
BOOK REVIEW

Luke, David and Rory Spowers, eds. 2021. *DMT Entity Encounters: Dialogues on the Spirit Molecule*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press. xiv + 370 pp. ISBN: 978-1-64411-233-5 (pbk).

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DMT Entity Encounters is the result of a four-day symposium which was held at Tyringham Hall in England in 2017. At the event, twenty scholars and experts from a variety of disciplines (including anthropology, clinical psychology, neuroscience, physics, theology, philosophy and religion studies) gathered to discuss the entity encounter experience, a phenomenon whereby people report meetings with seemingly autonomous non-human entities which appear to possess intelligence and agency, and are commonly described as spirits, aliens, angels, elves (among other terms). Such encounters can occur spontaneously, as the result of spiritual practices, and after ingesting psychedelic substances. This book, which is an edited collection of presentations and discussions from the symposium, focuses mainly on “entheogenic” entity encounter experiences—specifically, meetings with sentient others which occur when under the influence of the psychedelic compound DMT (dimethyltryptamine). Editor David Luke notes in the preface that “half of all high dose users” who take DMT (as ayahuasca or in pure form) report visions of other worlds and meetings with sentient non-human entities (p. xiii). As such, DMT research provides a fertile ground for the study of such experiences.

The Foreword, Preface and Introduction outline the symposium structure and its objectives. The main aim of the conference was to reinvigorate the relationship between science and spirituality. While entity encounters have a long history in mystical and religious traditions, they are also currently being studied in the laboratory (as discussed in Chris Timmermann’s chapter on human research with DMT), making them an ideal, if somewhat peculiar, conduit between the spiritual and scientific worlds. As entrepreneur, philanthropist and consciousness researcher Anton Bilton notes in the Introduction, NASA can spend billions of dollars searching for extraterrestrial life in outer space, but it seems to be inner space—or the “mindspace”—that presently offers the greatest opportunity for communion with incarnate intelligences (p. 2).

The following twelve chapters each consist of a transcript of a talk given by the author, followed by a discussion. The topics vary widely, and cover the phenomenology of the entity experience (for example, Luis Eduardo Luna’s chapter on entities in the ayahuasca realm), theoretical perspectives (such as Michael Winkelman’s chapter on evolutionary psychology

and the late Ralph Metzner's chapter which explores various theories and models of consciousness), and how the knowledge gained from such encounters might be applied to the everyday lives of ordinary people, particularly with the aim of alleviating human illness and suffering (William Richards's chapter on ineffability and revelation). Chris Bache's chapter is particularly fascinating; it provides a first-person mystical account of the author's own transformational journey with high doses of LSD, which he took regularly over a twenty-year period. LSD has a distinctly different quality to DMT, and encounters with "others" are not as common. Bache considers why this might be the case and how entities could fit within a broader spiritual paradigm of nondualism.

Other chapters cover entity encounters that occur outside of the psychedelic realm. For example, in Chapter 6, ufologist and author Whitley Strieber discusses his own spontaneously occurring encounter experiences which formed the basis of his best-selling book *Communion* (1987). In Chapter 7, academic Angela Voss focuses on the presence of the "daimonic other" in the ancient world. Voss's chapter provides an excellent example of how the arts and humanities can beneficially inform the entity discourse. It is also the only female perspective from the symposium; gender diverse viewpoints are still notably absent in psychedelic dialogues (although this appears to be slowly changing). Another highlight is Jeffrey Kripal's chapter, which explores the high weirdness of the encounter experience and its strangely reflexive relationship with language and narrative. Kripal considers the tricksterish nature of the entity and its association with paradox, anomaly and the human imagination. Daniel Pinchbeck's chapter also addresses the trickster archetype. Pinchbeck situates entity encounters within the context of global myths and cultural shifts; specifically, Terence McKenna's 2012 theory, the Mandela effect, the simulation hypothesis and current ecological and geopolitical crises.

While the title refers specifically to DMT entities, this volume is more broadly concerned with the notion of a numinous "other"—something that has communed with humanity throughout history, is deeply mysterious, and cannot be grasped by discursive reason alone. The dialogues in this book are academic and scientific attempts at understanding a phenomenon which currently occupies the borderlands between scientific reason and creative imagination; they demonstrate that while entity encounters may be measured with fMRI they cannot be reduced to sense-perception realities. As Winkelman notes, the phenomenology of these experiences still needs to be mapped further, and this should be a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary pursuit (p. 33). The book concludes with some thoughts regarding future methodologies for studying such an elusive phenomenon. In sum, *DMT Entity Encounters* is a captivating volume that provides a thorough analysis of the encounter experience. It is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in psychedelics, ufology, the paranormal, and all varieties of mystical and anomalous experience.