

Feminism at the Forefront: A Critical Approach to Exceptional Experiences

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Abstract – Feminist theory today is now more relevant than ever. Reactionary cultural and political shifts have taken away long held rights of women and those that remain are under threat. Far from being divorced from scientific practice, the implications of this trend have a bearing on research, communities, and institutions. By returning to some key insights from feminist thinkers in parapsychology, most important herein is Rhea White (1990, 1994a, 1994b, 2002) but also Carl Williams (1996) and Beverly Rubik (1994), we can more reflectively consider such cultural changes as necessarily implicated in parapsychological science. In this essay and opinion piece, I interface some of these insights gathered from the *Women in Parapsychology* conference (Coly & White, 1994) with selected feminist scholarship outside of parapsychology to argue for a revived feminist objectivity that counters the traditional androcentric view of science. In turn, I draw a connection between feminine embodiment and the paranormal that aids in disentangling both from political co-option. Finally, I suggest one critical strategy taken from the work of Félix Guattari (2015) called *transversality* that pushes interdisciplinary research further by demonstrating the political potential such collaboration entails. Critical approaches to exceptional experiences remain largely untapped by parapsychologists when their various concepts, interventive strategies, and reading tools could be put in the service of challenging unfair ideologies while also shifting psi studies toward a more transdisciplinary paradigm.

Keywords: critical theory – exceptional experiences – Félix Guattari – feminism – parapsychology – science studies – transversality

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Feminismus in den Vordergrund: Eine kritische Annäherung an außergewöhnliche Erlebnisse

Zusammenfassung² – Feministische Theorie ist heute aktueller denn je. Reaktionäre kulturelle und politische Veränderungen haben den Frauen lange bestehende Rechte genommen, und die verbleibenden sind bedroht. Die Implikationen dieses Trends sind keineswegs von der wissenschaftlichen Praxis abgekoppelt, sondern haben wichtige Auswirkungen auf Forschung, Gemeinschaften und Institutionen. Wenn wir auf einige wichtige Erkenntnisse feministischer Denkerinnen in der Parapsychologie zurückgreifen, allen voran Rhea White (1990, 1994a, 1994b, 2002), aber auch Carl Williams (1996) und Beverly Rubik (1994), können wir solche kulturellen Veränderungen als notwendigerweise mit der parapsychologischen Wissenschaft verbunden betrachten. In diesem Essay verbinde ich einige dieser Erkenntnisse, die auf der Konferenz *Women in Parapsychology* (Coly & White, 1994) gewonnen wurden, mit ausgewählten feministischen Forschungsarbeiten außerhalb der Parapsychologie, um für eine wiederbelebte feministische Objektivität zu plädieren, die der traditionellen androzentrischen Sichtweise der Wissenschaft entgegenwirkt. Im Gegenzug stelle ich eine Verbindung zwischen dem weiblichen Embodiment und dem Paranormalen her, die dazu beiträgt, beides von der politischen Kooptation zu entkoppeln. Abschließend schlage ich eine kritische Strategie aus dem Werk von Félix Guattari (2015) vor, die als *Transversalität* bezeichnet wird und die interdisziplinäre Forschung weiter vorantreibt, indem sie das politische Potenzial aufzeigt, das eine solche Zusammenarbeit mit sich bringt. Kritische Herangehensweisen an außergewöhnliche Erfahrungen bleiben von Parapsychologen weitgehend ungenutzt, obwohl ihre verschiedenen Konzepte, Interventionsstrategien und Lesewerkzeuge genutzt werden könnten, ungerechte Ideologien in Frage zu stellen, während sie gleichzeitig die Psi-Studien in Richtung eines stärker transdisziplinären Paradigmas verschieben.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Kritische Theorie – außergewöhnliche Erfahrungen – Félix Guattari – Feminismus – Parapsychologie – Wissenschaftsforschung – Transversalität

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Odd boundary creatures – simians, cyborgs, and women – all of which have had a destabilizing place in the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological narratives. These boundary creatures are, literally, *monsters*, a word that shares more than its root with the word, to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify. (Haraway, 1991: 2, emphasis in original)

In the introduction to her definitive book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Donna Haraway (1991) calls our attention to the troublesome character outsiders possess, each for their own reasons, in being able to monstrously expose the forces at work used to render them as other. The ‘outsider’s view’ represents a powerful and untapped way of writing alternative realities, possible worlds, and divergent stories. As parapsychologists, we are outsiders.

2 Eine erweiterte deutsche Zusammenfassung befindet sich am Ende des Artikels.

Yet, nowadays, some parapsychologists seem less concerned with the incisive critique against secular, materialist science that the paranormal composes and more attuned to piggybacking on the latest theories arriving from quantum physics (Radin, 2009), reproducing or analyzing old experiments (Bem, Tressoldi, Rabeyron & Duggan, 2015), and squabbling over the most scientific methodology (Williams, 2015). All the while, we continue to face mounting institutional hurdles, difficulty securing funding, and continued excommunication by the mainstream sciences *writ large*.

Thankfully, for us, we have feminist scholars, those like Haraway (1991), Harding (2001), White (1994a, 1994b), and many others, to bring us back to a more encompassing way of understanding and investigating exceptional experiences. Now more than ever, we need an invigorated and even militant approach to research that is particularly conscious and sophisticated in light of ongoing cultural and political trends. In the United States, for example, the Supreme Court very recently overturned the nearly five decade long precedent set by the case *Roe v. Wade* that secured the constitutional right to abortion (Tumin, 2022). More globally, the ongoing pandemic has disproportionately affected girls and women, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban threatens hard-won gains in that country, and anti-abortion sentiment continues in many of NATO's eastern countries including Poland and Turkey (Islam, 2022). Traditional and longstanding assurances of protection, access to healthcare, and general gender equity have eroded.

Far from being a political and social digress, these changes and trends must necessarily impact the status of women in science and parapsychology – more precisely, to their detriment. My point is not to offer some broad assessment of the status of women today but, rather, to try and investigate and detail the way that culture and science are interwoven with each other, a central claim to my argument. In fact, as Phillips (2018) posits, the logic of modernity is such that no assurances can be made toward the eventual unfolding of equity and egalitarianism. Moreover, part of the challenge is to resist modern attempts to “corral us into two groups, to position us as either male or female, masculine or feminine, and define us through practices of gender” (Phillips, 2018: 842). Scholars and political thinkers alike should, instead, refuse the “inequalities that become attached to gendered difference” (Phillips, 2018: 842, emphasis in original) therein rejecting some presupposed notion that equality will one day arrive on the scene, which is perpetuating a dangerous deferral of the *status quo*.

As a science and institution, parapsychology is also intertwined with changing political and social tides both being influenced by them and, when taking up the mantle of the feminist parapsychology that White (1994a, 1994b) envisions, being the *influencer*, taking seriously the political character of science, welcoming women scientists, broadening opportunities, exploring alternative epistemologies, and so on. Outside of parapsychology, the influence of

culture on the production of scientific knowledge has long been detailed by feminist scholars (Mayberry, Subramaniam, & Weasel, 2001). The political and cultural nature of science has been sidelined in parapsychology in favor of potentially achieving objective evidence in favor of or against psi. Upon this view, culture is unimportant and, put into stronger terms, an oftentimes confounding variable that only strict controls and procedures can isolate and thereby mitigate. Indeed, what has this sort of mitigation, of being able to remove the subjective and cultural element from research, produced? Certainly, parapsychology is nowhere nearer to achieving so-called mainstream acceptance. While there have been some important milestones along the way surveyed by Drucker (2021) in the *Journal of Parapsychology*, these achievements, nonetheless, may leave some of us wanting. The pursuit for the ‘proof of psi’ has generally erased and foreclosed more fruitful paths that would have analyzed the paranormal and exceptional experiences necessarily in terms of the cultural and political entanglement – scientific proof being just one cultural artifact among others.

This blindness, and indeed a blindness that privileges an *androcentric bias* (White, 1994b), fails to consider the often intricate and labyrinthine ways that culture contributes, often extensively, to the creation of scientific knowledge. This is not to suggest that all epistemic claims are relative or that materiality is completely at the whims of cultural and social values, another dualistic trap that halts progress and thinking. Rather, a critique of androcentric bias in parapsychology is a necessary counterbalance insofar as this specific way of seeing has permeated our research methods; in parapsychology, this has been epitomized most wholly in experimentation. To be fair, the use of qualitative methods and alternative approaches has increased in parapsychological research over the last several decades (a non-systematic survey of the *Journal of Parapsychology* resulted in the following essays of note, see Beischel & Rock, 2009; Drinkwater, Dagnall & Bate, 2013; Heath, 2000; Woofitt, 2003). Notwithstanding, these gains of methodological plurality and the move toward, arguably, a more feminist science (Harding, 2001), are not assured as evidenced by the recent political and social trends striping women of long held guarantees. Let us not forget that science as we know it required a specific cultural-historical ground to come into being in the first place (paralleling the ascension of the machine and technology)!

By androcentric bias, I mean to denote a specific way of discovering and producing knowledge that is typical to the Eurocentric perspective, privileging values associated with masculinity, those that include impartiality, rationality, objectivity, progression, and even discovery, among others. I prefer to use the phrase the *production of knowledge* to circumvent the internal problems of ‘discovering’ knowledge, the idea that the world is some kind of foreign or exotic land that we, as explorers or colonists, must then go out and lay claim to (Phillips, 2018). To produce knowledge, by contrast, relates how subject and object, scientist and other, are in a process of co-developing facts, fictions, and figures about reality (Guattari, 2011). White echoes

this even expecting feminist methodologies to be discredited and repudiated precisely due to this conservatism: “it is likely that feminist research in parapsychology will be discounted within the field. I propose that this conservatism may reflect an androcentric bias: that of not extending acceptance – or even tolerance – to those regarded as the Other ...” (White, 1994a: 245). While this androcentric bias still, in the present day, finds its way into the praxis of parapsychology, the discipline has welcomed greater demographic and methodological diversity in its ranks; as a case in point, the student membership of the Parapsychological Association is “half female, includes transgender and non-binary individuals, is racially diverse and enjoys more representation of multiple countries outside of North American and Europe than other PA membership levels” (Ventola, Evrard, Koumartzis & Glazier, 2021: 5).

Triple Vision: Parapsychology as Other

The Other, with a capital O as opposed to a lowercase o, as White (1994a) rightfully articulates, has an important place in feminist theorizing in parapsychology: “the Other is everything with which one is not identified, yet that with which one must deal ... females are the Other to males, and males are the Other to females, but the male view is privileged” (White, 1994a: 241). To develop this further, forty years before White’s comment, Simone de Beauvoir (1953) writes that “[man] thinks of his body as a direct and *normal* connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighted down by everything peculiar to it” (p. 15, emphasis added). Normal, natural, normative – all that signify maleness as *a priori*, that ideal that is to be sought after, a standard toward which culturally and historically the tradition has attempted to attain.

It is no coincidence that Beauvoir locates this stratification on the very material level of the body (as opposed to, as later feminist will argue, on the arguably more nebulous domain of social norms and values that create gender) since naturality, in this case, must take its form as a category that is operable by the mechanisms, methodologies, and manners of science³.

3 The debate regarding the degree to which biological sex is a natural kind has long historical roots in feminist theory. Some feminists assert the importance of retaining the female sex as natural and essential, as a site of resistance. Such a position, it is argued, allows for stronger political activism such as securing rights and other forms of parity. By contrast, poststructuralist feminism interrogates the very notion of biological sex as a natural kind through examining the historical, linguistic, and social forces that have co-constructed our present-day idea of male and female (McCann & Kim, 2017). There are other positions on this issue that feminists have taken. However, I point the reader to the debate on biological sex as opposed to gender to show it as being *more controversial*, more philosophically unsettling than seeing gender as partially or fully socially constructed. More specifically, poststructuralist feminism throws into question naturality as such: Who gets to define what is natural? What counts as a natural kind? What kind of political boundaries does the natural secure? My suggestion is that this more radical approach could benefit parapsychology insofar as it allows us to more abstractly and contextually understand

The woman as Other is not just a metaphor; rather, she is quite literally the *problem of science*, of the traditional, androcentric historical heritage out of which Beauvoir is writing. The problem exists only in relation to her solution: “she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beauvoir, 1953: 16). Being a woman means to be the one that must carry the burden of being an outsider, of an Other, while simultaneously being excised, excluded, and embargoed at the very level of the body.

Yet, the position of Other that women find themselves in grants a unique ability, what White (1994a) refers to, citing the feminist work of Annas (1978), as double vision. Double vision means being both attuned to the dominant, androcentric view while also aware of the subjugated perspective of those that are Other. White (1994a) even goes on to argue that due to the fringe nature of parapsychology, the fact that it too is ostracized from the mainstream, women and other Others in parapsychology have a triple vision! Parapsychologists, in other words, are in the best position as scientists to understand the world in unique and novel ways while revising the rules of knowledge production. Following White’s lead on this, I have argued such a position elsewhere (Glazier, 2021a) suggesting that critical theory can be a strong ally for parapsychology in terms of challenging the dominance of mainstream science while also infusing a dimension of analysis that would be cutting-edge with regard to thinking about inclusivity, indigeneity, and alternative epistemologies.

Indeed, the triple vision of parapsychology makes it the *best science* by which to challenge rigid epistemologies and methodologies and offer innovative approaches to old problems. Part of this project is to join with feminists in science studies to recognize the import that culture and social values have for scientific research – the ideal that Sandra Harding (2001) calls absolute neutrality and Donna Haraway (1988) refers to as the god-trick of science. Not only does ascribing to a culture-free view of objectivity bulldoze particular values safeguarded within certain groups in favor of a largely androcentric view, but it simply reproduces a bad form of science. As Harding (2001) writes, “complete cultural neutrality is not only impossible in principle, it is also undesirable for scientific and epistemological (as well as political) reasons” (Harding, 2001: 295). The production of knowledge is intimately bound up with the often geographically and locally situated research project that is being undertaken whereby the methodology of the researcher does and should take into account the nuanced influence the context has on the object of study, necessarily shading and molding the models used by the researcher. Or, as Jessica Utts (1994) says, in a feminist parapsychology “the system as a complex whole would be studied” (p. 29).

how certain givens, the *a priori*s of science, come to be taken as such in the first place.

Williams (1996) relays this fact on the level of metaphor in parapsychology such that researchers have described psi through the general tropes of intrusion, transmission or force, and connection. The importance of these metaphors is the structure they provide for communicating about the paranormal; indeed, often deriving from the most available and relevant scientific models that, precedingly, arise from “the experience of embodiment” (Williams, 1996: 194). This latter point, locating the origin of metaphor in embodiment,⁴ is echoed by Haraway (1988) when she argues that grounding knowledge production around perceptual systems and “specific ways of seeing” (p. 583, emphasis in original) or *situated knowledges* may offer the possibility of a feminist version of objectivity. The dissonance created by the phrase *feminist objectivity* is intentionally troubling urging us to receive what we mean by the traditional notion of objectivity. Rather, feminist objectivity in parapsychology would likewise be “grounded in the objectivity which derives from the common experience of human embodiment” (Williams, 1996: 194) insofar as this objectivity incorporates highly specific ways of seeing reality that require the use of narrative, discourse, and metaphor to communicate knowledge and findings. To echo this, White (2002) continually stressed the centrality of narrative in parapsychological research as being even integral to the experiments she saw and co-implemented in J. B. Rhine’s research lab. After all, experiments are also culturally specific ways of sense-making themselves and, therefore, are not devoid of narrative and communal context.

To pursue a feminist objectivity in parapsychology means to examine the multiplicitous ways of seeing in their very specificity by not trying to synthesize or proffer a universal theory of psi. Instead, the paranormal needs to be understood contingently and locally within the purview of the research study or community where it occurred. As a result, the vehicles of communication or metaphors that are used to talk about psi will necessarily change. Such cultural

4 A lot more needs to be said with regard to embodiment and parapsychology. The questions of what counts as a body, who has a body, and where the body begins and ends are not clear and become even more complex when studying exceptional and paranormal experiences. In addition, the perceptual system of the body seems contestable given its normative model in physiology or biology when taking into account the ‘extra senses’ that many paranormal experiencers suggest exist. The notion of the *long body* conveyed in the Iroquois culture, no doubt, speaks to the problem of embodiment (Aanstoos, 1986; Roll, 1987). According to Aanstoos, in Iroquois tradition, “the body extended beyond the skin. Indeed, it extended specifically to the other members of the tribe. They did not mean merely symbolic contact with each other. Rather, they actually experienced each other in and through their bodies” (p. 49). Roll (1987) goes on to define the long body in terms of memory such that it is another sense organ we have as beings in the world when he writes that “if you cannot remember someone or something that person or thing is not part of your long body” (p. 26). Memory, on this account, extends both retrospectively and prospectively. Again, my point is that not enough theoretical attention is paid to the understanding of embodiment by parapsychologists. The concept of the long body simultaneously represents a critical approach to exceptional experiences insofar as it is an indigenous model of embodiment therein challenging the normative way we understand senses, empiricism, and epistemology.

specificity is an “integral part of scientific inquiry, directing scientists to examine certain kinds of phenomena instead of others, and guiding how science will expand or correct its hypothesis in the course of research” (Harding, 2001: 295). If we are to believe, as Rhea White (1994a) did, that those Others in parapsychology have a very unique way of seeing, a triple vision, then those that investigate the paranormal should pursue as much cultural specificity in their research as possible – androcentric objectivity transforms into the political questions “of which social values, interests, discourse, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge can and should flourish, and which should be eliminated or carefully controlled” (Harding, 2001: 302). A kind of politics that parapsychology, due to the alternative nature of its investigation and subjugated status within the scientific community, is most competent to develop.

Being Honestly Political: The Feminine as a Site of Parapsychological Resistance

Harding (2001) brings us to not just questions of culture and sociality, as discussed previously, but calls attention to the function of power in ideology; namely, the political question. The well-known feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ (Hanisch, 1969) makes explicit how even so-called womanly tasks such as doing housework, having children, or even wearing makeup have a broader function. For example, Sandra Bartky (2017) analyzes this through the way that the feminine body becomes unequally disciplined. That is to say that women must account for their embodiment in many additional, laborious ways that men often do not. Moreover, this kind of discipline or self-surveillance necessarily has an ideological function restricting freedom, denying possibilities, and reinforcing the *status quo* by reproducing,

the need for women’s wage labor, the cult of youth and fitness, and the need of advanced capitalism to maintain high levels of consumption. Further, it represents a saving in the economy of enforcement: since it is women themselves who practice this discipline on and against their own bodies, men get off scot-free. (Bartky, 2017: 479)

Taken together, the disciplining of femininity and women’s bodies cannot be unlinked from broader political forces that have both a historical tradition and trajectory. Not until “we read the cultural messages” (Bartky, 2017: 479) will women be able to develop resistance to these forces.

Might we also be able to offer a similar analysis of parapsychology as a field of study? – that is, as that disciplined science that has had to learn to auto-regulate its research practices to be in line with the most ‘rigorous’ and ‘empirical’ methodologies, those methods like experimentation that are germane to the natural sciences. Perhaps it is the case that, as parapsychologists, we have lost sight of the subject we study and, instead, have tried to fit the paranormal into a mold that would make it sexy and appealing to the ‘real’ scientists. We have, in other words, become subjected to a regime of science that continues to perpetuate our marginaliza-

tion while also, most importantly, leading us methodologically astray. As White (1994b) says very bluntly, “since 1882 we have unconsciously followed a methodology devised by males” (p. 16). However, these unconscious investments are not merely androcentric but, I would argue, are also perhaps conspiratorial in taking us away from what a proper investigation of the paranormal could be.

Certainly, women and those Others of science and parapsychology can resist these macro and micro political forces through organization, solidarity, refusal, and other means. Yet, I think women who have exceptional experiences might be an important starting place. For instance, the sort of male-centered rationality so endemic to legendary science and, by extension, the ideologically informed skepticism that we find exemplified in those researchers like Reber and Alcock (2019) can be challenged by looking at exceptional experiences through the lens of gender. As Susan Blackmore (1994) reminds us, women “are more often the mediums, psychics, and fortune-tellers; they more often consult these people; and they more often report spontaneous psychic experiences” (p. 236). *Exceptional experiences are gendered*, to put it differently, and taking into account this difference in our theories and approaches is requisite of ethical scientific practice. Put into even stronger terms, Blackmore (1994), Rubik (1994), Schlitz (1994), and Zingrone (1994) in their own words, to a greater or lesser degree, have all suggested *the feminine as a site of parapsychological resistance*⁵ insofar as exceptional experiences are more acquiescent to feminine ways of being or, polemically, as tradition having obfuscated or overlooked this very connection.

The relationship and distinction between the scientist and practitioner can and has informed parapsychological research. Apart from the rare cases where these two categories overlap, such as with Ingo Swann or Eileen Garrett, at times scientists and practitioners can have a distrustful or even an antagonistic relationship. White (1994a) relates that “for *years* I have wondered why

5 I want to be clear that the thesis ‘the feminine as a site of parapsychological resistance’ should not be taken to essentialize or to romanticize women. In fact, I choose the signifier *feminine* intentionally to be more in line with gender and not biological sex thereby calling attention to the way that feminine gender rituals, characteristics, enactments, and so on are socially and historically arbitrated. While in parapsychology this has been documented, as Blackmore (1994) relates, in (presumably) biological women most frequently, such does not have to be the case. The problematic masculine and feminine dualities that Rubik (1994) analyzes help us see how being passive, being receptive, or acting as a vessel in cases of mediumship, for instance, while from a Eurocentric perspective seem more feminine stances, are such only within this very paradigm. One could imagine other anthropological models whereby ‘men’ (again another culturally arbitrated category) likewise might have an affinity for these enactments. The second point I want to make here is also to understand ‘the feminine as a site of parapsychological resistance’ through what Gayatri Spivak (1996) calls *strategic essentialism*. That is, feminists in parapsychology will need at certain strategic times to adopt an essentialist position in order to achieve political action and change.

there seems to be such an unbridgeable gap between psychics and scientists” (p. 242, emphasis in original), and she goes on to place the responsibility on the scientist to garner a better understanding of the other’s point of view. Parapsychologists have made great strides in developing this dialogue in the years since the original conference; as two cases in point, Beischel and Rock (2009) exemplify a more process-oriented form of research and McMoneagle (1997), being both a practitioner and researcher, bridges these two roles. The concept of *reflexivity* found in qualitative research methods (Finlay, 1998) would additionally allow researchers to account for their own subjective values, beliefs, and ideas in the research process – being perhaps an even more important methodological and ethical mandate for us given the impact of the experimenter effect on our research studies. Similarly, White (1990) stressed the need to include what she called the transpersonal dimension to research, how synchronicities or flow-states aided in the development of a research question in the first place.

The fact that both studying the anomalous along with exceptional experiences themselves are shaped, in part, by political and ideological forces might not be all that insightful. Yet, what is revolutionary would be for parapsychologists honestly and proactively to be political in their pursuits. Following the lead of feminist scholars in parapsychology and elsewhere, this would entail a careful deconstruction of androcentric scientific practices, a more complete admission of the researchers’ intentions when undertaking and publishing a study, and, over and above, the use of our small, but agile institutions and community to unapologetically push the agenda that *exceptional experiences are real*.⁶ People have experiences that cannot be explained through ‘normal’ scientific means.

What is more, we are doing a disservice to those claimants and participants that come to us for help or to further knowledge of the paranormal when we engage in ideological skepticism. Contrast this with what Blackmore (1994) maintains as, at the time of the conference, *progressive skepticism* wherein a researcher “has personal access to the experiences, who knows that they occur, who is aware they can have a profound influence on people’s lives, and who can

6 Such a claim is meant, intentionally, to be both provocative and thought-provoking. I am inspired by Haraway’s (1991) textual stylistics and evocative prose, on this point, insofar as she demands a new way of producing research and thinking – a way that, in a real sense, sees the world as a wily agent and trickster with whom we must learn to converse. I have attempted to bring this framework, more schematically, into dialogue with parapsychology elsewhere (Glazier, 2021b). The traditional philosophical concepts of ontology, epistemology, and so on begin to lose their semantic consistency, on this reading, in that these tidy and neat demarcations serve necessarily the interests of certain ideologies and even specific groups of people, what Rhea White (1994a) would call the androcentric bias. To put the point bluntly, this is a new way of conceptualizing research and writing in order to think through and around what Jacques Derrida (see 1982) referred to as the *metaphysics of presence*: the ontological question of exceptional experiences is a moot point when science is taken in the fullness of its polity.

simultaneously apply the best of scientific analysis and inquiry to them” (p. 236). To add to Blackmore’s notion, I would suggest that progressive skepticism also entails an openness to new experiences and alternative ways of knowing that lie outside of androcentric science; the willingness, in other words, of parapsychologists to consider other epistemologies (indigenous, feminist, queer, and so on) just as potentially truthful and valid as experimental, positivist science – and even further, more valid insofar as these ways of knowing and seeing are situated, to return to Haraway (1988), and do not claim some kind of god-trick, an objective view from everywhere and nowhere at once.

Critical Strategies: Transversality

With feminism arguably catalyzing the condensation of the other critical approaches, those like discourse analysis, poststructuralism, and deconstruction, we need not worry about losing the incisive critiques against patriarchy and androcentrism if we venture beyond the disciplinary threshold. In fact, various strategies found in adjacent fields can aid us as parapsychologists when attempting to either disentangle the paranormal element from other hegemonic structures, such as psychiatric power (Hooks, 2007) or media and technology (Guattari, 2009), or when working to combat ideological agendas that are being used to discredit our research or institutionally blackball our discipline. I want to make the case that one of the most important tactics comes from the Marxist revolutionary and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. During his work with the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and individually as an analyst at La Borde psychiatric clinic, Guattari (see 1996, 2011, 2013, especially 2015) articulated the concept of *transversality* as a way to disassemble hierarchies and produce spaces of freedom and agency.

One way to think about transversality may be through the feminist call for interdisciplinary scholarship as exemplified in the recent, special issue of *The Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (Morrissey & Slaney, 2020) where leading psychologists present their ideas on how to engender discussion and better diversify roles for women in the field. Bringing one’s own expertise to bear in relation to others’ sometimes philosophically or methodologically divergent competencies is not without its hurdles. Lisa Osbeck (2020), however, suggests that the tensions and challenges that may arise actually further “personal development in ways that can in turn enhance interdisciplinary exchange” (ibid.: 33). Osbeck goes on to point-out the increasing trend of interdisciplinary research in the social sciences and related fields has led many to celebrate this multimodal approach as ushering in divergent and inventive problem-solving skills – in part, precisely through this interpersonal adversity and growth.

While this special issue is certainly indicative of the movement in the academy and elsewhere to champion interdisciplinary collaboration, a critical strategy in and of itself, transver-

sality as developed by Guattari takes interdisciplinary collaboration a step further. In terms of group and organizational structure, transversality,

is opposed to: (a) verticality, as described in the organogramme of a pyramidal structure (leaders, assistants, etc.); (b) horizontality, as it exists in the disturbed wards of a hospital, or, even more, in the senile wards; in other words a state of affairs in which things and people fit in as best they can with the situation in which they find themselves. (Guattari, 2015: 112)

Clearly, this is a more dispersed, rhizomatic, and diagonal way of teamwork that is less demarcated and more open than the interdisciplinary meeting of experts from various fields. No doubt, parapsychology has generally been welcoming of interdisciplinary work exemplified by the collaborative nature of annual conventions, the virtual symposia and psi agoras sponsored by the PA (Events, n. d.), and research that brings together teams with diverse beliefs and perspectives (Laythe, Houran & Dagnall, 2022). Transversality would supercharge this already collaborative work – a more advanced form of interdisciplinary research being a procedure of organizing, cutting normative sense, and creating new concepts by working in a diverse and multiplicitous team. Guattari sometimes refers to this as transdisciplinary research (Goffey, 2015). Transdisciplinary research calls for the incorporation of a diverse range of methodologies not such that all are judged equally with regard to their epistemic truth-value or scientific prestige. Rather, the veracity or appropriateness of a research method should be judged *pragmatically* in concert with the context where we find the phenomenon. No doubt, on this account, investigating exceptional experiences primarily through experimentation is trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. The method is, on principle, misplaced since psi happens naturalistically, communally, and out in the world. This critique is to undermine the *primacy* of experimentation, not to discount or discontinue the methodology wholesale. The rhizomatic approach articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) does, indeed, circumvent convenient dualisms indicative of the androcentric bias itself and, not to mention, lazy thinking more generally.

To use perhaps a better analogy, one that Guattari employs, the degree of transversality can be likened to the adjustment of blinkers on a horse. He suggests that we,

think of a field with a fence around it in which there are horses with adjustable blinkers: the adjustment of their blinkers is the “coefficient of transversality.” If they are so adjusted as to make the horses totally blind, then presumably a certain traumatic form of encounter will take place. Gradually, as the flaps are opened, one can envisage them moving about more easily. Let us try to imagine how people relate to one another in terms of affectivity. (Guattari, 2015: 112)

There are two points worth unpacking in this analogy. First, if we have our blinkers only slightly open or shut completely, staying in our disciplinary lane, to put it differently, then we are undoubtedly going to step-on, kick, hurt, or collide with other researchers – not being able to see the others' scholarship or benefit of their research. This would represent more of a hierarchical organization or even interdisciplinary work that does not embrace the full potential of transversality. Second, Guattari calls on us to join together in research *affectively*, not based on that long-held androcentric principle of rationality or reason but through emotion, mood, and attunement. A very feminist-inspired form of collegiality, indeed!

When the transdisciplinary research team works toward solving a problem, they are engaged, at the same time, in reorganizing and restructuring larger institutions. Such is the political potential of transversality: *ipso facto*, it changes what it means to do research and, by extension, undoes ideological agendas inviting us to see reality from different paradigms and models. We know transversality is achieved “when there is maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings” (Guattari, 2015: 113). Requisite, here, is the need for diverse peoples, perspectives, and approaches to be included in the conversation and scholastic field; an inclusivity that we (Ventola, Evrard, Koumartzis & Glazier, 2021), the team at *Mindfield: The Bulletin of the Parapsychological Association*, have and continue to try and encourage. When this diversity is working synergistically and not antagonistically, Guattari (2015) argues that “a new kind of dialogue can begin in the group: the delusions and all the other unconscious manifestations which have hitherto kept the patient in a kind of solitary confinement can achieve a collective mode of expression” (ibid.: 116). Parapsychology should seek this radical collective mode of expression: pushing back politically against physicalism, eradicating sexism, racism, colonialism, and other forms of discrimination from its methods and institutions, leading the way in transdisciplinary research teams, and capitalizing on its triple vision by demanding a better version of reality in our scientific models.

Critically Concluding

I have attempted to marshal some of the key insights from feminist scholarship in parapsychology and elsewhere relying heavily on the *Women in Parapsychology* conference of the Parapsychology Foundation that took place in 1991 (Coly & White, 1994) with several ambitions in mind. Below, I have enumerated these as concisely as possible. However, my aims and other research paths that pertain to a critical approach to exceptional experiences, or what we might call *critical parapsychology* (Glazier, 2021a), require more extensive scholarship in and, more importantly, outside feminist theory since feminism in parapsychology has largely carried the critical banner.

1. My desire has been to reignite interest in feminist thinking and research, especially in parapsychology, by synthesizing and developing some of the important insights already put forward by feminist parapsychologists. Crucially, the naïve and dangerous notion that science should pursue a form of unbiased and impartial objectivity must be done away with, an archaic relic that parapsychology seems, at times, still to covet – a paradoxical aspiration given the extant influence of the experimenter effect on research studies. Feminist scholarship, perhaps most explicitly, reminds us of the political nature of science and research. This is an important reminder, especially given the current and reactionary cultural changes that are happening in our institutions. Now may be a time like no other for parapsychology to seize upon, to make the case that studying exceptional experiences is a timely, culturally sensitive pursuit that deserves as much academic and public respect as the other sciences.
2. At the level of embodiment, the paranormal has an affinity for those qualities and characteristics typically associated with the feminine – not in terms of biological sex or even gender identity but, rather, on the level of comportment and expression. Such an understanding sidesteps the problematic sexual dichotomy of male versus female in favor of understanding the femininity of exceptional experience in relation to perceptual systems, as Haraway (1988) posits, thereby being more holistic, encompassing, and inclusive. As such, Rubik (1994) urges us “to create a paradigm that appropriately addresses the fullness of the phenomena and is gender balanced and holistic in scope” (ibid.: 57) going on to chide conventional scientific models as overly masculine impeding progress in psi studies. What would a fresh and more harmonizing approach look like? Feminist theory in parapsychology and elsewhere welcomes us to consider the possibilities, experiment with innovative ideas, and reconceive the very foundation of the science behind exceptional experiences.
3. I have suggested only one critical strategy, namely transversality, that parapsychologists can employ toward becoming a more progressive discipline in the sense of enhancing diversity, expanding research possibilities, and creating new concepts and ideas. However, there are many more such strategies that, I argue, parapsychologists could take advantage of if we so desire. To outline just a few: (1) reappropriation or reclaiming is a tactic that has been used in subjugated groups to take back insults or derogatory terms and make them their own (see in queer theory Rand, 2014). What would it be like for parapsychologists to reclaim the word paranormal? (2) The post-situationists in France have suggested the strategy of *détournement* (see Debord, 1970), which is a kind of hijacking or turning-back of signs and symbols. (3) Finally, perhaps most famously, Jacques Derrida (see 1976) established the critical literary and post-structuralist reading of deconstruction that interprets a text or discourse antagonistically by demonstrating

how it necessarily undermines its central claims. There are other critical and interventive strategies that psi scholars can harness to expose latent political agendas, analyze subjugating or privileging power effects, and enrich disciplinary diversity. Critical theory with its methods, concepts, and activism remains largely untapped in parapsychology and related paranormal fields.

We are at a cultural and institutional turning point. As parapsychologists, we know what it is like to be excluded from the majority, to be denied certain privileges given to the sanctioned sciences. Why not heed Haraway's (1991) call to become more daring in our research approach – to, in fact, inhabit that boundary space, along with the other figures we find there, and advance the critical tools and strategies that only an outsider's position can apply?

Indeed, this path not only beckons us to become more courageous conceptually and methodologically, but also to inspire others along the way – *at the margin we are created, not birthed*. Such is a crucial distinction given the complex biopolitics involved with reproduction, heterosexuality, and birthing (Cohen, 2017). The use of critical strategies goes toward this end, toward as Deleuze (2015) puts it, “introducing a militant political function into the institution, constituting a kind of ‘monster’ ... to produce and give voice to desire” (ibid.: 19). To set free our desire as feminists and parapsychologists would mean to radically transform the landscape of paranormal studies.

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**Feminismus in den Vordergrund:
Eine kritische Annäherung an außergewöhnliche Erlebnisse**

*Erweiterte Zusammenfassung*⁷

Feministische Theorie ist heute aktueller denn je. Reaktionäre kulturelle und politische Veränderungen haben den Frauen lange bestehende Rechte genommen, und die verbleibenden sind bedroht. Weit davon entfernt, von der wissenschaftlichen Praxis losgelöst zu sein, wirken sich die Auswirkungen dieses Trends erheblich auf Forschung, Gemeinschaften und Institutionen aus. Wenn wir auf einige wichtige Erkenntnisse feministischer Denkerinnen und Denker in der Parapsychologie zurückgreifen, allen voran Rhea White (1990, 1994a, 1994b, 2002), aber auch Carl Williams (1996) und Beverly Rubik (1994), können wir solche kulturellen Veränderungen reflektierter als notwendigerweise mit der parapsychologischen Wissenschaft verbunden betrachten. In diesem Positionspapier verbinde ich einige dieser Erkenntnisse, die auf der Konferenz *Women and Parapsychology* (Coly & White, 1994) gewonnen wurden, mit ausgewählter feministischer Wissenschaft außerhalb der Parapsychologie, wobei ich mich vor allem auf Donna Haraway (1991) und Sandra Harding (2001) stütze, um für eine wiederbelebte feministische Objektivität zu plädieren, die der traditionellen androzentrischen Sichtweise der Wissenschaft entgegentsteht. Feministische Objektivität beinhaltet eine Form von situiertem Wissen (Haraway, 1988), das seine kulturelle und politische Natur explizit beschreibt – mit anderen Worten, wie Wissen durch verschiedene und vielschichtige Faktoren wie Geschlecht, Politik, Sexualität usw. miterzeugt wird. Im Gegenzug stelle ich eine Verbindung zwischen der weiblichen Verkörperung und dem Paranormalen her, die dazu beiträgt, beide von politischer Vereinnahmung zu lösen, insofern als Weiblichkeit nicht durch biologisches Geschlecht oder Essentialismus bestimmt ist. Eine solche Verbindung offenbart das Weibliche als einen Ort des parapsychologischen Widerstands, einen Raum, in dem die „doppelte Sichtweise“ (double vision) der Parapsychologie, wie White (1994a) sie nennt, ideologische Aufladung findet, die sich gegen Kräfte wehrt, die sie von vornherein als das Andere (Other) darstellen würden.

⁷ Aus dem Englischen von Gerhard Mayer.

Infolgedessen fordere ich die Parapsychologen auf, die Fallstricke der physikalistischen Wissenschaft zu vermeiden – mein Hauptargument ist hier zumindest ihr androzentrisches Erbe – und für die Realität außergewöhnlicher Erfahrungen einzutreten, indem sie die problematische Frage der Ontologie zugunsten einer eher feministischen, naturalistischen Vorstellung von Wahrheit umgehen. Abschließend schlage ich eine kritische Strategie aus dem Werk von Félix Guattari (2015) vor, die als Transversalität bezeichnet wird und die interdisziplinäre Forschung weiter vorantreibt, indem sie das politische Potenzial aufzeigt, das eine solche Zusammenarbeit mit sich bringt. Transversalität ist eine Form der interdisziplinären Arbeit, die so aufgeladen ist, dass sie das Zerschneiden normativer Semiologien und die Neuordnung semantischer Referenzen erfordert, um die theoretische Kraft neuer Konzepte, Ideen und Strategien zu stärken.

Transversal arbeitende Forschungsteams würden im Gegensatz zum androzentrischen Ansatz, der eher auf Rationalität, Problemlösung und begrifflicher Klärung beruht, affektiv miteinander in Beziehung treten. Meine Hoffnung besteht darin, auf dem aufzubauen, was ich an anderer Stelle als kritische Parapsychologie bezeichnet habe (Glazier, 2021a), einem Ansatz für das Paranormale und die Anomalistik, der auf die Machtdynamik des Diskurses abgestimmt, methodisch pluralistisch und in Bezug auf die akademische Ernsthaftigkeit von außergewöhnlichen Erfahrungen politisch lautstark ist. Abschließend schlage ich zusätzliche kritische Taktiken vor, wie z.B. Rückforderung, Détournement und Dekonstruktion, die Parapsychologen dabei helfen könnten, die Andersartigkeit des Feldes neu zu ‚verdrahten‘. Kritische Herangehensweisen an außergewöhnliche Erfahrungen bleiben von Parapsychologen weitgehend ungenutzt, obwohl ihre verschiedenen Konzepte, Interventionsstrategien und Lesewerkzeuge in den Dienst gestellt werden könnten, ungerechte Ideologien infrage zu stellen, während sie gleichzeitig die Psi-Untersuchungen in Richtung eines stärker transdisziplinären Paradigmas verschieben.