

Encounters with Immaterial Beings

A Literature Study as an Example of Psychological-Critical Hermeneutics of Spiritual Experiences

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Initial question

Is it possible that there are non-biological life forms, life outside the dimension of our current scientific world order? The existence of such intelligent life is often affirmatively (i.e., in the sense of an assertion) denied by representatives of a materialistic worldview. But this denial is of completely irrational nature. Reasonable would be at best an agnostic modesty: You cannot talk about that which you do not know. Science can logically never proof the *non*-existence of a phenomenon based on empirical knowledge, but only according to theoretical considerations stating that the existence of a phenomenon is just impossible. But such a categorical exclusion is not possible in the case of not material-bound life. Where such exclusion is asserted, it is based on a religious belief in the very existence of the material (a material monism).¹

In 1861 Alan Kardec, the founder of the Roman branch of spiritualism, contradicted the assertion that the existence of beings without material body was incompatible with the laws of nature: "Do we know these laws so well that it is possible to define the limits of God?" he writes, and in relation to the critics of the authenticity of mediumistic experience: " We will prove them, by realities and common sense reasons, but if they do neither accept the one nor the other, if they even still deny what they see, it is up to them to prove that our judgment

¹ The materialist hereby accomplishes a perfect solidarity with some dogmatic Christians, not only because these also refuse any "belief in ghost", but because for them it is as well true, "Credo quia absurdum" – just because there are no rational arguments for my belief system, I have to belief even more vehemently, or else I loose the way to salvation, i.e., I loose a coherent image of me and the world, in which I may see myself (in the materialist case) as the truly "Enlightened" and rational disciple of the true world order.

is wrong, and the spiritualistic facts are impossible." ² Since it is principally *possible* that non-material beings exist, that they are perceived by material beings (humans and animals) in some cases and that they in turn perceive material beings and worlds, and since there are hints for their existence, Kardec turns the onus of proof and demands from those, which negate their existence without the slightest reason, to proof their inexistence or to explain the experience of these beings. We are not interested, therefore, in proofing their existence, it is our concern what the experience of obviously authentic people tells us about their nature (the underlying "laws of nature").

In a review of the literature on encounters with immaterial beings, we find different kinds of psychological experience:

1. *The perception of dead persons*: The immediate perception of the dead is mostly a visual perception of human beings who are likely or certainly dead at that time.

2. *The immediate perception of non-human beings*: Beings that appear to be non-human and that are perceived immediately visually and / or audibly, tactilely etc. Here we can again distinguish different classes of beings (especially deities, angels or demons, nature spirits)

3. *The perception of the effect of immaterial beings*: The perception of the immediate impact of, in the positive case, benevolent beings (Guardian Angel Experience) or direct harassment by a negative-minded being (perception of demonic influence; "circumsessio"). Another subcategory concerns *poltergeists*: A poltergeist phenomenon means the occurrence of weird physical incidences (changing the arrangement of objects, possibly teleportation or influencing electrical devices, etc.). However, here also no being executing these phenomena can be directly observed but such a being (such as a dead spirit) is supposed to be the cause.

4. *Possession*: The perceived effect of another being inside of a person (complete takeover of consciousness or partial effect on the mental functioning of a person; also temporal mediumistic possession) is, the "other" being perceived as immediate, an intermediate category between sensory perception and the mere perception of effect.

5. *The perception of people currently living in immaterial form*: This particular category concerns encounters during out of body experiences either of the experiencer or the perceived one (e.g., visions in which meditation students meet their meditation master). This category is not covered here.

² Kardec, Allan (1987): Das Buch der Medien, Freiburg i. Br.: Bauer, 19 (Original: Le Livre des Médi-ums, 1861). All citations in this essay are translated from the German by the author.

In all of these categories we do not distinguish whether the experience is made as an inner or an outer perception, i.e., which kind of reality does the experience contain for the subject.

Methodology

In my article on Transcendental Semiotics (Part II) in this issue, I have shown that a hermeneutic method is appropriate for the generation of knowledge about phenomena, which do not conform to the prevailing materialist worldview. The hermeneutic method approaches a text with questions generating preliminary answers, which in turn allow in a next step a better understanding of the text and other similar texts. With such a hermeneutic approach I have looked through some published works that are connected by two criteria: First, all publications should have a common subject, in this case the experience of immaterial beings. Second, the selection included exclusively works that contained first-hand reports. In addition, other criteria were applied: Recent publications have been preferred, and only print publications in German language, listed at the German National Library were included. Among the remaining numerous books an arbitrary selection has been made.³

As a guideline, the following questions were applied:

I) Criteria of person:

Is it possible to know something about the person who has the experience, especially with regard to their psychosocial functioning level as an indication of socially accepted cognitive functions? This question should primarily help to understand the credibility of the person.

II) Criteria of situation:

Is there any evidence that the same situation or similar situations have been experienced in this way by other people? This question concerns the understanding of a experience, regardless of an individual person.

III) Criteria of text / statement:

Can the context, which is included in the statement itself, influence the degree of reality of the statement? Can testimonial psychology provide evidence for fictional content? Can clinical psychology provide evidence of formal thought

³ One could call this a randomization.

disorder? This questions aims at an indication of the credibility of the report itself.

IV) Conclusions on the construct level:

Can conclusions about the construct level be derived from comparison of the thus as authentic identified anecdotal reports, which in turn are useful for assessing the individual reports? Can structuring principles (categories) be generated?

In order not to bore the reader and the author with an infinitely detailed analysis of every case, the method will not be presented systematically at this point, but only show some of its results in a spotlight-like manner. The purpose of this publication, therefore, is not a methodically exact study, but an exemplary discussion of some literature by including a hermeneutic perspective.

1. Direct perception of deceased

There are a number of contemporary books with immediate descriptions of spirit perceptions. Among these, I (in order to optimize the person-criterion, number 1 of the above system) excluded all reporters that seemed to have an increased interest in public attention or gave for other reasons rise to doubts about their authenticity from the outset.⁴ Finally, I selected the Swiss forester Sam Hess, who in his book *Diesseits – Jenseits* introduces himself and whose career and experience is portrayed in ***Wanderer in zwei Welten*** of Pier Hänni⁵ as an extract of conversations with Hess.

Sam Hess had "at the age of seven, his first encounter with a spirit. At that time, it was his dear grandfather smiling. He saw him sitting beside the coffin. In the following years, several other encounters expected him, making him shiver at the beginning. The empathetic understanding of his mother, father and uncles and the spiritual lessons by a priest of the local monastery helped him to live with his exceptional disposition" ⁶. The development of this special gift – the attempts to block it out, to conceal it, and finally the inner necessity to integrate it, to live for it – seem convincing as a psychological process of development and are consistent

⁴ Even if this criterion seems very subjectively, it can be measured easily by the number of personal publications about oneself, public appearance, and commercial significance of the mediumistic work.

⁵ Hänni, Pier (2010): *Wanderer in zwei Welten. Sam Hess – Begegnungen mit Totengeistern und der anderen Dimension des Lebens*. Aarau: AT and Sam Hess (2007): *Diesseits - Jenseits: Ein Blick über die Schwelle des Todes*. Huttwil: Bröhl

⁶ Hänni (2010), S. 37/38

with experiences of other people who make extraordinary experiences.⁷ His formation as a foresters and his professional and personal career indicate at least that Hess should be a down-to-earth person. The person-criterion of authenticity is supported by the vivid picture of the personality that is presented in the report of Hänni.

The encounters with spirits of the dead reported by Hess are revealing: They often accord with what centuries of tradition reports about the laws that seem to govern those of the dead, who are caught in an "intermediate world": Sam Hess tells us of many experiences, that for violently deceased (like those dying on the battlefield, by murder, and suicide) it is harder to move on into the next world than for those deceased in peace.⁸ By impressive examples, we learn that spiritual beings cling to places and objects that were important to them once in their lifetime. That is why relatives who want to hold their dead long after their death, make it difficult for them to go. Spirits of the dead are not fundamentally resentful towards the living: "Spirit beings are human beings, even if they have no body. Accordingly, there are among them all the behaviours or characteristics as among the living".⁹ So Hess / Hänni tell us of spirits who are not able to overcome their wickedness, and those who continue to act helpfully after death. Even ghost communities (think of the Wild Hunt or the legend of ghost ships) can be experienced by Sam Hess, but the individuals seem solipsistic and isolated like the shadows Odysseus saw in Hades.

The experience of Hess shows a high correlation, for example, with reports of some indigenous cultures. The ancestors are revered as powerful helpers of the community, provided they have taken the right way to the otherworld. Those who died by sudden deaths, accidents and violent crime but also suicides, are, however, feared: The unthinkable that has torn them out of life without finishing their earthly business makes such spirit beings adhere particularly strongly to the world of the living and then can cause damage.

Sam Hess experienced that even the disturbance of the peace of the grave or the fact that a body has not been buried lets the dead not come to rest. Similarly, we hear in many cultures and already in the stories of ancient Greece of the spe-

⁷ Cf. Harnack, Edgar W. (2012): The cost of being different: Schizotypy, hyper-permeable Ego structure, and social reactions on spiritual experience. *JSTP* 1 (2), 229-240

⁸ Of course, we do not know anything about the effective direction of this nexus: if Sam Hess construes his experience – maybe unconsciously – following a cultural pattern or if they as autonomous events confirm them). Once again: Here we deal with plausibility as a result of previous hermeneutic examination, not with a secure proof.

⁹ p. 126

cial importance of the right, ritual burial. So Antigone puts herself into great danger, only to bury her brother Polyneices, who was condemned as a traitor by the Theban despot to suffer not only earthly but eternal punishment. The recurrent patterns in the immediate experiences with spirits of the dead comprise all human epochs and cultural areas.¹⁰ Is the need to bury the dead, which at least goes back to the phylogenetic roots of humanity 70,000 years ago, not just superstition arising out of naivety, but a real experience with the dead, which – visible for some – stay among the living, as long as they cannot find closure with their previous life? The direct experiences of Sam Hess leave us with the hypothesis, "that this is not simply pulled out of thin air but based on the experiences and insights that have made highly spiritually evolved people for thousands of years and still do".¹¹

It is interesting, in this context, to compare this with a classic exploration of paranormal experience, the study *Geistererscheinungen und Vorzeichen* by C. G. Jung's student **Aniela Jaffé**.¹²

Categories that are familiar from popular ghost stories become chapter headings in Jaffé's book, under which first-hand reports from people can be found who

¹⁰ Their authenticity can perhaps be seen by their ineradicability: Not only the Christian missionaries in Europe, also the Buddhist clergy in Asia could not prevent that spirits of the dead are still encountered today. In fact, popular views on spiritual beings often exist alongside with official Buddhist teachings that do not share these views likewise; cf. Tambiah, S. J. (1970): *Buddhism and the spirit cults in North-East Thailand*. Cambridge: University Press. The survival of humans as spirits is theoretically difficult to justify for Buddhism, if remaining in the intermediate world is interpreted as getting out of the cycle of rebirths and as affirmation of the existence of a substantial soul (and not just as a "delay" in continuing). Thus, among the six division of life worlds in Mahayana Buddhism, there are the *preta* (hungry ghosts), but not earthbound spirits of the dead. This theoretical difficulty seems not easy to meet as the Buddhist teacher Lama Tsem Tulku Rinpoche, recognized by the Dalai Lama, demonstrates. Tsem Tulku, who devotes himself with plenty of time to his website where he talks about the subject of ghosts extensively, did not know any answer to my public question in his blog how the post-existence of the dead as spirits fits into Buddhist doctrines. Instead, he referred only to another blog entry in which he had also not been able to answer the question.

A reasonable answer can be found, however, in Isabella Krause (2012): *Schamanen, Hexen, Barden und Orakel: Phänomene der Besessenheit durch Dämonen und Gottheiten in Tibet und Ladakh*, Ulm: Fabri-Verlag, p 56: "In the Buddhist view, the stream of consciousness leaving the dying is determined by the thoughts of the person at death. Is this person full of fear, hatred, or panic and cling to life, then this negative emotional energy can solidify through a projection into a spirit. Certain forms of death, such as suicide or murder, almost inevitably bring forth a spirit, because they are associated with very strong negative emotions". Here we find an explanation compatible with Buddhist conceptions and matching with the shadowiness of the spirit: Such spirit beings are *projections* of a mental continuum that has partly become entangled in the material world.

¹¹ p. 31

¹² Jaffé, Aniela (1997): *Geistererscheinungen und Vorzeichen*. Freiburg: Herder (Orig. 1958, Zürich: Rascher; engl. *Death, dreams and ghosts*. Einsiedeln: Daimon, 1999).

sent their experience to the author answering an advertisement: *The white woman, for example, a ghost wrapped completely in white light or white clothing, is still seen in our time. A woman writes: "Suddenly I see before me a medium sized snow-white figure of a female. She hovered in front of me, then, next to me, again a little further away and closer again hovering slightly above ground"*¹³. And another says: *"... there appeared on the threshold ... a to me completely strange female figure, tall, beautiful, in white flowing robes, with long black hair hanging down"*¹⁴. Even the well-known from numerous parodies "ghost without a head and face" owes its humorous existence to a long tradition of experiencing, as show the collected reports here: *A woman tells how she mustered all her courage to address somebody in a long hooded cloak walking in front of her on a lonely, dark road. "He turned round quickly, we stood facing each other. I was almost paralyzed to ice with fright: only the empty hood – a black void! From a face I saw no trace."*¹⁵.

Interesting is the methodological approach of this Jungian research: Without broaching the ontological status (the "reality") of the reported, the phenomenon is taken seriously as an expression of the pure possibility of such a (archetypal) perception. Jaffe leaves the subjective authentic content of the reports, but interprets them widely by Jung's method of amplification, i.e., she puts them in a general mythological contexts. Thereby, however, the primacy of experience is lost sometimes. So she explains the white woman mythologically as Venus-Aphrodite, as Mother Earth and asks herself, "Why has the Mother Earth, being also the goddess of love [...], converted into something sinister". That puts the myth, the archetype into the position of a powerful agent and makes the experience depending on a collective cultural memory. In a difference to Jung's theory, for me the experiences can stand on their own primarily: Here a person makes an experience – and this, first of all, has to be understood in itself and for itself.

But why should the writers of such reports post real experiences and not just have made all up? Jung replies to this objection in the preface written by him, "... there are such reports from all times and places. Therefore, there is no sufficient reason to doubt the veracity of a single report principally. A reasonable doubt is only appropriate where there is a deliberate lie. The number of such cases is negligible, because the authors of such forgery are too ignorant to lie properly."¹⁶

¹³ Op. cit., p. 115

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 116

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 179

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 13

2. Immediate perception of non-human beings

(A) Angels

Spirit beings of non-human origin manifest themselves by diverse forms of influence and encounters on all sensory channels and in all gradations of reality. This is particularly evident in the reports on light figures originating from many cultures that we call angels. Angel encounters occur (like all such phenomena) more often than is normally assumed regarding the concealment with which these experiences are tabooed.¹⁷ Stories of people reporting to have experienced an angelic apparition were collected by **Glennycy Eckersley**.¹⁸

Here we learn about John, who was deterred from a suicidal leap by the huge wings of a loving spirit being. We read about Roy who, being hit by a truck and jammed under it, was given courage by a female voice, and survived the severe accident with minor injuries. We learn about Caroline, who gets an answer to her prayer in a dark undercrossing in which she has to pass some drunkards: Suddenly a woman appears and likewise suddenly vanishes after having accompanied her passing the frightening figures with safe steps.

Although the pure number of direct experiences impresses the reader, in this opus the shaky ground of speculation seems broader than the narrow path of convincing facts. This is first of all because of a weakness of what we called the text-criterion: Although the author pretends to have received all reported events firsthand, most of the episodes she tells herself. Even where she supposedly allows the reporters to speak directly to the reader, these quotes sound "doctored" and at least transposed into the language of the author. Everyone who, like the author of this survey, collects self-reports of unusual events knows that each report is written in a completely different style and the consistency of an easily readable book would suffer greatly. Here, however, the readability of the book seems to override the authenticity. Since other details to verify the authenticity of the reports are missing, probably even the possibility of free invention is not to be dismissed.

Against this stand only the enormous variety and differing quality of the reports that may have been very difficult to conceive even with a lot of imagination. At least they do not contradict the various experiences of angels that can be found

¹⁷ In the online opinion poll webpage sozioland.de (source: Mystery & Esoterik Umfrage 2005/2006, sozioland.de, Huhnsgasse 34b, 50676 Köln) almost *one third* of the inquired sample answered that they either with certainty (>10%) or possibly (>20%) have been in contact with a ghost or any other supernatural apparition.

¹⁸ Glennycy Eckersley (2003): *Schutzengel. Geschichten von Nahtodeserfahrungen und Begegnungen mit Engeln*. München: Goldmann. Orig. (1996): *An Angel at my shoulder*. London: Rider and (2002): *Saved by the Angels*. London: Rider.

in other case collections (such as the Alister Hardy Archives) in their narrative structure. But then remains another speculative side of the book, namely that the reports seem to give testimony only partially about angels, being included either because the compiler or the reporters saw them as an angelic encounter, without that this conclusion is always convincing intersubjectively. Was the pregnant Carol, immersed by an intense light in a feeling of peace and bliss, rewarded by an angel appearance or a different mystical experience? What was it that helped the 14-year-old Michael, his bicycle being directed by an invisible force on a pitch-dark road without his own doing around a dangerous abyss? Can the voice be attributed to an angel that preserved David twice in his life from severe physical damage? Only if we denote as angels (from the Greek *angelos*, the messenger) all the messages sent from a supernatural source, which protect and encourage a human being. But then we are dealing with conclusions and not with perceptions, why we must classify some of the events of this volume at other parts of our system.

(B) Nature spirits

Some people do not perceive spirits of the dead or angels, but (also or exclusively) entities which appear in nature or in connection with natural phenomena. Such natural or elemental spirits in prehistoric times and until today have been a part of myths and legends in our culture as well as in the animistic religions of many indigenous peoples and in the hermetic, occult sciences of the West (magic, alchemy). As Aniela Jaffé¹⁹ points out in another context, their belonging to the realm of myths is not opposed to the authenticity of the experience, because before the myth solidified into its typical crystalline narrative form, a number of real experiences have been underlying it. Both in the letters that evaluated Jaffé, as well as in other archives of spiritual experiences reports have been found about encounters with nature spirits, and also the Swiss for-ester Sam Hess perceives them. However, the text sources in this area are less abundant than in the field of the spirits of the dead. A compilation of primary sources can be found in **Marjorie Johnson's** book about nature spirits, for which the author for 50 years collected hundreds of reports from around the world.²⁰

¹⁹ Jaffé, op. cit., p. 129

²⁰ Johnson, Marjorie (2008): *Naturgeister. Wahre Erlebnisse mit Elfen und Zwergen*. Grafing: Aquamarin (1. Aufl. 2000). Amazingly, until now, the book was published in a German and an Italian translation only; the publication of the English original is just in preparation. A large part of these reports

Johnson seems to disclose the names and addresses of the rapporteurs without anonymization, which is a big exception in such literature, even if, to my knowledge, nobody has attempted to verify the existence of the sources. The reports of small brightly glowing elves, earth-coloured dwarves and gnomes, water, tree and fire spirits, and many other manifestations are actually amazing. Bay Kirkaldy from London reports (p. 53) once having watched a collection of very small flying creatures together with other people in St. James Park. The male seemed to wear tight-fitting pants, red, blue, or green doublets and a kind of fisherman's cap. The women were dressed in bright robes. Mrs. G. K. Evason from Kent writes that she had seen a gnome pushing a tiny wheelbarrow before him: "He took care of the front yard, which the tenant above me maintains", she writes (p. 70). And Doris King from Nottingham remembers to have found at the age of eight under the dining table in the morning a forty centimetre large Goblin with blue tunic, pointed cap and pointed shoes as well as two more figures half as big, and that she ran away fearfully.

This collection of stories amazes because the experiences depicted here seem so natural as a Sunday excursion with the family. But the little dwarves with their wests, the water nymphs with frog or fish body, the elves that look like wisps or winged tiny female figures with clothes in bright colours seem to have sprung from the picture book so much that one wonders whether here the human brain with its tendency to construct perceptions according to familiar schemas has not translated non-sensual impressions into sensual appearances. The cases, however, according to text analytic criteria seem to be reproduced directly and unaltered, straight from the spring of their very different authors, which on the one hand is the big gain of this book, which on the other hand makes the reading a little bulky after a certain time.

What for most moderns impossibly can be something else than silly children's stories or the animistic explanation of primitive peoples for scientific facts, others claim to experience as a reality: the existence of spiritual beings that are connected to the physical nature, but nevertheless have their own existence. The occult tradition has worked with elemental spirits since its beginning. Around the turn of 19th to 20th century celebrities of Theosophy like Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, and later Rudolf Steiner, claimed that they immediately perceived nature spirits. Even Arthur Conan Doyle, a member of the Society for Psychical Research, tried to relieve the existence of elves, gnomes and other beings living in nature from the realm of fairy tales and myths and dili-

comes from the 1950s, when Johnson was a secretary of the former *British Fairy Investigating Society* and invited submissions of experiential reports by newspaper ads.

gently collected evidence of sightings and their effects.²¹ The reports, which Johnson collected, may seem incredible, but also incredibly authentic and genuine and deserve to be taken seriously as reports of unusual experiences.

3. Experiences of the effect of non-human beings

The perception of influence "from above", which is interpreted as the effect of a guardian angel, is a relatively common phenomenon of spiritual experience. We have already touched on such reports in the discussion of the immediate perception of angels (in the book of Glennyce Eckersley). Some occult authors think that such effects actually do not derive from a different "species" (angels), but from well-meaning persons who died, which shows how difficult it is to attribute these reports to a specific source. The opposite phenomenon is fortunately rare: Published reports that tell from the first hand perspective about harassment by demons (*Circumsessio*) in German language I do currently not know.

4. Possession

Before we turn to two reports about possession by spirits of the dead, we can gain an overview of the diversity of the phenomenon of possession by a short trip to the anthropological literature.

Isabella Krause's book about the **phenomena of possession by demons and deities in Tibet and Ladakh**²² gathers research of the anthropology of religion in the Tibetan-Ladakhi culture systematically. It is thus quite suitable for the exemplary study of possession in traditional cultures. In summary, the author extracted the following classes of possessions:

1. *The following possession phenomena are considered as positive and desirable from the outset:*
 - *Monastery oracles designated by lot or by inheritance;*
 - *The possessed bard type;*

²¹ The publicist Peter Tompkins has gathered such possible evidence and reports about spectacular encounters of psychic persons with nature spirits: Tompkins, Peter (1997): *The secret life of nature*. New York: Harpercollins. There, he also responds to the assertion that the most famous case investigated by Conan Doyle had been proofed as a fake.

²² Cf. annotation 10

- *Intentionally caused demonic possession of a corpse (the tantric ro-langs-type);*
- 2. *The following possession phenomena are considered as negative and undesirable:*
 - *Demonic possession in people;*
 - *Demonic possession of dead bodies (the demonic ro-langs-type);*
 - *Possession with witchcraft and possession by beings who are created by witches through their negative emotions;*
- 3. *The following possession phenomena are considered initially negative because interpreted as a disease, but later positive because interpreted as divine possession:*
 - *Monastery oracles elected by divine appointment;*
 - *The village oracles* ²³

It is striking that, in addition to spirits of the dead and demons, living people (women characterized as witches) can penetrate the body of another person and cause damage with a part of their *unconscious*. In any case, the negative possession of living persons provokes mental and possibly physical illness, and misbehaviour. On the other hand, also higher beings can manifest in a human body, which initially may trigger symptoms, too, but then is always rated very positively: in the case of the Tibetan human oracles the positive obsessive beings are usually called "protectors of the doctrine" (Sanskrit *Dharmapala*; Tibetan *Choskyong* spoken: *Cho-kyong*), which are gods of the lower regions (the samsaric realms). Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, who are already beyond the ordinary realms, never manifest themselves in the bodies of the living or the empty shells of the dead. Therefore, the Tibetan lamas consider the claim to be possessed by a Buddha as proof of the (deliberate or self-deluded) fraudster.²⁴

The possession experiences from our culture with which we shall deal as an example are related solely to the nature of possession by deceased. These can result – in a not rarely seen pattern, according to some reports – from contacts to

²³ Op. cit., p. 167f

²⁴ It is of interest if this distinction is reflected in different empirical consequences of both possessions or just originates from the theoretical assumption that Buddhas do not behave like this. The categories seem here to be delimited in a different way than in the Western discourse anyway, where – because of the Biblical tradition – a substantialist perspective categorizes demons and humans into strictly separated realms, while in Tibetan Buddhism there is (bridgeable) gap between usual beings (humans or demons) and Buddhas. So in the Tibetan sources the metamorphosis of humans into demons is considered as possible.

spirits provoked in seances. Many visionaries warn strongly against the dangers of naive contact to other worlds. Alan Kardec already has written, "The practical exercise of spiritualism is associated with many difficulties and not always free from inconveniences and dangers".²⁵ This warning is supported by the 1989 published autobiographical report *Medialität, Besessenheit, Wahnsinn* by Carola Cutomo.²⁶

*This report deserves mention because it can vividly show the course of a mental situation that has been called mediumistic psychosis. Personal predisposition of Cutomo encounters dangerous practices and a continuous cumulation: She describes, firstly, that her grandmother had already stood out in the family by having "second sight", that she foresaw the death of people. Secondly, Carola Cutomo made herself experiences with spontaneous memories of reincarnation and inspirations that she traced back to her then deceased grandmother. During a spontaneous waking trance, she has the impression that the spirit of her idol Elvis Presley manifested in her hotel room. Until then, such experiences were singular, not yet intensified to thought disorder, ego impairment and other pathological forms of experience, such as after the séances.*²⁷

But as soon as she actively experiments with spiritualist séances, the predisposition develops into an uncontrollable opening to foreign influences. Her first experiment with a séance leaves everyone involved with perplexity and astonishment: Where do the stunning details come from that reveal themselves through the automatic writing with a "Westerwald Table"? As her first big mistake she later regards that she asks the spirits in another séance to show her the spirit world. She becomes cold and she feels bodiless all of a sudden, watching the aura of people sitting around like on a trip with hallucinogenic substances. From here on, the séances, so she assumes, become more than just an encounter with beings from another dimensions: It begins what she describes in detail on the following 130 pages as possession by different spirits.

Deeper and deeper she gets involved in not only receiving messages at séances, but also contacting spiritual beings at any time, day or night, through the technique of automatic writing. Finally, she hears the voices of the spirits even in herself. They tell her to do absurd things just to check their obedience, they pretend to be omniscient and divine, they threaten the rapporteur to torture her as punishment for disobedience and even to kill her family. All these messages are known to

²⁵ Kardec, Op. cit., 8

²⁶ Cutomo, Carola (1989): *Medialität, Besessenheit, Wahnsinn*. Flensburg: Flensburger Hefte

²⁷ Cf. Harnack, Edgar W. (2012): *The diagnostic separation of psychosis and spiritual experience II: Distinctive Criteria for Clinical Practice*. JSTP 2 (1), 76-93

us from the voices of many patients diagnosed as psychotic. Here, however, they stand quite in the logical course of development of an actively induced contact with spirit beings. The commotions of a healthy, stable mind but went further: she soon sees objects move by themselves, then she hovers over her own body. Always the inner dependency of the rapporteur on these messages amazes; that she cannot see through that these spirits are inflated liars and manipulators: obediently the now (partially) possessed woman follows all the instructions, partly out of faith and partly because of fear of the consequences.

In the last part of the book, she describes how she despite of (not because of) an authoritarian psychiatric treatment and then with the help of a sympathetic psychologist gets away from her dependency of the spirits, how she can stop the automatic writing and block the internal contact with the spirits. Finally, she is able to take leave of the last, closest spirit, her ex-boyfriend, who had posthumously tormented and loved her in revenge for former rejection. She lets him go, sends him away eventually after several relapses, and from that moment on has no symptoms that would indicate any psychotic states in any way.

Cutomo's assumption, her schizophreniform symptoms were due to the séances and their consequences, seems comprehensible, given the description of the onset and remission (termination) of her symptoms. While the person-criteria here naturally cannot speak for a condition free of pathology, the statement-criterion indicates authenticity and honesty. The situation is confirmable by similar reports, a generalization of the phenomenon class of "possession provoked by spirit contacts" appears permissible. That this is indeed the influence of spirits (a substantialist theory of spirit possession), is not yet stated, like in the classic book *The Unquiet Dead*²⁸ the author and psychotherapist **Edith Fiore** rejects such an ontological assertion of a "thing in itself". Although Fiore says, seventy percent of the patients in her psychotherapy practice owed their mental disorders to the possession of spirits, she denies that she was sure of the existence of such beings. Only the success of her method, in which the possessing spirit is asked to leave during a hypnotic treatment, is sufficient for her to state the possibility of such existences. According to the laws of hypnotherapy, the hypnotic suggestion, however, needs not to correspond substantially with the actual cause of the psychological problems, yet to be healing. Already the hypnotic image as a symbol of the mental state can be effective. Regardless whether thought of as real or as a symbolic act, between the possession experience and the mental state interactions in both directions exist: whether the possession perceived under hypnosis, as Fiore thinks, caused the psychological problems or,

²⁸ Edith Fiore (1995): *The Unquiet Dead: A Psychologist Treats Spirit Possession*. New York: Ballantine.

conversely, the psychological situation attracts (or repels) suitable possession experiences.

The latter becomes clear in reading the 2011 published report of the experience of the couple **Shaneta and Roland Sitte, *Heimgesucht und besetzt***.²⁹

The book, told exclusively from the perspective of Shaneta Sitte (although her husband also appears as an author), goes far beyond the agnosticism of Edith Fiore and describes the story of a spirit possession affirmative: since at the end of the report a cure by freeing the adherent spirit is shown, this proves to Mrs Sitte, that her family was a victim of various spirits for a long time. These spirits are a tailoress who was employed by Mrs Sitte and who was possessed herself during her lifetime by her late husband having died before her, and Mrs Sitte's mother-in-law. The selection of the persons later becoming spirit beings is striking because of the ambivalent relationship of the rapporteur to them. In a certain way very appropriate, the harm both are doing is directed to her daughter, which is occupied by the tailoress, and to her husband possessed by his mother. Appropriate are these possessions inasmuch as the daughter at that time increasingly frees herself emotionally from her parents and presents herself quite unruly. Mr. Sitte in turn has become more and more irritated, has begun to consume plenty of alcohol (the tailoress and her husband were alcoholics, but inconsistently not the mother-in-law that kept him possessed while he was drinking already). In consequence of this possession, Mrs Sitte's boutique runs not as good as before. Even the dog behaves strangely. The rapporteur paints a magnificent picture of the disaster of increasing decay of a once intact, harmonious middle-class family.

The eye of the trained psychotherapist is caught by the numerous potential projections of the author's inner conflicts to the spirit world. Are we not dealing with a typical family in a transition crisis after reaching the retirement age, and an empty nest syndrome? The adult children's cutting of the cord and the entry into the autumn of life regularly let couples in a crisis bang into each other. Substance abuse is not uncommon in these phases. The husband seems not to know how to occupy himself after retirement, the daughter emancipates and Mrs Sitte herself is in conflict as to whether she gives up the house in Germany and will move into her Bulgarian homeland. Here, the perception of a possession of her husband and daughter become the appropriate means to explain this threatening crisis and channel it to an external source, in order to maintain the idea of an ideal family (very often one reads that she just wants "to bring the family together again"). This becomes very clear when she interprets all sings of autonomy of her daughter as

²⁹ Sitte, Shaneta und Roland (2011): *Heimgesucht und besetzt*. Halle: Projekte-Verl. Cornelius

influenced by the spirit of the tailoress: "Her behaviour was much more confident than usual"³⁰ she notes with concern. And when the daughter is happy to stand on her own feet economically, this further supports their possession: "I wanted to please her and bought her many things she had chosen. Earlier she used to say quite kind: 'Thanks, Mom'. Now she reply caustically, 'You need not to buy me anything, I have money myself.'" ³¹.

When she tries to convince daughter and husband of the possession of the daughter, she is falling on deaf ears. In response, mother Sitte feels isolated, senses solidarity of daughter and husband against her, and interprets this as incestuous erotic attraction between the two, caused by the evil spirit of the tailoress. Frantically, she faces her angry husband, "... that Mrs Renner [the tailoress] has fallen in love with him, that she was very jealous of my life and wanted to live as I did, that she has entered Sonja [the daughter] and tries to seduce the father by the daughter".³² When the daughter in turn wants to address the possession of the mother by her possession faith, the rapporteur interprets this as the sure sign of her possession: "I shed some tears. She tried to hug and comfort me, but I only saw the woman hidden in her and did not let it happen. 'She is in you, Sonja, she is in you, I know it', I said softly and left".³³ Finally, she believes her own sister-in-law being against her and even her own sister "was a copy of Mrs Renner".³⁴

Now she concludes that her husband also must have been possessed, this time by his own recently deceased mother. She recognizes the impact of the evil on his hateful glare: "... I tried not to provoke him, but at certain moments there was this icy look with a suppressed anger".³⁵ This is not surprising in the face of such imputations and neither that he lost his appetite for sex and his wife's cooking: "Furthermore, his manhood was gone",³⁶ she notes. When he starts a new retirement hobby instead of drinking, she complains: "After the possession by her [his mother] my husband has stayed almost exclusively in the kitchen. He started to create cakes. He has previously never baked a cake".³⁷ Of course, her mother-in-law loves baking and therefore provides an excellent explanation for the husband's strange behaviour.

³⁰ Op. cit., p. 49

³¹ Op. cit., p. 75

³² Op. cit., p. 77

³³ Op. cit., p. 85

³⁴ Op. cit., p. 51

³⁵ Op. cit., p. 147

³⁶ Op. cit., p. 149

³⁷ Op. cit., p. 148

Unaffected by the fact that we have here a prime example of a purely psychologically interpretable description of a possession, some paranormal aspects, the book contains, remain: Poltergeist phenomena, clairvoyant knowledge of a far away living medium, some changes that the affected family members (daughter and husband) show spontaneously after the banishment of the spirits (without personal presence at the ritual). The unlimited power of the human mind cannot be limited by the limited assumption of being the victim of a strange mind. It is also noteworthy that the consulted psychotherapeutic professionals were not able to build any relationship to Mrs Sitte, considering her assumption of possession benevolent, while at the same time being able to address the issue in a systemic family therapy. Either way, only the expulsion of the spirits was able to help this family system return to a kind of normality!

Here, the criteria of statement speak for a reduced person criterion in terms of a lower reliability of the experience for an independent insight into the phenomenon class of possession by spirits of the dead. But how is it with the situation criterion? It seems to be totally certain for many peoples that the dead must vanish from the intermediate state of an earthbound spirit into an afterlife world, in order to not harm the living. It is also a widespread belief that the spirits of people who were known as untrustworthy already in this world can continue to have an effect. Thus, this report does not contradict the already known, but it as well does hardly contribute or enrich it. Whether we take the possession by spirit beings at face value or as a metaphor for a "feeling of possession", being caused by the "egostate" of the person concerned, or some other psychological explanation, psychological and transcendental explanations can never contradict each other (so the epistemological basis of transcendental psychology), because both must be mapped as an object of knowledge within the human psyche. The book *Soul Centered Healing* by Tom Zinser, reviewed by Alan Sanderson in the previous issue of JSTP, is an example of how a synthesis of ego-state therapy and dealing with spirits can succeed theoretically and practically. The fact that possessions and psychological causes can go hand in hand we can also formulate as follows: Apparently, everyone gets the possession he deserves. This is not meant cynical or morally: In the case of the Sitte family there was no moral guilt, which had invited the possession. It was the psychological situation of the rapporteur and her family system's overall situation, which has led to a certain perception of possession. After all, experienced visionaries like Sam Hess also teach that the mental state of the living and the dead is jointly responsible for the action of spirits of the dead.

Conclusion

It is possible and recommended for everyone to read themselves the here consulted, easily accessible sources and to check my conclusions. For me, as a reader, what was quite fascinating when reading all these books, which were very selectively chosen from the many volumes with (supposedly) authentic reports about encounters with spirit beings, was the authentic involvement of all these people. In my opinion, they describe experiences that hardly anyone believes them, and often they only describe them because for once in a lifetime someone (often a newspaper ad) asked for it. Of course, due to a lack of sufficient research into this phenomenon, the present analysis abstains from any closing judgement about the way in which immaterial beings exist: whether as a product of imagination (the currently most-represented, radical materialist position), whether as a purely inner experience (the symbolist psychological variant), as the experience of an inner reality that clothes itself in the image of a spirit being (so many Jungians understand their forefather C. G. Jung), as a result of the interaction of intrapersonal and transpersonal conditions (as I understand the position of C. G. Jung), or (the substantialist spiritualistic variant) as beings with a similar form of external reality like incorporated humans and animals. That we should not reject the spiritualistic position without better reasons, is founded on a principle of any science known as Occam's Razor: Use the simplest theory that represents an observation adequately – and until now we cannot rejected the simplest theory without further investigation, which is the spiritualistic assumption of the correctness of the obvious perspective. Another argument that speaks for the investigation of the spiritualist hypothesis is of ethical nature. For even if only a very small possibility exists that people who by the way of their life, their death and the attitude they sustain after death, in an afterlife world suffer or find happiness, then it is imperative to pursue this possibility further. Because it would be unethical in the highest degree not to explore carefully an entirely open question that could potentially save many people from suffering after death or from fear of death during this life.