



Paranormal and the Politics of Truth: A Sociological Account

Jeremy Northcote

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This book is based on the author's ten-year research into the politics of belief surrounding paranormal ideas. Through a detailed examination of the participants, issues, strategies and underlying factors that constitute the contemporary paranormal debate, the book explores the struggle surrounding the status of paranormal phenomena. It examines, on the one hand, how the principal arbiters of religious and scientific truths -- the Church and the academic establishment -- reject paranormal ideas as "occult" and "pseudo-scientific", and how, on the other hand, paranormal enthusiasts attempt to resist such labels and instead establish paranormal ideas as legitimate knowledge. The author contends that the paranormal debate is the outcome of wider discursive processes that are concerned with the construction and negotiation of truth in Western society generally. More specifically, the debate is seen as an aspect of the "boundary work" that defines the contours of religious and scientific orthodoxy. The book paves new ground in understanding the nature of belief relating to a topic that has long held fascination to academics and lay people alike – paranormal ideas. It develops a discursive framework for understanding a contemporary social phenomenon, hence placing the study at the cutting edge of ethnographic development that seeks to integrate discursive perspectives with empirical accounts of sociological phenomena. Most importantly, the study is intended to contribute to the debate surrounding communicative action, by outlining a discursive perspective on the negotiation of ideational differences that goes beyond the incommensurability theories that have dominated the sociology of communication and knowledge.

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