

epistemologically neutral point of view.

None of these criticisms are directed at Professor Poynton. Michael Whiteman's work deserves to be preserved, both for its positive contributions to parapsychology as well as for its false paths that parapsychologists should avoid. I thank Professor Poynton for making Whiteman's thought accessible to the scholarly community in one handy volume.

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GHOSTOLOGY: THE ART OF THE GHOST HUNTER by Steve Parsons. Foreword by Ann Winsper. White Crow Books, Hove. £12.99 ISBN-13: 978-1910121726

With the title of this book Steve Parsons, an experienced field investigator in the area of spontaneous cases, has risked promoting the word 'Ghostology' to cover the scientific study of ghosts. I doubt it is term that will catch on at present in such a disputed field, but this book is nonetheless one to be commended to anyone interested in the practical aspects of investigating possibly paranormal events in premises labelled as 'haunted'.

Although this book is subtitled *'The Art of the Ghost Hunter'*, its emphasis is primarily upon aspects of physical science and the technical issues that may arise in such investigations. It takes a largely critical look at the wide range of equipment that modern ghost hunters may be tempted to deploy in attempts to obtain evidence for haunting phenomena. It questions many of the claims that are bandied about concerning ghost hunting equipment, particularly devices which are being marketed commercially as essential aides to psychical research. Reading the book as a whole, it comes as a much-needed corrective to the widespread view that the existence of apparitions can be proved (or disproved) by the deployment of increasingly-sophisticated pieces of technology.

That such notions are widespread in part reflects a depressing observation by Alan Gauld some 25 years ago that "around the country there are many little 'psychical research' societies whose principal *raison d'être* is to have a midnight *frisson* on their occasional 'ghost-hunts' and fun and buns at their occasional meetings" (Gauld, 1993). Such groups have enormously proliferated in the last quarter of a century on both sides of Atlantic, but all too many are found wanting in terms of the scientific standards (if any) that they apply to their work. Many simply do not understand the capacity or limitations of the various pieces of equipment that are readily brandished, or even how to operate them to a basic standard. Often these devices seem to function more as ritual objects in a crude 21st century form of practical spiritualism, since many of these investigators already believe themselves to be in touch with a spirit world.

Accordingly, the author provides a comprehensive summary of the function and correct operation of a wide range of pieces of equipment which are all too often wrongly cited as providing evidence of discarnate activity in haunted premises. It transpires that even with common devices (such as mobile phones and camera phones) the users may have only the haziest notion of how they actually work or the physical principles behind them. Before anything can be meaningfully recorded, it is important to have a sufficient understanding of scientific measurement and the devices concerned. Hitherto, all too many would-be researchers have proceeded in ignorance of the internationally recognised scientific standards, in place for many decades, for measuring temperature, sound, and aspects of electromagnetism (such as flux density and changes in electromagnetic field strength). A knowledge of these systems and principles is essential if the results are to be in any way meaningful. All too often, the operators misinterpret entirely normal readings or findings as evidence of paranormal effects or to bolster personal theories. Consequently, Steve Parsons is scathing of the numerous pseudo-scientific claims, for instance, that EMF meters can act as ghost energy detectors, stating such ideas "represent nothing more than a corrupt or pseudo-scientific understanding as to why EMF may be worth considering".

Accordingly, *Ghostology* usefully summarizes some of this required basic knowledge needed by the operator, emphasising that anyone trying to make measurements should at least ensure they know what they are attempting to measure and what unit of measurement is being employed. Rather than providing a comprehensive guide to all ghost hunting gadgets, it provides notes on different types of equipment and correct standards of measurement.

The section on temperature readings is very good, and I am pleased to have been able to include a condensed version of it for a new edition of a book which has been updated for the absolute beginner in the field of ghost investigation and psychical research (Green, 2016).

Thus, *Ghostology* is a book that may be recommended to those who have already begun or have experience in what is popularly termed ghost hunting using equipment, but are prepared to question their assumptions.

Chapter One of the book gives a brief history of ghost hunting, and Chapter Two is dedicated to 'Critical thinking'. Chapter Three looks at accumulation of evidence in the investigation process and Chapter Four gathering data direct from people and historical records. Chapter Five looks at psychics and Chapters Six to Nine cover scientific measurements in the context of ghost research.

This part of the book needs to be read as much by sceptics of ghost phenomena as believers. Notably, the scientific critique provided in *Ghostology* cuts both ways, not just with those who believe that ghosts are spirits of the dead but also their sceptical opponents who seek to ascribe haunting phenomena to aspects of naturally occurring physical forces such as electromagnetism and infra sound which have been variously propounded as the explanation for hauntings in the last thirty years (Budden, 1999; Persinger & Cameron, 1986; Tandy 2000).

Chapters 11 and 12 look at the differences between analogue and digital recordings for sound which has also recently been the topic of a book *Paranormal Acoustics* (2015) edited by Parsons with Callum Cooper. The chapters carry the important warning that ordinary sounds and noises, once recorded, can be misinterpreted as evidence of the paranormal, particularly in EVP research.

The danger of misinterpretation is even more acute with photographic images which have been taken as evidence of a spirit world for over 150 years. Such notions are dissected in the next section, with chapters 13–19 covering cameras, video photography and filming techniques, with Chapter 17 addressing the question: 'Can ghosts be photographed?'

The question of whether photography might provide evidence for phantoms and other psi effects is a very important one which has been considered by the Society since the 1890s (Myers, 1894), and some have thought apparitions can be captured on camera. For my own part I tend to think not; while odd images may occur on film, I rather take the view of many in the early Society that ghosts are primarily hallucinatory and that photography is not a substitute for human testimony (Lodge, 1894; Sidgwick, 1894). Certainly, judging by the photographs submitted to the Spontaneous Cases Committee in recent years, the recorded images do not correspond with the detailed accounts of life-like apparitions that witnesses described, at least in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Hallson, 1986). Most suspiciously, nearly all identifications of ghosts in contemporary photographs are made after the claimed image was obtained; seldom is anything ever reported as visible at the time.

The author states: 'there is a lack of convincing proof' and many of the photographs claimed as phantoms are naturally-produced glitches or distortions of one kind or another, coupled with the will to believe and the

hope for some kind of tangible proof. This is demonstrated by the so-called orb phenomenon which is conclusively demolished in chapter 19. The author's own experiments in this regard establish beyond reasonable doubt that so-called orbs are nothing but artefacts arising from the flash units of modern cameras illuminating dust particles in the atmosphere.

What, then, might be the point of taking a camera on an investigation? Well it just might help settle the question of apparitions, but more pertinently it could record physical phenomena, either spontaneous or (less likely in my view) physical phenomena in the séance room. The issues are not settled beyond all conjecture (Willin, 2007).

However, after reading *Ghostology*, many may wonder why the results have been so poor, at least as regards apparitions. Of course, the null hypothesis is that ghosts do not exist and that, along with people camped out for sightings of the Loch Ness Monster, those embarking on ghost vigils are engaging in a Quixotic exercise, one which will only accumulate further negative evidence that their elusive quarry is simply not there to be found. Yet as G.N.M Tyrrell pointed out, there is no doubt that large numbers of people do experience apparitions (Tyrell, 1952) and, certainly, there is also much evidence for physical effects in poltergeist activity, both from human witnesses and recorded by way of instrumentation (Colvin, 2010; Gauld & Cornell, 1979). Thus, waiting in haunted houses is not a complete waste of time but such evidence as may be recorded by instruments tends to relate to physical events (e.g. object movements and objective sounds), rather than the capture of apparitions on film.

Thus while I am not sure that that the technical approaches or equipment explained in *Ghostology* will necessarily help secure any positive proof of visual apparitions – certainly if they are essentially non-physical and hallucinatory in nature – it will help eliminate many entirely normal effects that may be mistaken as ghosts. New directions in research might arise with the realisation that apparitions may exist on a wholly different level to material reality (a conclusion tentatively advanced by the late Tony Cornell after many years of effort in trying to record hauntings instrumentally [Cornell, 2003]). However, in *Ghostology* the author does not speculate as regards other dimensions; the correct measurement of events occurring in this one is his priority.

The short bibliography reflects in part the scarcity hitherto of useful technical books in this field and *Ghostology* is certainly a most welcome addition to the currently limited shelf. An index would improve a future edition. Also, I have to say that, along with *Paranormal Acoustics* referred to above, probably not since *Apparitions* (1975) by Celia Green and Charles McCreery has a book cover design for a work in this field been at such complete variance with the seriousness of the information contained within. However, it succeeds in attracting readers from other less reputable titles it will be more than justified.

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DEATH, DYING, AND MYSTICISM: THE ECSTASY OF THE END edited by Thomas Cattoi and Christopher M. Moreman. Palgrave Macmillian, New York, 2015. 281 pp. £63 ISBN 978 1 137 47207 6

The vast and extremely diverse range of approaches in this eclectic volume draw on “the insights of disciplines as varied as psychoanalysis, musicology, and ethnographic studies” (p. 1). Analyses of Near Death Experiences (NDEs), channelling, and hallucinations associated with bereavement sit side by side with papers on topics as varied as death as an inspiration for Frida Kahlo’s art, twentieth-century compositions for Requiem Masses, and the way Mediaeval constructions of gender influenced variant narratives of St Francis’s death. The common theme, according to editor Thomas Cattoi, is that the essays “explore the way in which different religious and spiritual traditions – as well as individuals who do not explicitly identify with any tradition – have approached the dying process as a moment of transformation and opportunity for growth” (p. 1). However, many of the essays only explore one aspect of this paradigm, for example the essay on Lacan’s concept of “symbolic death”, while taking up the theme of transformation, doesn’t touch on physical dying; the “death” here refers to the moment when an individual “experiences her or his own desire as a form of mystical experience or sublimation” (p. 103). While the diversity and breadth of papers can be seen