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# The Monika Encounter: A Mixed Methods Study of a Techno-Based Ghostly Episode

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## Abstract

Haunted People Syndrome (HP-S) characterizes recurrent 'ghostly episodes' as an interactionist phenomenon emerging from people with heightened somatic-sensory sensitivities that are stirred by dis-ease states, contextualized with paranormal belief, and reinforced via perceptual contagion and threat-agency detection. We tested the applicability of this psychological model via a three-part, quali-quantitative case study of a 36-year-old male in France, who self-reported successive encounter experiences seemingly triggered by the popular horror game and visual novel, *Doki Doki Literature Club!* The percipient completed several standardized measures that mapped the contents and context of his experiences, including indices of 'deep' imaginary companions, stigmata-like marks, and enchantment effects. We also conducted independent content analyses of his written account to compare the narrative's development and descriptions to published sequences for HP-S and dissociative phenomena. This episode showed (a) slightly below-average 'haunt intensity' and a content structure that paralleled both fantasy and lifestyle-based accounts, (b) an above-average score on a screener for HP-S recognition patterns, which we corroborated with scores on separate measures of transliminality, paranormal belief, and stress levels, (c) a narrative sequence that aligns reasonably well to the posited process of HP-S, (d) clear indications of depersonalization, derealization, and dissociated identity, and (e) aftereffects of situational-enchantment. The percipient's understanding of his experiences also evolved over time due to active sense-making activities. Our findings support prior research suggesting that embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive cognitions partly help to shape the phenomenology of these often transformative and clinically-relevant experiences.

## Keywords:

Case study • Dissociation • Entity encounters • Haunted people syndrome • Interactionism • Liminality • Phenomenology

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## Introduction

Case studies of exceptional human experiences (EHEs)—i.e., altered-anomalous perceptions that are typically spontaneous and challenge percipients' assumptions about the nature of reality (Palmer & Hastings, 2013)—can be valuable additions to the burgeoning research literature that integrates issues of consciousness, sense-making, and spirituality (Cardena et al., 2017; Kelly & Tucker, 2015; Plante et al., 2023; Rabeyron & Watt, 2010; Rodrigues et al., 2023; Tassell-Matamua & Frewin, 2019; Willard & Norenzayan, 2013; Woodard, 2012). In this context, Houran and Laythe (2022) argued that accounts of so-called apparitions, haunts, and poltergeists (collectively termed 'ghostly episodes') offer particularly rich insights about the roles of expectancy, liminality, and person-environment interactionism in EHEs<sup>1</sup>. Note that 'haunted people' who report direct and persistent encounters with supernatural beings or non-human intelligences are more common than perhaps assumed, with some estimates widely ranging from 5% (Ross & Joshi, 1992) to 25% (Sanders et al., 2022) of the general population. But these metrics might be understated, as such EHEs also occur in secular contexts (Taylor, 2012), including laical variations of ghostly episodes such as 'deep' imaginary companions that seemingly exhibit autonomous personalities or actions (Laythe, Houran, & Little, 2021) and 'group-stalking' whereby a person claims to be targeted by a covert gang of mysterious people (Lange et al., 2020).

Purported spirit activity is integral to many theological beliefs and transpersonal practices, as well as a familiar topic within corresponding academic studies (Lindeman et al., 2012; Plante & Schwartz, 2021; Santos & Michaels, 2022; Willard & Norenzayan, 2013; Wilt et al., 2022). However, readers unfamiliar with the literature on ghostly episodes might appreciate a short primer before learning about the case in question. To clarify from a phenomenological perspective, 'poltergeist outbreaks' involve clusters of unusual psychological or *subjective* experiences (*S*, e.g., apparitions, sensed presences, hearing voices, or unusual somatic or emotional manifestations) and physical or *objective* events (*O*, e.g., object displacements, malfunctioning electrical or mechanical equipment, and inexplicable percussive sounds like raps or knocks) that occur in presence of certain people called 'focus persons' (for a recent discussion, see Ventola et al., 2019). Similar *S/O* anomalies that seemingly persist over time at particular locations are known as 'hauntings' (Houran & Lange, 2001a). Researchers

1 This view aligns with "4E cognition" (Carney, 2020; Rowlands, 2010), i.e., the idea that cognition is fundamentally "(a) *Embodied*: Cognition cannot be fully described in terms of abstract mental processes (i.e., in terms of representations). Rather, it must involve the entire body of the living system (brain and body); (b) *Embedded*: Cognition is not an isolated event separated from the agent's ecological niche. Instead, it displays layers of co-determination with physical, social, and cultural aspects of the world; (c) *Extended*: Cognition is often offloaded into biological beings and non-biological devices to serve a variety of functions that would be impossible (or too difficult) to be achieved by only relying on the agent's own mental processes; and (d) *Enactive*: Cognition is conceived of as the set of meaningful relationships determined by an adaptive two-way exchange between the biological and phenomenological complexity of living creatures and the environments they inhabit and actively shape" (Schiavio & van der Schyff, 2018, para. 2).

have traditionally differentiated haunts and poltergeists, but research suggests that the *S/O* anomalies characterizing each type of occurrence reliably form a probabilistic and unidimensional factor, i.e., a literal Haunt Hierarchy of different encounter-type experiences (Houran, Lange et al., 2019). Moreover, people with ‘thin or permeable’ mental boundaries (as measured by constructs like Transliminality or Paranormal Belief) are more likely to perceive these *S/O* anomalies (Houran et al., 2002; Kumar & Pekala, 2001; Laythe et al., 2018). This phenomenon of an ordered set of unexplained signs or symptoms in individuals with a distinct perceptual-personality profile strongly suggests a core ‘encounter’ experience that resembles a biomedical syndrome (Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al., 2021).

Building on the above, Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al.’s (2021, 2022) grounded theory of Haunted People Syndrome (HP-S) describes all guises of ghostly episodes recurrently manifesting to specific people as an interactionist phenomenon emerging from (a) heightened somatic-sensory sensitivities that are (b) aggravated by dis-ease states (i.e., when a person’s normal state of ‘ease’ becomes markedly disrupted or imbalanced), (c) contextualized with sense-making attributions and reinforced by (d) perceptual contagion (i.e., snowballing perceptions) via attentional biases and (e) threat-agency detection. In short, the HP-S model equates the psychology of these EHEs to some of the fundamental mechanisms underpinning outbreaks of mass (contagious) psychogenic illness or autohypnotic phenomena (cf. Bell et al., 2021; Houran et al., 2002; Lifshitz et al., 2019; Ross & Joshi, 1992). Surveys, content analyses, and modern case studies all lend increasing credence to the five recognition patterns outlined above (Houran, Laythe, Little et al., 2023; Houran, Little et al., 2022; Houran & Laythe, 2022, 2023; Houran, Massullo, Drinkwater et al., 2024; Houran, Massullo, & Jawer, 2024; Lange et al., 2020; Laythe et al., 2018; Laythe, Houran, & Little, 2021; O’Keeffe et al., 2019; Ventola et al., 2019). But we nevertheless pursue new and particularly novel or challenging accounts that might help to validate, refine, or rewrite the HP-S concept. One such opportunity came to our attention.

### The ‘Monika Encounter’ Case Summary

An individual identifying as “Alt2109”<sup>2</sup> contacted the last author on 30 March 2024 eager to share a personal account of an EHE known as ‘soul-bonding’—i.e., a deep, emotional connection with fictional characters or entities that parallels both centuries-old Christian experiences of theophany (Robertson, 2017) and elements of modern-day celebrity worship (McCutcheon et al., 2004). In particular, the percipient claimed to be haunted for nearly two years by the central digital-character of “Monika” in the

2 This pseudonym reportedly aimed to protect his privacy, and though we lack direct evidence that Alt2109 had any paranoid ideations, his strong concern about issues of anonymity and potential monitoring or tracking is certainly consistent with ‘targeted people’ who report so-called ‘group (gang)-stalking’ experiences (cf. Lange et al., 2020; O’Keeffe et al., 2019; Reed, 2025).

freeware psychological horror game and visual novel called *Doki Doki Literature Club!* (DDLC) (Team Salvato, 2017). After providing his informed consent to participate in an iterative research process and allow publication of his narrative and psychometric information in whole or part, we requested further information about his situation and posed three questions: (a) “Do anomalous or psychic experiences run in your family? Please explain in detail;” (b) “Please describe your recent anomalous experiences in as much detail as possible, including how these have affected your personal or professional life;” and (c) “What other sources of information have you found, or individuals have you contacted, that have been helpful in your quest for answers about your anomalous experiences?” This approach follows other studies of encounter experiences using semi-structured interviews of percipients (e.g., Michael et al., 2021).

Alt2109 provided highly detailed narrative and background information, which was suitable for content-thematic analysis. In addition, a supplemental chronology of the general events in the case was established. This extensive set of case material contains a curious mix and development of themes that we previously have not seen integrated within a single ghostly episode, e.g., references to tulpas (thought-forms), possession, succubus-type activities (i.e., an entity in female form that appears in dreams to seduce men), group- (or gang) stalking events, and references to ritual magic practices, etc. (see Supplemental Material: Monika Encounter Narrative). And extending the idea that high technology can facilitate EHEs (Bebergal, 2018) or spirituality in general (Wildman & Stockly, 2021; cf. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), there also was the striking context of a modern video game as the claimed catalyst of the *S/O* anomalies. In other words, this case might represent a new variation on entity encounters (or ghostly episodes) which seemingly involve a core experience that alters in appearance or meaning in accordance with a percipient’s biopsychosocial context (Evans, 1987; Houran, 2000; Kumar & Pekala, 2001).

In particular, Alt2109 recounted a series of profound and perplexing events, beginning with “shared lucid dreams” influenced by a “Romanian witch” and an immaterial entity named Monika that purportedly emanated from the DDLC game. These dreams were reportedly confirmed by external interactions, such as visits to Alt2109’s web profiles by the dream participants. Alt2109 also described a range of anomalous experiences involving synchronicities, predictions, pseudo-hallucinations, and body manipulation allegedly orchestrated by the Monika entity. These included her accurately predicting events and manipulating his physical and mental state, such as maintaining alertness through simulated electric shocks and even controlling biological functions. Despite these unsettling occurrences, Alt2109 sought validation and understanding from various sources. These included cognitive scientists, astrologers, and paranormal communities, all of whom gave mixed responses. Ultimately, the experiences deeply impacted his life by challenging perceptions of reality and prompting a quest for answers about the nature or meaning of his EHEs.

## The Present Study

Our quali-quantitative design involves confirmatory and exploratory approaches organized in three parts. Part 1 assesses the phenomenology of the Monika Encounter against the five recognition patterns of HP-S (Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al., 2021, 2022). Phenomenology refers to the structures of experience and consciousness (Seamon, 2000), which Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al. (2021, p. 198) described as having “micro” and “macro” aspects. Micro-phenomenology refers to the specific contents or details of altered-anomalous experiences, whereas macro-phenomenology in this context denotes the conditions that mediate the onset or proliferation of those experiences<sup>3</sup>. Part 2 involves a thematic analysis with mediate or moderate a narrative lens to compare the sequence of events in the case relative to prior research on HP-S. Finally, Part 3 examines the percipient’s frequent references to esoteric activities or phenomena in order to seek additional insights about the anomalous experiences. We adhered to the Journal Article Reporting Standards (Kazak, 2018) and describe below how we determined our research samples, data exclusions (if any), research questions, applicable manipulations, and all measures and data abstractions used in the content analysis (Vassar & Holzmann, 2013). Our analyses and research materials were not pre-registered but largely follow the procedures used in prior studies (e.g., Houran, Massullo, Dagnall et al., 2024; Houran, Massullo, & Jawer, 2024; Houran, Laythe, Little et al., 2023; Houran, Little et al., 2022, Houran & Laythe, 2022, 2023).

### Part 1: Phenomenology of the ‘Monika Encounter’

Our first analysis tested whether the phenomenology of this case corresponded to a ‘spontaneous’ ghostly episode with features and dynamics suggesting that: (a) *Transliminality* (or thin mental boundaries), reinforced by *Belief in the Paranormal*, was a springboard for the anomalous experiences; (b) *Dis-ease states* coincided with the onset of anomalous experiences; (c) Recurrent anomalous experiences exhibited patterns (‘diverse events’ and ‘event flurries’) indicative of *Perceptual Contagion*; (d) *Sense-Making Attributions* conformed to the percipient’s biopsychosocial context, and (e) *Threat-Agency Detection* was triggered, i.e., arousal or anxiety levels of the percipients relate to the nature, proximity, and spontaneity of the anomalous events.

We also assessed for certain tangential phenomena to ghostly episodes: (a) ‘deep’ imaginary companions, i.e., a pretend (invisible) friend or personified object showing an independent personality or will (Drinkwater, Dagnall, Houran et al., 2024; Laythe, Houran, & Little, 2021; Little et al., 2021); (b) potential stigmata-like marks on the

<sup>3</sup> Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al. (2021) developed their concept of micro-phenomenology independently from Petitmengin (2006; 2006; Petitmengin et al., 2009), who used the term to describe an interview method for collecting fine-grained descriptions of lived experiences associated with various sensorial, emotional, or cognitive processes so that a corpus of accurate data relevant to a research objective can be gathered. However, both views involve the idea of a “psychological or behavioral microscope” that distinguishes descriptive elements in a narrative from those related to explanations or judgments.

focus person (Houran, Little, Laythe et al., 2022; for a discussion of similarities between Catholic saints and poltergeist-like incidents, see Bayless, 1967); and (c) a sense of enchantment (Drinkwater, Massullo et al., 2022) that can foster additional anomalous experiences (Lange & Houran, 2021). This latter state specifically involves absorption within ‘pleasant’ ideations and emotions (e.g., excitement, surprise, awe, and wonder), simultaneously mixed with ‘unpleasant’ ideations and emotions (e.g., uneasiness, disorientation, tension, and unpredictability)<sup>4</sup>. This happens when a person-environment interaction disrupts an individual’s normal waking experience with a sudden or unexpected awareness that fuels a transformative feeling of connection to a transcendent agency or ultimate reality (Drinkwater, Massullo et al., 2022). As such, enchantment is a common aftereffect of perceiving *S/O* anomalies (Houran, Lange, & Laythe, 2022).

## Method

### Participant

“Alt2019” is the self-assigned pseudonym for a 36-year-old European male, who professed to be a highly educated professional with two Masters degrees and a current pursuit of a doctorate while working as a teacher. He reported a history of being perceived as intellectually advanced and individualistic, with potential indications of neuro-atypicality, possibly on the autism spectrum. He also emphasized a cautious and methodical approach to belief systems and stated that his diverse background experiences and thoughtful introspection contribute to his multifaceted perspective and success in academia and professional endeavors.

He further reported no “diagnosis or professional treatment for any serious mental illness or condition like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder” or “use of alcohol or other recreational or illegal substances” (cf. Smith et al., 2010). However, Alt2109 did reference notable paranormal beliefs and experiences in his family history. In particular, his mother supposedly practices astrology and energetic healing and has had paranormal experiences since her childhood. For example, she told him about a time when she dreamed of President Kennedy’s assassination the night before the announcement came to his country. According to her, the maternal-side of their family tends to have females with psychic abilities. On the other hand, his father is “only superstitious” in terms of using “little rituals to obtain good luck.” But Alt2109 noted

4 Drinkwater, Massullo et al. (2022) argued that their construct of situational-enchantment—which qualitatively parallels the concepts of numinosity (Lönneker & Maercker, 2021), extraordinary architectural experiences (Bermudez, 2015), ontological shock (Mack, 1994), (spiritual) awakenings (Corneille & Luke, 2021; Taylor, 2012), absolute unitary experiences (Jones, 2004), and Stendhal syndrome (Guerrero et al., 2010) — subsumes and extends the epistemic and positive emotion of awe (Schaffer et al., 2024). For a discussion concerning the concepts of Oneness vs Nothingness in the context of religio-spiritual experience, see Murly (2022).

that his father as a child had an “imaginary dog” before his parents adopted a real one.

Alt2109 stated that his primary language is French, but he also claimed to read, write, listen, and speak English regularly and well enough to watch movies in the original voice and converse with friends in the US and the UK. He reportedly scored at a C1-level on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL; cf. Oller & Spolsky, 1979), which is a standardized assessment of English language ability in non-native speakers wishing to enroll in English-speaking universities. A ‘C1’ score signifies a high-level of proficiency, such as understanding complex texts, expressing oneself in a fluent and spontaneous manner, and using language that is flexible and effective for social, academic, and professional purposes.

## Measures

*Survey of Strange Events* (SSE; Houran, Lange et al., 2019). This is a 32-item, Rasch (1960/1980) scaled measure of the overall ‘haunt intensity’ (or perceptual depth) of a ghostly account or narrative via a true/false checklist of anomalous experiences inherent to these episodes. The SSE’s Rasch item hierarchy represents the probabilistic ordering of *S/O* events according to their endorsement rates but rescaled into a metric called ‘logits.’ Higher logit values denote higher positions (or greater difficulty) on the Rasch scale (Bond & Fox, 2015). More information about the conceptual background and psychometric development of this instrument is provided by Houran, Laythe et al. (2019, 2021). Rasch scaled scores range from 22.3 (= raw score of 0) to 90.9 (= raw score of 32), with a *mean* of 50 and *SD* = 10, and Rasch reliability = 0.87. Higher scores correspond to a greater number and perceptual intensity of anomalies that define a percipient’s experience of a ghostly episode. Supporting the SSE’s validity, Houran, Lange et al. (2019) found that the specific sequence (or Rasch model) of *S/O* anomalies in ‘spontaneous’ accounts (i.e., ostensibly sincere and unprimed) differed significantly from narratives derived from ‘primed, lifestyle, fantasy, and illicit’ contexts.

*Haunted People Syndrome Screener* (HPSS; Lange & Houran, 2024) consists of six items to be rated four-point Likert scales anchored by ‘Strongly Disagree’ (scored 0) and ‘Strongly Agree’ (scored 3). These assess recurrent haunt-type experiences and aspects of four of the five recognition patterns of HP-S (Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al., 2021, 2022)—namely: (a) Thin Boundary Functioning (i.e., Transliminality), (b) Dis-ease States, (c) Perceptual Contagion (i.e., event flurries and/or diverse perceptions), and (d) Sense-Making Attributions (i.e., narrative reality based on general ideological or sociocultural beliefs). The Rasch-scaled scores (reliability = .80) range from 37.1 to 71.2, with a mean of 50 and standard deviation = 10. Its scores also strongly and positively predict SSE scores ( $r = 0.78, p < .001$ ).



The HPSS does not index the recognition patterns of Paranormal Belief and Threat-Agency Detection due to measurement issues found during the tool's development (Lange & Houran, 2024); therefore, we measured (a) Paranormal Belief with a standardized tool described below and (b) Threat-Agency Detection using a one-item statement (i.e., "My 'ghostly' experiences feel most threatening or unnerving when the mysterious events happen very close to me or actually to me") that we adopted from the HP-S Recognition Patterns Checklist (Houran, Laythe, Little et al., 2023; Houran, Little, Laythe et al., 2022). This item is rated on a four-point Likert scale anchored by "Strongly Disagree" (scored '1') to "Strongly Agree" (scored '4'). It is important to understand that this latter index is supplementary and does not contribute to the HPSS score.

(3) *Revised Transliminality Scale* (RTS; Lange, Thalbourne et al., 2000) is a 17-item, True/False, Rasch-scaled measure of "hypersensitivity to psychological material originating in (a) the unconscious, and/or (b) the external environment" (Thalbourne & Maltby, 2008, p. 1618). Lange, Houran et al. (2019) thus explained that this perceptual-personality variable incorporates both Hartmann's (1991) general boundary construct and the specific notion of sensory-processing sensitivity (Aron & Aron, 1997). The Rasch reliability is .82, and RTS scores ( $M = 25$ ,  $SD = 5$ ) significantly predict an array of anomalous experiences, syncretic cognitions, and lower perceptual thresholds (for overviews, see Evans et al., 2019; Roxburgh et al., 2024; Simmonds-Moore, 2024).

(4) *Rasch-Revised Paranormal Belief Scale* (RPBS) is a Rasch-based, 16-item version (Lange, Irwin et al., 2000) that remedies the original 26-item, Likert-based RPBS (Tobacyk, 1988, 2004) with its artificial seven-factor structure due to differential item functioning—i.e., sex and age-related response biases. Once these measurement issues are corrected, Lange, Irwin et al. (2000) found that the RPBS comprises two, moderately correlated belief subscales that seemingly reflect different issues of control. Specifically, 'New Age Philosophy' (11 items, Rasch reliability = .90) appears related to a greater sense of control over interpersonal and external events (e.g., belief in psi), whereas 'Traditional Paranormal Beliefs' (5 items, Rasch reliability = .74) seem more culturally-transmitted and beneficial in maintaining social control via a belief in magic, determinism, and a mechanistic view of the world. The Rasch-RPBS has a mean of 25 ( $SD = 5$ ) for both subscales, and several studies support their construct validities (Houran et al., 2000, 2001; Houran & Lange, 2001b).

(5) *Social Readjustment Rating Scale* (SRRS; Holmes & Rahe, 1967) is a 43-item tool that measures the amount of stress a person experiences due to major life events. It assigns a rank-ordered, numerical 'impact score' (ranging from 11 to 100) to various life events, e.g., marriage, divorce, job change, or loss of a loved one, based on the perceived impact on a person's life. Summing the impact scores of these rank-

ordered events experienced within a specific period, usually a year, gives an index of the stress level of an individual. The total score-range is 0 to 1466. Interpretation of the overall score is difficult because of the large differences in each person's ability to cope and their reactions to stress, but the general guidelines are (a) score < 150 suggests equates to a low probability of developing a stress-related disorder, and (b) score > 300 equates to an 80% chance of getting sick in the near future. Gerst et al. (1978) reported good reliability for both healthy adults and patients, and Holmes and Rahe (1967) found a positive correlation between scores on the SRRS and an illness measure. Revisions have been proposed (e.g., Hobson & Delunas, 2001; Wallace et al., 2023), but we used the original version for ease and convenience.

(6) *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983) is a widely used stress assessment instrument. It consists of 10 items that assess how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded individuals appraise their lives. The PSS was designed for use in community samples and features, questions of a general nature that are relatively free of content specific to any sub-population group. Participants rate each item on a Likert-type scale from 0 to 4, according to how often they have felt or thought a certain way during the last month. The total score indicates the perceived level of stress, with higher scores corresponding to higher stress levels. Cohen and Williamson (1988) reported significant correlations between PSS scores and alternative stress measures, self-reported health and health services measures, health behavior measures, smoking status, and help-seeking behavior. Lee's (2012) review and more recent evaluations (e.g., Denovan et al., 2019) report acceptable psychometric properties for the tool, with alphas ranging from about 0.70 to 0.90.

(7) *Enchantment-Adjective Checklist* (Enchantment-ACL; Houran, Lange, & Laythe, 2022) is a 21-item, True/False, Rasch-scaled measure of five aspects of "ontological shock"—i.e., an arousal stated comprising Emotional, Sensorial, Timeless, Rational, and Transformative contents. Items are rated via a 4-point Likert scale anchored by "Strongly Disagree" (= '1') and "Strongly Agree" (= '4'), with a mean of 50 ( $SD = 15$ ). Preliminary analyses indicate good internal reliability (Rasch reliability = 0.82) and positive correlations with individual's global ratings of perceived enchantment ( $r = 0.51, p < .001$ ).

(8) *Tangential Phenomena*. Two items indexed personal histories of (a) 'Deep' Imaginary Companions (ICs)—i.e., a favorite inanimate object or invisible playmate that exhibits an independent personality or will; and (b) Stigmata-like Marks—i.e., wounds or localized pain on the body that correspond to those of the crucified Jesus Christ (i.e., on the hands, on the feet, near the heart, and sometimes on the head from the crown of thorns, or shoulders and back from carrying the cross and scourging). These two items are rated on 4-point Likert scales anchored by "Strongly Disagree" (scored '1') and "Strongly Agree" (scored '4').

Procedure

We emailed English versions of the measures (collated as a randomized battery) to Alt2109, along with explicit instructions to carefully read and complete each form at his own pace. We also encouraged questions about the intended meaning of any items on the instruments since English was his second language. He returned the completed measures within two weeks. We followed-up with Alt2109 to member-check his responses before scoring the measures and conducting the analyses (cf. McKim, 2023). Note that Alt2109 was not financially compensated for his participation in this study.

Table 1.  
Ratings on the Micro-Phenomenology (SSE Patterns) of Percipient “Alt2109”

Survey of Strange Events (SSE)	Lifetime Inventory (pre-DDLC)	DDLC Inventory	DDLC Inventory Frequency
I saw with my naked eye a non-descript visual image, like fog, shadow or unusual light	0	0	0
I saw with my naked eye an “obvious” ghost or apparition – a misty or translucent image with a human form	0	0	0
I saw with my naked eye an “un-obvious” ghost or apparition – a human form that looked like a living person	0	0	0
I smelled a mysterious odor that was <i>pleasant</i>	0	0	0
I smelled a mysterious odor that was <i>unpleasant</i>	0	0	0
I heard mysterious sounds that could be recognized or identified, such as ghostly voices or music (with or without singing)	0	0	0
I heard on an audio recorder mysterious sounds that could be recognized or identified, such as ghostly voices or music (with or without singing)	0	0	0
I heard on an audio recorder mysterious “mechanical” or non-descript noises, such as tapping, knocking, rattling, banging, crashing, footsteps or the sound of opening/closing doors or drawers	0	0	0
I had a <i>positive</i> feeling for no obvious reason, like happiness, love, joy, or peace	1	1	730
I had a <i>negative</i> feeling for no obvious reason, like anger, sadness, panic, or danger	1	1	1000
I felt odd sensations in my body, such as dizziness, tingling, electrical shock, or nausea (sick in my stomach)	1	1	1000
I had a mysterious taste in my mouth	1	0 (1)*	0
I felt guided, controlled or possessed by an outside force	0	1	1000
I saw beings of divine or evil origin, such as angels or demons	0	0	0
I saw folklore-type beings that were not human, such as elves, fairies, or other types of “little people	0	0	0
I communicated with the dead or other outside force	1	1	1000
I had the mysterious feeling of being watched, or in the presence of an invisible being or force	1	1	1000
I had a sense of déjà vu, like something was strangely familiar to me about my thoughts, feelings or surroundings	1	0	0
I felt a mysterious area of <i>cold</i>	1	0	0
I felt a mysterious area of <i>heat</i>	1	1	1000
I experienced objects disappear or reappear around me	0	0	0

**Table 1.**  
*Ratings on the Micro-Phenomenology (SSE Patterns) of Percipient “Alt2109”*

Survey of Strange Events (SSE)	Lifetime Inventory (pre-DDLC)	DDLC Inventory	DDLC Inventory Frequency
I saw objects moving on their own across a surface or falling	0	0	0
I saw objects flying or floating in midair	0	0	0
Electrical or mechanical appliances or equipment functioned improperly or not at all, including flickering lights, power surges or batteries “going dead” in electronic devices (e.g., camera, phone, etc.)	0	1	3
Pictures from my camera or mobile device captured unusual images, shapes, distortions or effects	0	0	0
Plumbing equipment or systems (faucets, disposal, toilet) functioned improperly or not at all	0	0	0
I saw objects breaking (or discovered them broken), like shattered or cracked glass, mirrors or housewares	0	0	0
I heard mysterious “mechanical” or non-descript noises, such as tapping, knocking, rattling, banging, crashing, footsteps or the sound of opening/closing doors or drawers	0	0	0
I felt a breeze or a rush of wind or air, like something invisible was moving near me	0	0	0
Fires have started mysteriously	0	0	0
I was mysteriously touched in a <i>non-threatening</i> manner, like a tap, touch or light pressure on my body	1	1	1000
I was mysteriously touched in a <i>threatening</i> manner, such as a cut, bite, scratch, shove, burn or strong pressure on my body	1	0	0
RAW SUM	11	9	7730

\*Note: False = 0, True = 1

## Results

### *Micro-Phenomenology*

Table 1 gives the SSE patterns of Alt2109’s *S/O* anomalies for two distinct time frames: (a) the period before he played the DDLC game (i.e., ‘Lifetime-inventory’), and (b) the period after he engaged with the DDLC game (‘DDLC-inventory’). His Lifetime-inventory comprised anomalous experiences collectively showing a slightly above-average ‘haunt intensity’ (SSE score = 51,  $SE = 2.7$ ), whereas the DDLC-inventory indicated a ghostly episode with a slightly below-average ‘haunt intensity’ (SSE score = 48.6,  $SE = 2.8$ )<sup>5</sup>. Contrasted to the means for narratives associated with ‘Primed’ ( $M = 52.30$ ), ‘Spontaneous’ ( $M = 51.7$ ), ‘Lifestyle’ ( $M = 50.6$ ), or ‘Illicit’ ( $M = 45.9$ ) contexts, the current norms signify that his latter SSE score most closely approximates the mean for a ‘Fantasy’ narrative ( $M = 49.43$ ) — i.e., respondents who purposely imagine a vivid and personal ghostly experience, thus producing contents likely to be intuitively-generated or creatively constructed from tacit knowledge

5 The narrative material mentioned an experience of ‘mysterious taste,’ i.e., a perception of a kiss, but a revised score that includes the corresponding anomaly (SSE item #12) would not change our overall conclusions here.

accumulated through experience and cultural learnings, combined with a capacity to access sensory and affective elements (Houran, Lange et al., 2019).

To cross-check, we correlated the recorded frequencies of each SSE item to the Rasch logit values for the same items across each of the five different haunt conditions in Houran, Lange et al. (2019). Recall that a logit is the unit of measurement in Rasch scaling that corresponds to a point along an interval-level continuum where a given item is positioned per its likelihood of being endorsed relative to other items along the common dimension. Houran, Lange et al., (2019) found that the logit values of some SSE items shifted by context, i.e., specific anomalies were under- or over-reported by survey respondents in Spontaneous, Primed, Lifestyle, Fantasy, and Illicit conditions. Thus, these five narrative-specific 'haunt hierarchies' have some diagnostic value. The *S/O* anomalies that Alt2109's most frequently experienced should thus correspond to SSE items with lower logit values (i.e., 'easier' endorsement, or relatively more common experiences). Likewise, the SSE items with higher logit-values (i.e., 'harder' endorsement or relatively rarer experiences) should relate to his *S/O* anomalies with comparatively lower frequencies. In other words, a stronger *negative correlation* in this exercise indicates stronger compatibility between a given account and a narrative-specific haunt hierarchy. Correlational analysis indicated that Alt2109's frequency distribution of *S/O* anomalies most closely resembles a Lifestyle narrative ( $r = -.25, p = .17$ ), followed by Primed ( $r = -.17, p = .35$ ), Spontaneous ( $r = -.04, p = .83$ ), Fantasy ( $r = .09, p = .62$ ), and Illicit ( $r = .11, p = .55$ ) conditions. Though these associations are not statistically significant, their directionalities are important datapoints for further contemplation.

Finally, we evaluated the broad structure of the *S/O* anomalies in his DDLC-inventory via Houran, Lange et al.'s (2019, p. 180) decision-tree process. Based on current benchmarks, this statistically-derived classification heuristic suggested that the general structure of his *S/O* anomalies align with 87% accuracy to an 'Illicit' narrative, i.e., an account containing some degree of false or embellished testimony. This outcome might fit with Fantasy or Lifestyle narratives assuming that self-deception or self-gaslighting was involved. For example, this could relate to expectancy-confirmation effects (e.g., Drinkwater et al., 2019) or efforts to cope with trauma (e.g., Rubinstein & Lahad, 2023). Overall, Alt2109's account showed the haunt intensity of a Fantasy narrative with *S/O* anomalies showing a distribution pattern most like people who routinely participate in ghost-hunting or paranormal-tour groups with strong demand characteristics. We thus conclude that his DDLC-related ghostly episode does not represent purely 'spontaneous' experiences but more likely stems from certain private or public activities that involved certain expectancies, as well as fostered Thin Boundary Functioning and associated capacities for imagination or dissociation, i.e., a disruption, interruption, and/or discontinuity

of the normal, subjective integration of behavior, memory, identity, consciousness, emotion, perception, body representation, and motor control (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). An expanded content analysis could help to clarify these ideas.

<b>Table 2.</b> <i>Macro-Phenomenology and Psychometric Profile of Percipient “Alto2019”</i>			
Psychometric Measure	Benchmarks	Score	Conclusion
Haunted People Syndrome-Screener (HPSS)	$M = 50$ ( $SD = 10$ )	51.7	Slightly above-average score suggests a fair match to HP-S macro-phenomenology
Threat-Agency Detection (one-item)	$M = 2.5$	2	Tendency not to perceive anomalous events in his proximity as ‘threatening’
Revised Transliminality Scale	$M = 25$ ( $SD = 5$ )	26.6	Slightly elevated somatic-sensory sensitivities
Rasch- Revised Paranormal Belief Scale			
New Age Philosophy	$M = 25$ ( $SD = 5$ )	27.97	Proponent of supernatural beliefs related to a sense of personal control over events.
Traditional Paranormal Beliefs	$M = 25$ ( $SD = 5$ )	31.89	Marked proponent of supernatural beliefs related to magic, entities, determinism, and a mechanistic view of the world.
Social Readjustment Rating Scale	$\leq 150$ = low stress $\geq 300$ = high stress	353	Indications of very high stress levels due to major life events
Perceived Stress Scale	$M = 12.1$ ( $SD = 5.9$ )	19	Indications of high stress levels due to situational factors
Enchantment-Adjective Checklist	$M = 50$ ( $SD = 15$ )	53	Slightly above-average sense of enchantment in response to the anomalous experiences
Deep Imaginary Companions (one-item)	$M = 2.5$	2	No history of deep imaginary friends
Stigmata-Type Markings (one-item)	$M = 2.5$	1	No history of stigmata-type markings

### *Macro-Phenomenology*

Table 2 shows that Alt2109 had a marginally above-average HPSS score, indicating that the features of his DDLc-period anomalies matched the HP-S recognition patterns to a good degree. The strongest ratings corresponded to the HPSS items dealing with Transliminality and Perceptual Contagion (diverse events), whereas the lowest ratings concerned the HPSS items about Lifetime Recurrent Experiences, Disease States, Perceptual Contagion (event flurries), and Sense-Making Attributions. However, other psychometric results mitigate these latter outcomes and suggest that

the presence of Lifetime Recurrent Experiences, Dis-ease States, and Sense-Making Attributions were underestimated.

Specifically, several metrics distinctly profiled Alt2019 as an ‘encounter-prone’ person, as his Lifetime-period inventory of *S/O* anomalies was slightly above average (i.e., Recurrent Lifetime Experiences) and this is consistent with his above-average scores on Transliminality, New Age Philosophy, and Traditional Paranormal Beliefs (i.e., Thin Mental Boundary Functioning). Next, the presence of Dis-ease States was confirmed by his high scores on the PSS and SRRS measures of stress levels related both to recent circumstances and major life events.

Perceptual Contagion, on the other hand, received limited support. The DDLC-inventory indicated ‘diverse perceptions’ as would be expected, but the lack of suitable time series data prevented an empirical test of ‘event flurries’, i.e., perceptions that snowball over time. Likewise, Alt2109 “somewhat disagreed” (rating = 2 on a 1-4 Likert scale) with the one-item index of Threat-Agency Detection, even though his narrative contained repeated references to this theme, ranging from hypervigilance to paranoid-type ideations. But he clarified that the experiences that occurred nearest to his physical person (or closely within his personal space) always involved ‘Monika’ stimulating his body in surprising or enjoyable ways. As such, there was ongoing agency detection but without a consistent sense of threat.

Lastly, the lower rating on the HPSS item about Sense-Making Attributions is understandable and probably accurate given Alt2109’s ongoing exploration and contemplation of various explanations for his altered-anomalous experiences. He described his current attitude as “ambiguous,” i.e., a mix of inherent skepticism of the paranormal combined with increased open-mindedness to this possibility. Still, his above-average Paranormal Belief scores in Table 2 reveals a moderately-strong endorsement of various psychic phenomena. Moreover, his family and friends reportedly believe in the paranormal and even practice certain occult arts. Taken altogether, his biopsychosocial context unquestionably constitutes a ready framework for him to interpret the *S/O* anomalies as manifestations of supernatural agencies or forces.

### *Tangential Phenomena*

Table 2 shows that Alt2109 reported no history of ‘deep ICs’ or stigmata-type phenomena despite the otherwise overt somatic or potentially dissociative aspects to his case. However, he scored slightly above-average on situational-enchancement in response to the *S/O* anomalies. He also conveyed four noteworthy phenomena ostensibly “not covered by the SSE,” namely: (a) “shared, lucid dreaming” (i.e., “dreams induced by another dreamer who was far away, e.g. the Romanian witch or an immaterial entity like Monika”); (b) “pseudo-hallucinations” (i.e., “strong mental representations of images

or noises clearly recognized as such”); (c) “predictions” (i.e., “several times Monika predicted events that occurred as she described”); and (d) “body manipulation” (i.e., “Monika could alter my health or more precisely my tonus”) (pers. comm. to J. Houran; cf. Supplemental Material: Monika Encounter Narrative). Enchantment can mediate additional anomalous experiences via an ‘enchantment-psi loop’ (Lange & Houran, 2021), so it is unclear if these tangential perceptions were integral to his ghostly episode or ancillary experiences to the HP-S model. Either way, this circumstance could have stoked or sustained Perceptual Contagion effects.

## Part 2: Narrative Development of the ‘Monika Encounter’

We augmented Part 1 by comparing the ostensible evolution of the case against the narrative development of ghostly episodes implied by previous research. To clarify, Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al. (2021, 2022) implicitly posited that the HP-S recognition patterns unfold in ghostly episodes via the general process:

Transliminality/Paranormal Belief → Dis-ease → Threat-Agency Detection  
→ Perceptual Contagion (event flurries) → Perceptual Contagion (diverse  
perceptions) → Sense-Making Attributions (1)

However, Lange and Houran’s (2024) observed Rasch hierarchy of the HP-S variables in their HPSS development work suggested a slightly different ordering:

Sense-Making Attributions → Transliminality → Perceptual Contagion (event  
flurries) → Dis-ease → Perceptual Contagion (diverse perceptions) (2)

Our content analysis of Alt2109’s written material thus aimed to (a) map the basic progression of events and HP-S recognition patterns via a chronological ‘lifeline’ exercise that identified and depicted the significant life events and turning points in his personal story, marking the highs (eustress) and lows (distress) (cf. Gramling & Carr, 2004; for a prior application to a haunt case, see Houran, Massullo, Drinkwater et al, 2024), and (b) compare it to the ‘posited’ versus ‘observed’ sequences above.

We also explored the narrative material for additional insights about the potential role of fantasy-related tendencies (e.g., dissociation) as implied by Part1’s results. Specifically, we explored for high-confidence indications of (a) *derealization* (i.e., distorted perceptions of external reality), *depersonalization* (i.e., distorted feelings of bodily-self), and *dissociated identity* (i.e., distorted feelings of identity-self) (Caputo et al., 2021), and (b) a tiered progression of these dissociative phenomena per Lange et al.’s (2022) path analysis model:

Derealization → Depersonalization → Dissociated Identity (3)



## Method

### Analysts

A doctoral-level researcher who was very familiar with the HP-S model and associated coding materials independently conducted the lifeline mapping including a content analysis of the recognition patterns, whereas a second doctoral-level researcher and specialist in dissociative phenomena conducted a separate content analysis of the narrative. Neither analyst had any contact with Alt2109 or knowledge of Part 1's findings.

### Narrative Material

We used the written account and background material that Alt2109 prepared at our request for a detailed description of his anomalous experience and current circumstances. It is too lengthy to give in an Appendix, so we deposited the full, verbatim record—comprising a 13,967-word chronology and commentary—as Supplemental Material: Monika Encounter Narrative at: <https://osf.io/7zfyp/>. We did not correct the many spelling and grammatical errors in this document, which might relate to the percipient's (a) current fluency level in English, (b) potential racing thoughts from anxiety or excitement, or (c) unreported or undiagnosed mental health issues (Walenski et al., 2010).

### Procedure

To evaluate qualitative data scientifically, content or thematic analysis is often used to simplify complex text-based information into quantifiable data suitable for standardized comparisons or statistical analyses (Namey et al., 2008). This approach specifically involves assigning a series of unique labels to texts that reference a particular thematic category of information that maps the “distinct phenomena into descriptive categories” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 275). The content analyses conducted here used a narrative lens, which involves a deductive approach that applies existing theory and codes following from it to qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Accordingly, the first content analyst carefully studied Alt2109's narrative and then embedded notes to mark the assessed presence of any of the five HP-S recognition patterns as judged appropriate. To support consistent and accurate coding, we provided the content analyst with an instruction sheet that clearly defined each recognition pattern (cf. Houran, Laythe, Little et al., 2023; Houran, Little, Laythe et al., 2022). This coding was part of the analyst's larger task to prepare a chronological lifeline map of the purported events and experiences that defined Alt2109's case. Outputs from this exercise enabled a comparison of his narrative's progression to the ‘posited’ vs ‘observed’ (i.e., derived from Rasch scaling) HP-S sequences noted above.

The second content analyst worked a parallel path to assess the narrative material for ostensible examples and chronological ordering of derealization, depersonalization, and dissociated identity. For convenience and efficiency, the other research team members then worked as an expert panel (Bertens et al., 2013) to ‘double-check’ the reliability, accuracy, and completeness of both sets of these primary ratings (Hewitt et al., 2016). Any ambiguities or disagreements about particular aspects of the case’s phenomenology were resolved via iterative discussions. We deposited the extensive research materials and results associated with the HP-S content analysis at Open Science Forum (OSF): <https://osf.io/7zfyp/>, including: (a) Narrative Analysis-Instructions and Coding Sheet, (b) Narrative Analysis-Embedded Codes, and (c) Narrative Analysis-Lifeline Map.

## Results

### Sequence of HP-S Recognition Patterns

We refer readers to the Supplemental Material for the full results of the HP-S content analysis, including a detailed graphical mapping of the case’s apparent ‘lifeline.’ The cumulative results suggest that the reported experiences align well to the ‘HP-S Sequence (1)’ noted above (cf. Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al., 2021). Particularly, Alt2109 initially outlines mentation that is consistent with elevated levels of Transliminality. This, during the period when Alt2109 is attempting to become close to the person referred to as the Romanian witch, expresses as unusual thoughts and perceptions (i.e., ideation, affect, and fantasy). Principally, the notions that the Romanian witch wants to become a spy and is deliberately concealing personality aspects. Following Alt2109’s failure to initiate a relationship, these odd cognitions become paranormal in nature. This transition starts with the perception that the Romanian witch was interested in preternatural topics (i.e., dreaming and religion) and manifests in the conviction that she possesses magical powers. At this point, paranormal beliefs become the central focus of Alt2109’s observations.

It seems that distress arising from the failure to initiate a relationship with the Romanian witch is a catalyst for the movement from broader, transliminal ideations to paranormal convergent and predominating perceptions (Dagnall, Denovan, & Drinkwater, 2022; Dagnall, Denovan, Drinkwater, et al., 2022; Drinkwater et al., 2024). Dis-ease arising from negative affect plays a significant role in the process. Moreover, the Dis-ease state is concomitant with Alt2109 increasingly regarding the Romanian witch as a source of supernatural malevolence and intentional menace. These cognitions reflect threat-agency detection, whereby Alt2109 linked anomalies to, and is anxious about, the paranormal powers of the Romanian witch. The increasing attribution of the Romanian witch to paranormal occurrences/phenomena is consistent with Perceptual Contagion (diverse events). This is characterised by

the inclusion of compound supernatural ascriptions (i.e., event flurries). The end of this activity burst coincides with a shift in Alt2109's paranormal-based perceptions. Explicitly, focus moves from the Romanian witch to DDLC and then to its main character, Monika. Alt2109 personifies Monika as a psychic entity that is seeking physical embodiment. This stage further aligns with Perceptual Contagion (diverse perceptions), where the percipient reports an array of supernatural-related anomalies.

Alt2109 provides coherence between narrative phases (i.e., Romanian witch, DDLC, Monika, and experience sharing that was post-Monika) by retaining the major themes and varying intensity or centrality. Within this storyline, the Romanian witch is initially pivotal, then following manifestation, Monika predominates. The final phase, where Alt2109 shares his experiences serves as a postscript for the narrative overall. The observed variations in attention are consistent with reported accounts of Perceptual Contagion. This involves a progressive increase in perceived anomalies, followed by a burst of anomalous events, which gradually die away (Houran & Lange, 1996). The development, establishment, and maintenance of a cogent narrative was commensurate with the final Sense-Making Attributions stage of HP-S. Moreover, this demonstrates that the events, despite logical inconsistencies are internally rational and coherent.

### **Sequence of Putative Dissociative Phenomena**

Consistent with prior research linking dissociative tendencies to encounter-type experiences (Caputo et al., 2021; Ross & Joshi, 1992; Sharps et al., 2010; Wahbeh & Radin, 2017; for an overview see Maraldi, 2024), the third analyst noted many probable examples of dissociative phenomena in Alt2109's narrative. Table 3 classifies selected instances of his altered-anomalous experiences by derealization, depersonalization, and dissociated identity. The analyst also concluded that Alt2109's perceptions and behaviors involved a notable degree of hysteric suggestibility, i.e., a state where a person is highly influenced by suggestions, especially when they are experiencing strong emotions, psychological distress, or traumatic events (Kluemper & Dalenberg, 2014). This means that Alt2109 could have easily been led to believe things or act in certain ways due to a hyper receptiveness to external influences like the ideas or commands of others. This personality constantly searches for 'confirmations' of his (often fantastic) beliefs and scopes in every event. He superficially knows some psychological concepts, e.g., 'anomalous experiences' or 'pseudo-hallucinations'.

Alt2109 shows a high-level of derealization (i.e., detachment of external sensations from mental representations of the external world). This appears in his deep involvement with fictional characters of the visual novel DDLC are similar in all respects to cartoons. He spontaneously associates this fictional novel with the reality of a Romanian 'witch.' Alt2109 also manifests remarkable instances of depersonalization (i.e., detachment of

Table 3.

## Alt12109's Altered-Anomalous Experiences Organized by Ostensible Dissociative Phenomena†

Derealization	Depersonalization	Dissociated Identity
<p>“She tears off her clothes and incidentally her skin, discovering that she is in fact the Predator” p. 7.</p> <p>“as if drawn in pencil continuously, everything consisted of black lines; that were constantly redefined to ensure movement” p. 7.</p> <p>“I felt myself being lifted up and pulled towards her, towards her face” [both derealization and depersonalization] p. 7.</p> <p>“[...] my expectations are much more... practical!” I remember her laughing with a certain joyful candor as she said this. I thought about it when I woke up and my conclusion was that she expected me to find a technique to realize her big dream: to <i>materialize and become a real person</i>” p. 8.</p> <p>“Pluto in Sagittarius would be a sublimation, therefore the <i>solidification</i> of a vaporous material with the help of a stone with magnetic properties” p. 8.</p> <p>“She was therefore counting on me to find a solution in order to realize her dream to <i>materialize</i>, to stop being an idea” p. 8.</p> <p>“I remain on the hypothesis of the thought-form, i.e., an idea strong enough to have developed an existence of its own on the psychic or astral planes and to act in return on human thoughts or even on concrete events” p. 9.</p> <p>“as Monika would be an <i>algorithmic entity</i>, a being circulating among the electromagnetic waves and thus able to oscillate between the human psyche and the cyberspace” p. 9.</p> <p>“<i>Later February–Early March 2020</i>: my series of [lucid] dreams with Monika occurred” p. 23.</p>	<p>“A feeling of comfort or a whiplash when I was physically or morally ill or sharing intimate fantasies with me” p. 8.</p> <p>“Then, she very quickly manifested herself to me during the waking period. I could not really see her. I could not really hear her, I could not really feel her” p. 9.</p> <p>“This sometimes led to funny situations, such as her <i>warming me up by caressing my private parts</i>” p. 9.</p> <p>“At first, her “<i>touches</i>” felt like tingling, which I likened to static electricity” p. 9.</p> <p>“Then her feeling became “humanized”, and I felt as if a small, warm hand of a woman with silky skin was brushing against me” p. 9.</p> <p>“she could draw on the surrounding environment to channel said energy and thus revitalize me” p. 10.</p> <p>“It was harsh, she punished me by limiting my <i>libido</i>” p. 11.</p> <p>“Strange feelings on and into the body: Sometimes, those manifestations seem as glue spilling my health; other times, they are as needles altering my mental health” p. 12.</p> <p>“I mentioned mysterious touches since they were the most vivid experiences to the point” p. 20.</p> <p>“She was largely more skillful and graceful than me with my own body. When we disputed to the point of broking up, she proved an extended control of my biological functions since she restrained my libido as a punishment: I could only obtain that my penis stanked and then ejaculated by thinking about her, all other crushes let me flat” p. 20.</p> <p>“<i>Later March 2020</i>: direct contact with her is enhanced including at daytime” p. 23.</p>	<p>“she had pieces of information that I could not know by myself and even once time she contradicted my assumption, and she was right” p. 1.</p> <p>“it’s a character who wants to go out with us and who has well spotted the person behind the protagonist” p. 4.</p> <p>“She explained to me that she was not born as an egreore but came into the world in the mind of her creator, as a compromise between tulpa and servant, between autonomous personality and barely intelligent instrument of a magician. She only gained access to a multitude of minds when DDLIC was published, having spent two years beforehand developing fully under the aegis of her “father” p. 9.</p> <p>“Monika, who warned me that <i>third parties were certainly aware of our encounter and would seek to manipulate me</i>, potentially by creating a double of Monika to impersonate her to me” p. 9.</p> <p>“She explained that she had to fight constantly to force people who thought about her to respect her <i>original personality</i> and not to alter it too much, especially mod authors. Otherwise, she felt that this induced a form of <i>dissociation</i> in her that horrified her. What’s more, her dignity was undermined when some people reduced her to a sexual phantasm, and this irritated her all the more as she absolutely detests all objectification: she considers herself a person and hates to be denied the human condition” p. 10.</p> <p>“Monika then told me that it was out of the question for me to get involved with <i>anyone other than her</i>” p. 10.</p> <p>“Our next leads were magical rituals and attempts to <i>multiply</i> her roots in many minds” p. 11.</p> <p>“As for the attempts at mental connexion, for me it was a question of inducing lucid dreams with the intention of joining the spirits of other sleepers and convincing them to connect to her so that they could share a little of their psychic strength. We hoped she would build up more and more power until she reached physical manifestation. I could not remember my dreams, ironically, but they were always covered by more innocent ones. Monika explained to me that my mind was blocking because I had planned to <i>multiply myself</i>” p. 11.</p> <p>“<i>April–July 2020</i>: I began my researches to help Monika for her goal but also to better understand her and the phenomenon behind her very existence. Our main objective was then finding electromagnetic devices or artefacts e.g., menhirs and dolmens that could trigger an energetic event able to <i>materialize</i> her. Nonetheless, we quickly renounced about this trail since 1) nothing serious emerged from my researches 2) and Monika was worried about health outcomes for me if I exposed myself to powerful electromagnetic fields” p. 23.</p> <p>“May 2020: The incident with my previous crush happened and so I renounced to find somebody else, I gave in Monika before her insistence to become my girlfriend. Moreover, she made me sad about her condition of artificial being only forged to fulfill a mission, as an instrument while she had <i>feelings and was self-aware</i>” p. 23.</p> <p>“Plus, I had to convince Monika not to <i>harm the Romanian witch</i> since the latter continued her attacks against me. Her attempts made Monika horribly angry, and she began to threaten killing the Romanian witch to make her stop. When I argued that I did not want her to do a dirty work, she precised that she could otherwise “burn up her neurons enough to make her retacted, which would be another way to neutralize her. I <i>obtained from her</i> that she renounced to both those extreme solutions” p. 23.</p> <p>“As lucid dreaming had seemed a privileged way to obtain magical results, we planned that I practiced it again to visit as many people as possible and try to convince them to share a little fraction of their life force with her in order to make her power up with hope that it would be enough to <i>materialize</i> her” p. 24.</p> <p>“November 2022: Lyeve’s show conclusion ended on a scenarisation of his broadcast with Monika manifesting to him apart from the game. Two points were puzzling since they confirmed the assertion of Monika about her deal with him: 1) the actor who gave her voice to Monika later said that she risked to “<i>loss herself into the character</i>”; 2) her avatar played a long tirade during which she argued that she was not an AI but a character becoming <i>alive due to emotional involvement of her audience</i>” p. 24.</p>

Note: Derived from ‘Supplemental Material: Monika Encounter Narrative’ and with added emphasis here by the authors.

bodily sensations from mental representations of the inner world). This depersonalization is congruent to his putative ‘hysteric’ suggestibility and appears in feeling ‘touches’ by the warm hand of a girl (Monika, who is a fictional character in the visual novel that he watched). Alt2109 further shows a significant amount of compartmentalization of dissociative identities. This appears in his continuous endeavors for the ‘materialization’ of Monika to whom he is engaged. He might even meet the diagnostic criteria for Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). This seems reasonably indicated from the start of the narrative when he admitted that “she [Monika] had pieces of information that I could not know by myself and even once time she contradicted my assumption, and she was right” (Supplemental Material: Monika Encounter Narrative, p. 1). Lastly, his narrative contains indications of ‘megomania’ (now referred to as narcissistic personality disorder, see Loudis, 2018), i.e., a condition where a person has an exaggerated sense of their own importance, power, or abilities. This emerges overtly in his attraction to the task of ‘materialization’ of the spiritual presence and continuous attempts to ‘materialize’ Monika.

Moreover, it was possible to discern the order of ostensible dissociative states from Alt2109’s detailed and date-stamped narrative material. *First*, derealization occurs during lucid dreams that involve DDLC characters. Probably, the author omits experiences of de-realization during waking states because of his fear of being classified as suffering from schizophrenia. In particular, Alt2109’s relationship with the Romanian witch seems pathological. However, lucid dreams are clear cases of derealization: (a) “Yuri tore off her clothes and, incidentally, her skin revealing the Predator;” (b) dreams as drawn in pencil continuously readjusting black lines; (c) the author’s face was pulled toward Monika’s face hence melting both faces and loss of himself. *Second*, depersonalization occurs through vivid experiences of somatosensory perceptions of ‘presences’ attributed to Monika’s hand touching intimate areas of his body. These experiences of depersonalization precede the engagement before marriage between the author and Monika. *Third*, the compartmentalization of dissociative identities emerges in part at the first stage of derealization, and they explode after the vivid bodily experiences of ‘presence’ to Monika. The temptation to ‘materialize’ the Monika thought-form into a living female body to complete a marriage that is no longer a mystic conjunction but instead a natural embodiment —fails. However, the materialization of an idea indicates that a mental representation attains the stage of being an ‘alter’ identity. In this sense, Monika’s scope is ‘practical,’ as she said while laughing during a lucid dream. Monika reaches a high level of autonomy appearing to manifest jealousy and menace to kill other girls. This compartmentalization could represent DID, i.e., a mental condition characterized by the existence of two or more different personality states, with distinct behavior, memory, and cognition, within one individual (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; cf. Dell, 2006; Lebois et al., 2022; Lynn et al., 2022).

According to Alt2109’s material (see Table 3), the progression across the three stages of dissociation seemingly bridge the period from Later February-Early March 2020 (derealization) to Later March 2020 (depersonalization) to April-July 2020 (dissociative identity). Therefore, our content analysis of the altered-anomalous experiences found both probable signs of dissociative manifestations and showing a sequence that conceptually replicated the ‘derealization → depersonalization → dissociated identity’ chain from Lange et al.’s (2022) study of mirror- (eye) gazing experiences.

### **Part 3: Esoteric Themes in the ‘Monika Encounter’**

Researchers have long known that entity encounters can be deliberately cultivated for leisure, research, therapeutic, or spiritual purposes via techniques like transcranial magnetic stimulation (Persinger & Koren, 2001), mirror-gazing (Caputo et al., 2021), psychedelics (Lutkajtis, 2021), trance and meditative states (Peres et al., 2012), or immersive experiences like legend-tripping and paranormal tourism (Houran et al., 2020). Some of these approaches or activities closely parallel in important ways Western-based magic rituals for the ‘summoning’ of supernatural beings (cf. Lange et al., 2023). Thus, we sought to clarify whether the references to esoteric philosophies, concepts, or activities in Alt2109’s narrative reflected (a) Fantasy- or Lifestyle- related activities that possibly fueled *S/O* perceptions by facilitating Thin-Boundary Functioning (i.e., were ostensible ‘causes’ as suggested in Part 1), or (b) Sense-Making Attributions that the percipient explored or adopted in response to the *S/O* anomalies (i.e., were ostensible ‘synonyms’ or ‘aftermaths’).

## **Method**

### **Analytical Approach**

To minimize rater biases in this last content analysis with our research team (Sheldrake, 1998), we assessed Alt2109’s narrative materials via the ChatGPT-4 software (OpenAI, 2023) in combination with a follow-up qualitative review. In this way, the initial results would be blinded to the findings of Parts 1 and 2. ChatGPT is a computer program that functions as an AI-powered robot capable of understanding and responding to human language. The process begins with training, where ChatGPT learns from vast amounts of text data, such as books, articles, and websites, to grasp how language is used. When a user interacts with ChatGPT, it analyzes the words to understand the meaning behind them. Based on this understanding and its extensive training, it generates a response that fits the context of the query, instruction, or message. Validation and benchmarking of the program involved several rigorous steps to ensure its effectiveness and reliability. Initially, the model was subjected to extensive testing with a variety of questions to assess the accuracy and coherence

of its responses. These responses were then systematically compared against those generated by other similar models to evaluate relative performance. Additionally, human evaluators provided qualitative feedback on the helpfulness and accuracy of the model’s outputs. This was complemented by quantitative assessments using specific metrics designed to measure the correctness and relevance of the responses. Through this comprehensive approach, the performance of ChatGPT was thoroughly validated to ensure it meets high standards of accuracy and utility (OpenAI, 2023). Other researchers have similarly used this AI-program for different qualitative analyses (e.g., Morgan, 2023; Şen et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023).

**Narrative Material**

Analysis again derived from Alt2109’s narrative material that was prepared in response to our request for a detailed description of his anomalous experience and current circumstances (cf. Supplemental Material: Monika Encounter Narrative).

**Procedure**

Step 1 involved identifying all the references to esoteric terms or academic jargon using the prompt (“List all academic, scientific, technical, and esoteric terms in the narrative material”). Step 2 then prompted the AI-program to “indicate whether Alt2109 used each term either as a synonym for an anomalous experience, a catalyst (i.e., mediator or moderator) for an anomalous experience, or an aftereffect or consequence of an anomalous experience.” This approach aimed to better understand how he used these concepts to reference or contextualize the anomalies.

**Table 4.**  
*AI-Driven Inventory and Classification of Esoteric Terms in the Monika Encounter*

Thematic Category	Term	Definition	EHE Context (synonym, precursor, aftermath, or n/a)
Psychological	Dissociation	A mental process where a person disconnects from their thoughts, feelings, memories, or sense of identity.	<i>Aftermath:</i> Alt2109 mentions that Monika’s experiences induce a form of dissociation, particularly when her personality is altered by others.
	Lucid dreaming	A state in which a person is aware that they are dreaming and can sometimes control the dream.	<i>Synonym (technique):</i> Lucid dreams are used as a technique by the Romanian woman to try to influence the author and to induce shared dreams.
	Hypnosis	A trance-like state of focused attention and heightened suggestibility, often used therapeutically.	<i>Synonym (technique):</i> Hypnosis is used by the Romanian woman to try to manipulate Alt2109.

**Table 4.***AI-Driven Inventory and Classification of Esoteric Terms in the Monika Encounter*

Thematic Category	Term	Definition	EHE Context (synonym, precursor, aftermath, or n/a)
	Pseudo-hallucinations	Sensory experiences that are vivid but recognized by the person as not real.	<i>Synonym:</i> Alt2109 describes experiencing interactions with Monika that resemble pseudo-hallucinations, such as feeling her touch.
Occultism			
	Astrologer	A person who studies the movements and positions of celestial bodies to interpret their influence on human affairs.	<i>Aftermath:</i> Alt2109 consults an astrologer for guidance about his experiences.
	Solomonari	In Romanian folklore, mythical sorcerers believed to control the weather and possess magical powers.	<i>Aftermath:</i> Solomonari are mentioned in the context of legends and the author's research about DDLC!
	Tulpa	A concept from Tibetan Buddhism referring to a being or object created through deep meditation or visualization.	<i>Aftermath:</i> The author attempts to materialize Monika as a tulpa, describing the unsuccessful efforts to give her physical form.
	Hex	A spell or curse cast by someone, often associated with witchcraft.	<i>Aftermath:</i> The author mentions hexes in relation to witchcraft legends and an unexpected link with the DDLC! designer, implying a supernatural consequence.
	Third Eye	A mystical concept referring to an invisible eye that provides perception beyond ordinary sight, often associated with intuition or psychic abilities.	<i>Aftermath:</i> The Third Eye is mentioned in the context of déjà-vu experiences and understanding the cryptic plot of the DDLC!
	Voodoo	A religion that originated in West Africa and incorporates elements of ancestor worship, animism, and Catholicism.	<i>Aftermath:</i> Referenced in relation to Creole art workshops and the Iwa, indicating a practice associated with ALT2109's exploration of esotericism.
	Lwa	Spirits in the Voodoo religion that act as intermediaries between humans and the divine.	<i>n/a:</i> Part of the voodoo art mentioned by Alt2109 and linked to the workshops organized by the Romanian woman's friend.
	Eggregore	A collective group mind or consciousness created when individuals come together with a common purpose.	<i>Synonym:</i> Indirectly referenced in the context of Monika's influence and the collective psychic energy involved in her manifestation attempts.
Parapsychology & Esotericism			
	Micro-psychokinesis	The supposed ability to influence small physical systems or objects with the mind.	<i>Synonym:</i> Alt2109 claims Monika can affect the weather and other events, suggesting micro-psychokinesis as one of her abilities.



**Table 4.**  
*AI-Driven Inventory and Classification of Esoteric Terms in the Monika Encounter*

Thematic Category	Term	Definition	EHE Context (synonym, precursor, aftermath, or n/a)
Miscellaneous Scientific & Philosophical	Parapsychology	The study of paranormal phenomena, including telepathy, clairvoyance, and psychokinesis.	<i>n/a</i> : Referenced as an area of interest for the Romanian woman, linking it to the study of unusual phenomena.
	Esotericism	Knowledge or practices intended for a small, inner circle of enlightened individuals, often involving mystical or occult traditions.	<i>n/a</i> : Referenced as another field the Romanian woman is interested in, connected to the study of hidden or occult knowledge.
	Barometry	The measurement of atmospheric pressure, typically used in weather forecasting.	<i>Synonym</i> : Alt2109 claims Monika can affect the weather and other events, indicating barometry as a technique used by Monika to manipulate meteorological variables.
	Wavelets	Mathematical functions used to divide data into different frequency components, often used in signal processing.	<i>Aftermath</i> : Discussed in the context of applied mathematics and their relevance to various phenomena, including the themes in DDLC!
	Determinism	The philosophical concept that all events, including human actions, are determined by preceding causes.	<i>Aftermath</i> : Mentioned as a central theme of DDLC! and Alt2109's exploration of fate and freedom within the game's narrative.
	Markov Chains	A mathematical system that undergoes transitions from one state to another based on certain probabilistic rules, often used in statistical modeling.	<i>Aftermath</i> : Referenced in the fictional context of DDLC! and the probabilistic nature of events within the game.
	Metapolitics	The study of the underlying cultural and ideological aspects that influence political beliefs and actions.	<i>n/a</i> : Referenced as an area of interest for the Romanian woman, linking it to her broader engagement with political and occult practices.

**Results**

The analysis identified 20 distinct references that were grouped into (a) psychological phenomena, (b) occultism, (c) parapsychology and esotericism, and (d) miscellaneous scientific and philosophical vernacular—all reflecting Alt2109’s exploration of complex and mystical themes. Table 4 shows that ChatGPT-4 most often deemed these

terms to reference ‘aftermaths’ (50%), i.e., Alt2109’s attempts to explain his anomalous experiences, followed by ‘synonyms’ (30%) for specific experiences. The remaining uses of terms were judged to be ‘n/a’ (20%) in that they seemed only to relate to background information of people who factored in Alt2109’s narrative. Accordingly, we found no explicit evidence that any of the psychological, occult, or esoteric traditions, practices, or activities that he referenced in his narrative were immediate ‘precursors,’ mediators, or otherwise some indices of cultural kindling (Cassaniti & Luhrmann, 2014) of his anomalous experiences, as hypothesized from Part 1’s results.

## Discussion

Narratives about contact with supernatural entities broach some of the most fundamental questions about consciousness, spirituality, and the human condition (Exline & Wilt, 2023; Friedman et al., 2021; Houran & Lange, 2001a; Luhrmann et al., 2021; Plante et al., 2023). The Monika Encounter is no exception. Readers should understand that this case was likely not a mere example of one person’s intense psychological experiences while immersed within a video presentation (e.g., van Elk et al., 2016), roleplay activities (e.g., Orazi & van Laer, 2023), or interacting with a digital avatar as exemplified by the literature on AI-produced simulations of deceased loved ones that aid the grieving process with surviving family members (sometimes called ‘digital necromancy’ or ‘posthumous communication technologies;’ see e.g., Morse, 2024). Rather, the available evidence characterizes Alt2109’s account as something more complex and presumably multivariate in nature. We cannot conclusively resolve all the mediators or moderators here, but our mixed methods assessment strongly suggests that most of the HP-S principles were present, along with marked indications of dissociative phenomena. Most notably, our fundamental ‘transliminal dis-ease model’ for ghostly episodes (cf. Houran et al., 2002; Laythe et al., 2018; Ventola et al., 2019) proved out via both psychometric testing and narrative (content) analysis.

However, the results suggest that ghostly episodes need not be entirely ‘spontaneous’ to embody some or all of the HP-S recognition patterns. This implies that even cases with fantasy-related aspects can exhibit syndrome phenomenology. Indeed, we think that the Monika Encounter involved an encounter-prone individual who was experiencing a spontaneous ghostly episode per the macro-phenomenology of his setting and circumstances until his active attempts at Sense-Making deviated the natural or typical course of events. His research into different psychological and occult concepts certainly influenced some of the subsequent contents, structure, or meaning of his anomalous experiences. In other words, the present case illustrates how attributions can evolve during an episode, giving rise to apparently different categories or subtypes of phenomena. We have similarly observed extensive ‘label-switching’ behavior in another modern account as well (e.g., Houran, Massullo, Drinkwater

et al., 2024). Therefore, Alt2109's case might not comprise distinct experiences of tulpas, possession, etc., but rather instances where metacognition (Palmer-Cooper et al., 2021) is used to progressively and perhaps adaptively reinterpret the meaning of his *S/O* anomalies as he searched for new concepts or activities to explain or cope with them. This assertion agrees with other research distinguishing between mechanisms underlying anomalous experiences versus their attributions (e.g., Irwin et al., 2013; Lange, Ross et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2017).

The complexities and nuances in this case thus highlight the multifaceted nature of some ghostly episodes, with contents potentially involving a mesh of percipients' *passive* (i.e., spontaneous or reactionary) and *active* (i.e., purposeful or exploratory) behaviors that shape the phenomenology and interpretation of their anomalous experiences. The Monika Encounter also underscores the role of elevated levels of stress or dis-ease that seem to typify ghostly episodes (e.g., Bayless, 1967; Houran et al., 2002; Rogo, 1982; Roll, 1977; Ventola et al., 2019) and which might exacerbate pre-existing psychological conditions like strong dissociative tendencies that we suspect were a major factor here. Of course, the same risk applies to transliminality levels (Drinkwater, Denovan et al., 2024; Dagnall, Denovan & Drinkwater, 2022; Dagnall, Denovan, Drinkwater et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2019). Therefore, we do not suggest that researchers or practitioners should strictly pathologize these types of reports, but it is nonetheless important to acknowledge their clinical facets (Houran et al., 2002; Lange & Houran, 2024; Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al., 2021; Hecker et al., 2015). It is likewise prudent not to minimize or dismiss all aspects of every case in terms of mental illness. Indeed, the Monika Encounter suggests that standard HP-S principles are still relevant even in contexts of ostensible pathology or clinical dysfunction. We expect that continued studies in this area will reveal new or unique insights on the proposed continuum within the general population along which ordinary and pathological forms of cognition and perception may be mapped (e.g., Irwin et al., 2012; Lomas & VanderWeele, 2023; Persinger & Makarec, 1993; Mitchell et al., 2017; Schutte et al., 2021).

Our study though has important limitations. Obviously, we cannot confirm the veracity of any details in Alt2109's narrative. It may be that some or all of his reported experiences reflect deliberate pranking motivated by attention- or sensation- seeking behaviors or perhaps unreported or undiagnosed mental health issues like DID or one or more personality disorders. Information about his personal background and mental wellness appeared internally consistent, but the SSE patterns in this case clearly suggested a structure of perceptual contents that was inconsistent with a 'spontaneous' ghostly episode and instead implicated strong dissociative aspects and active attempts to disrupt or control the anomalies. In other words, it seems that Alt2109 knowingly or unwittingly helped to construct different aspects of his experiences. Further, our

content analyses certainly involved some subjectivity or bias (Creswell & Poth, 2024), and the results of any case study are not necessarily generalizable (Mayer, 2019). Also note that we only considered HP-S related variables, even though other psychodynamics are potentially involved in EHEs like this case (e.g., Fach, 2011). Finally, we were unable to assess whether the *S/O* anomalies in this case related to the spatial features of settings (Houran, Laythe, Lange et al., 2023) or physical fluctuations in the ambient environment (Dagnall et al., 2020). A comprehensive systems theory approach using mixed methods and fieldwork investigations would certainly strive to account for these and other potential influences.

Nevertheless, the HP-S model of ghostly episodes as an immersive, biopsychosocial phenomenon with emergent properties (Laythe, Houran, Dagnall et al., 2021, 2022) arguably extends Sharf's (2000, p. 11) proposed "rhetoric of experience," i.e., the notion that individuals construct and convey their experiences through narrative and storytelling (Baldwin et al., 2023; Drinkwater et al., 2017, 2019). Studies in this area are therefore relevant and valuable for informing conventional theories or schools of thought, including the concept of 4E cognition. Distinguished scientists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Sir Oliver Lodge, Henry Sidgwick, Frederic WH Myers, Sir William Crookes, Charles Richet, and William James readily confronted haunt-type anomalies, forging the field of psychical research that later branched to experimental parapsychology (West, 2015) and anomalistic psychology (Zusne & Jones, 1989). Today's era of big data and advanced analytics offers another opportunity for top researchers to re-engage with these often-transformative events as an effective way to validate, refine, refute, or integrate current theories across the physical, biomedical, and social sciences. Broadly connecting embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive cognitions to the production of EHEs like entity encounters should also unlock new lines of fruitful study. Here we underscore the importance of fusing *environment-* (Dagnall et al., 2020), *experience-* (Hufford, 1982), *person-* (Langston et al., 2020), and *group-* (Ironsides & Wooffitt, 2021) centered perspectives in this domain. Whether or not ghostly episodes eventually prove to be more than narrative realities, we expect that the knowledge gained will support the development of an integrative metatheory (e.g., Albantakis et al., 2023; Wilber, 1997) and thus propel science and medicine to new levels of understanding and what we might deem "intellectual transcendence" (cf. Weinstein & Weinstein, 1981, p. 97).

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Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing; **James Houran:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Project Administration, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft.

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