

Consciousness & the Contact Modalities: Three Moves into Strangeness

Prologue by Jeffrey J. Kripal, Ph.D.¹

I am happy and honored to be asked to write a brief Prologue for this important book. As a historian of religions, that is, as someone charged with the task of taking *everyone's* extraordinary experience seriously and not just this or that culture's convictions, I have encountered almost all of these exceptional events in some form or another, either in living people or textual deposits. So I have been thinking about these matters for some time, decades really. I have also been watching contemporaries react to them, often not so well, often, alas, rather dumbly.

Not here. Rey Hernandez and his colleagues treat an exceptionally broad range of these experiences of transcendence. Rey calls them the "Contact Modalities" and speculates that they all have something to do with the primacy of consciousness or Mind as the fundamental base of reality. I strongly suspect that they are correct, or correct enough. I also suspect that, once we take such contact modalities seriously and what they imply about our place in the universe, things are going to get stranger, *way* stranger.

Are we ready for that? I think there are three moves into strangeness that we very much need to make, all of which are made in this important volume entitled *A Greater Reality: The New Paradigm of Nonlocal Consciousness, the Paranormal and the Contact Modalities*.

The first move involves the realization that *all of these Contact Modalities are connected*. In fact, everything is connected to everything, but this is especially true in this twilight zone. This move, I want to suggest, is one of the real markers that separates the novice from the mature thinker. The novices think that their particular specialty is somehow a specialty, that it is set apart from all of that other "crazy" stuff. You know, UFOs are real, but Bigfoot is not. Or maybe telepathy happens, but certainly not precognition. And forget about levitation. That sort of thing. The seasoned thinkers are not so tricked. They know that the UFO phenomenon and the NDE phenomenon are not the same, but that they are also definitely connected. So are parapsychological phenomenon (precognition, clairvoyance, remote viewing, even levitation, teleportation, and bilocation). So are spectral presences of every kind (from ghosts, angels, and demons to cryptids and monsters). The more one knows, the weirder it gets. Things, in actual fact, never really "makes sense," and for one glaringly simple reason: such phenomena have little to do with the five senses.

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The second move we very much need to make involves the realization that *the imaginal is the Contact Modality*. Put a bit less elliptically, once we realize that everything is connected, we have to come up with a model that explain why all of these things are connected *but are also so different*. We have to become comparativists. This is one of the hardest things for people to do in my experience. The believer wants to believe. The debunker wants to debunk. Neither can recognize the partial truth of the other. Neither can hear the secret—that the imaginal is a symbolic translator, a medium of communication, the dimension of consciousness that connects all of the dots.

By invoking the imaginal, I do not mean that these things are “imaginary.” I mean rather that, under very special circumstances, the human imagination is somehow empowered and becomes, for a while, not a spinner of fantasy but a medium of contact. What this means in turn is that no such contact modality should be interpreted literally but all should be interpreted really. Do not confuse the dream with the dreamer, but recognize that the dream *is* the dreamer, or rather is a symbolic expression and art form of the dreamer.

To invoke a simple metaphor I have used in other contexts, these contact modalities are all functioning like the stain glass windows of the church in which I grew up as a kid. The images and stories told in that glass are all culturally and religiously specific, as is the lead and glass art that constructed the windows many moons ago. But the sun that shines through them is neither culturally determined nor locally specific. And, of course, other places of worship will have other kinds of stain glass windows with other images and stories. What unites them all is the same sunlight shining through them and the subsequent process of artistic illumination and local mediation. There is real difference. And there is real sameness. But, in order to balance these two truths, one needs to recognize the artistic expression, the translation, the medium of contact. Otherwise, one will simply be confused, focusing on the images in the glass as literally true (the believer) or as obviously absurd (the debunker).

The third move involves what comes after—speculative ontology, that is, the positing of new models of reality and, specifically, new models of reality that are not strictly physicalist or reductive, that is, that do not frame everything as causal products of material reality. In our present reigning model, essentially different forms of scientism, most all of these extraordinary things are not extraordinary at all. They are simply impossible. They cannot happen. And so, or so we are told, they don't. But they do.

As you read through these remarkable essays, you will see the gifted authors making these same three moves. They make them in different ways and toward different ends, but the volume as a whole shout their triple truths. It is all connected. The imaginal is the contact modality. And we need to imagine new realities in order to bring these strange things into belief, acceptance, and, eventually, human knowledge.

Bio: Dr. Jeffrey J. Kripal is the Associate Dean of the School of Humanities and holds the J. Newton Rayzor Chair in Philosophy and Religious Thought at Rice University, where he chaired the Department of Religion for eight years and helped create the GEM Program, a doctoral concentration in the study of Gnosticism, Esotericism, and Mysticism that is the largest program of its kind in the world. Jeff is the author or co-author of eleven books, seven of which are with The University of Chicago Press, including, most recently a memoir manifesto entitled “*Secret Body: Erotic and Esoteric Currents in the History of Religions*” (The University of Chicago Press, 2017). He is presently working on a three-volume study of paranormal currents in the history of religions and the sciences for The University of Chicago Press, collectively entitled “*The Super Story*”.

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