed eyes then become the focus for A and C's attention, and C's explicit inquiry 'you alright' (line 87).

This short sequence of talk and actions illustrates key issues in the use of the body in paranormal investigations. There is, first, the way that embodied actions are responsive to, and collaborate in sequential organisation of talk. For example, in lines 78 and 79, B and C

respond to the movement of the planchette over the letters of the Ouija which spelled out the name ‘Munthob’. B’s ‘Hello Munthob’ is launched fractionally before C’s ‘Munthob’. Though similar in design, these two utterances entail different implications as to what kinds of actions come next.

One of the most noticeable things about conversation is that certain classes of utterances conventionally come in pairs. Examples of paired action sequences are:

Greeting-greeting
Question-answer
Invitation-acceptance/refusal
Offer-acceptance/refusal

Throughout his early work developing conversation analysis, Harvey Sacks developed a formal account of the properties of what, at that time, he was calling adjacency pairs (Sacks, 1992, Vol. 2: 521-532). They are ordered, that is, there is a recognisable difference between first parts and second parts of the pair; and in which given first pair parts require particular second parts (or a particular range of seconds). In other words, an invitation is the first part of the 'invitation-response' adjacency pair, and we recognise that invitations should be followed by a specific range of responses, mainly, acceptances or declinations. An initial invitation should typically not be followed by an initial greeting, for instance.

A basic norm of paired actions sequences was described Schegloff and Sacks:

> given the recognisable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type the first is recognisably a member of. (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 295)

This structural property of paired actions is not a statement of empirical invariance; rather it points to the expectations that are attendant upon the production of first parts. There is a *normative* character to paired actions. That is, the production of a first part proposes that a relevant second part is *conditionally relevant* (Schegloff, 1972).

B’s ‘Hello Munthob’ is the first part of a greeting sequence. It exhibits confidence that there is a co-present spirit, named Munthob, and makes return greeting conditionally relevant In paranormal investigations such as these, it is not expected that the spirits will interact verbally with the participants (hence the communicative resource of the Ouija board). Consequently, spirit communication is produced by other means, such as interfering with gadgets such as the Gauss meter. So, while the first part of a greeting sequence sets up a conditionally relevant spirit response, it is understood that that response will come through non-verbal communications. Participants will, then, be monitoring their environment for other events that might constitute the now relevant spirit response.

However, A’s turn ‘Munthob’ (line 79), is more ambiguous. It may be the first part of a summons-answer sequence (as in ‘Mike’ – ‘What?). This would convey an equivalent degree of epistemic certainty as to the presence of the spirit. However, this turn may be doing different actions. The questioning intonation (indicated by the arrows) may be the initiation of an identification confirmation sequence, as in ‘are you Munthob?’, which invites confirmation or disconfirmation of the name. Alternatively, it may be that here A is simply

clarifying the name produced from the board by saying it out loud (it is an unusual name). That is, it may be a form of confirmation check.

Either way, there is epistemic ambiguity, and possible epistemic variance operating over these two turns. B's turn is unambiguously premised on the assumption that it is known that there is a co-present spirit called Munthob; and that by implication, that they were responsible for the increase in volume from the Gauss meter. A's turn, however, is less epistemically certain; while it may be the first part of a summons-answer sequence, which conveys a degree of certainty about a spirit presence, it may also be heard as a more circumspect turn, either clarifying the name of the spirit, or initiating a check on the name. As a consequence, there is also a sequential ambiguity about the subsequent trajectory of the interaction: is a return greeting relevant (in which case, the participants will be motivated to attend to the environment to detect any event that could be taken as the conditionally relevant second greeting); or is the response to the confirmation check now relevant? Or the answer to the summons?

The turns by B and A lines 78 and 79 propose a different understanding of the group's social reality at that moment. One proposes the presence and interactional responsiveness of an identified spirit entity; the other seeks to determine the spirit's identity. It is at this moment that the body - specifically, B's body - is recruited as a resource to resolve these competing understandings. At the same time as the sound of the Gauss meter increases, A and B look at each other, and B bites her bottom lip. For B, this is a public demonstration of excitement or apprehension in response to the meter. It signals that the sound is taken to mean something significant to the group. It also prohibits speech, so it also marks B's temporary withdrawal from verbal participation. It is at this point that C takes the opportunity to participate. Her turn 'It's definitely Munthob' is an epistemic upgrade on A's prior turn. Instead of questioning Munthob's identity, she accepts Munthob's presence and attributes the increase in meter output to the spirit. Prior to the first possible place in C's turn where turn transition is normatively appropriate (Sacks *et al*, 1974), B begins to exhale, loudly and at length. At the end of this extended exhalation she says 'Jesus'. This exclamation is a response cry (Goffman, 1978), a form of 'self-talk' (Gofman, 1978: 787) that, on first inspection, appears to be an asocial act, much as saying 'ow' when pricked is a direct expression of immediate pain. However, Goffman argues that response cries are in fact sensitive to the interactional and normative environment in which they occur.

> It is plain, then, that self-talk, in a central sense, is situational in character, not merely situated; its occurrence strikes directly at our sense of the orientation of the speaker to the situation as a whole. Self-talk…is a threat to intersubjectivity: *it warns others that they might be wrong in assuming a jointly-maintained base of ready mutual intelligibility among all persons present*. (Goffman, 1978 791: emphasis added)

B's exhalation and 'Jesus' establish that in that moment that her subjective reality is distinct from the intersubjective reality of the others, that something has happened to her, and not to the others. In the context of her greeting to Munthob, her breathing and her utterance propose that she has experienced internal sensations that constituted the actions of the spirit made conditionally relevant in her prior turn. Through talk and embodied action, she claims privileged experience of the spirit's interactional agency, at precisely the moment that C has lodged her authority with the declarative statement 'It's definitely Munthob'.

As she begins to exhale B leans forward, and she closes her eyes. The repositioning of her body is a physical display of her responsiveness to an unseen influence in content, inferably, the spirit. The closing of her eyes has two functions. In conjunction with the leaning body, the closed eyes invite the attention of the others. She is now the corporeal canvas on which the spirit's otherwise unseen agency can be observed. Moreover, she is the *only* one to display her experience of these sensations, thereby establishing primary rights (Heritage, 2014) on the agency of the spirit. There is another way that the leaning body and closed eyes (and, subsequently, watery eyes) work as a sense making resource. These are exhibitions of the severity of her reaction and by implication, the extent of the spirit's influence on her body. It is an embodied performance of extreme spirit agency. Finally, it is not by closing her eyes that B looks *away* from the others; she is not looking *anywhere at all*. Her action thereby constitutes a temporary withdrawal from visual interaction with the others. It is a unilateral withdrawal from the possibility of eye contact, and the range of engagements that might ensure. So not only is B seeably and hearably inviting the inference that she is manifesting on her body the agency of the spirit, but she does in such a way as to perform the degree of that influence, while her temporary disengagement from eye contact from the others publicly enact the privacy of the experience, and the primacy of her rights to articulate in embodied form her encounter with the spirit.

From these preliminary observations we can drew some tentative conclusions. First, the body may be more deeply implicated in ostensible paranormal experience than has been previously recognised. Second, it is a resource in sense making: the body may be drawn upon in coming to an understanding of an ongoing experience. Third, the significance of the body as a sense making resource is inextricably tied to its relationship to the organisation of talk-in-interaction (Schegloff, 2007). In the next chapter we develop these conclusions and begin to identify more formally the kinds of sense making practices in which talk and the body intersect in paranormal group investigations.

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