

Some Misanthropic Musings On The Nature Of The ‘ORB’

Introduction

The following discourse initially began as a fairly brief article – a simple argument against the Orb (as an aspect of potential paranormal phenomenon) - which was published in a (supposedly) paranormal related newspaper in mid-2004. This greatly expanded – and far from finished! – version of the article reached it’s current state in October 2005.



While I would hope that the key points outlined in this piece would, if presented in a more serious light, be valid in any balanced, measured argument on this topic, I will certainly make no excuses for my blatant contempt towards this particular subject – or any negative views implied against the paranormal field itself.

While this is still, in essence, a diatribe against the appearance of the Orb and its subsequent, surrounding mythology, I would ask you to 'read between the lines' and also note at least some of the myriad intimated failings that are currently rampant within the 'ghost research world' itself.

The Orb is only one small aspect of the type of thing that is wrong in this field today. However, its very presence – its implied traits, personality and, in many circles, its unquestioned acceptance – typifies all that is currently wrong in the field.....

In reading this, I sincerely hope that some people will be able to decipher my 'babble' and evidently understand the bigger – disastrous and damning - implications such matters mean to the paranormal world in general. For those who choose not to try to entertain these notions – the 'Orbs exist because Derek says so' brigade – don't worry too much.... this isn't really for you – it's all about you!

So - What Is An Orb?

Over the five or so years, at least 98% of all potentially 'paranormal images' sent in to the W.M.G.C. have comprised of so called 'Orb' shots.

For the uninitiated, in simplest terms, Orbs are: (a) spherical blobs of varying light intensity that tend to appear on (mainly) digital stills photographs and (b) moving blobs of light caught on (often digital) video footage.

So – Really – What Is An 'Orb'?

Technically speaking, 'Orbs' are mainly a by-product of digital technology and C.P.C. – Close Proximity Contamination – involving airborne debris, such as dust particles, pollen, rain drops / moisture droplets, etc. The effect concerned will generally be most noticeable when taking a photograph in relatively poor light conditions when using a flash or, on video footage, if utilising the onboard light source or night-shot capacity. Out of focus C.P.C. particles are subsequently distorted and misinterpreted by a combination of light source / night vision and the camera technology involved.



The effects concerned are mainly confined to 'digital' cameras because they have a small focal distance – in comparison to 35 mm cameras – leading to a greater depth of field. Due to this, small airborne particles can be 'picked out' by digital cameras, but not (or seldom) with 35 mm models. Under

normal daylight conditions, such debris will not generally show up, but, when utilising a flash against a dark background, the projected light serves to emphasise C.P.C. particles.

I have purposefully used the word 'mainly' at the beginning of the above statement simply because I have seen one, solitary example of orb phenomena on a 35 mm photograph. (The shot concerned was taken by a member of the W.M.G.C.). Needless to say, there will always be exceptions to the rule, though the anomaly within the image concerned would doubtless be down to the somewhat peculiar – round – design of the camera concerned. (The flash being situated exceptionally close to it's lens).

Interestingly, the make / price range of different cameras would often appear to have a direct effect on the appearance of (so called) orb phenomena. Some makes / designs of camera seldom produce orb bearing images. My own cheap and cheerful 'Fuji' model is particularly prone to churning out orb shots, while another W.M.G.C. member with a more up to date – more expensive - version of the same camera hardly ever produces this effect. (The manual to my Fuji camera contains a section actually addressing the orb effect as a form of technical fault).

On the subject of personal, photographic experience, the last 2 years of my utilising a digital camera has been resulting in my obtaining an orb effect every five or so shots, on average. During the previous 20 years of owning and regularly using a standard 35mm Camera, I had never 'caught' an Orb once.

In recent years, I have spoken to many professional photographers who use the more expensive digital rigs - £1000 and upwards – and none could recall ever having taken photographs containing Orbs. While initially perplexing to some, this factor can be easily explained in considering the sheer quality and design of the product concerned. The more expensive the camera, the better quality the internal technology. The bulk of camera's producing orb effects are those with a small 'charged couple device' – simply put, the digital sensor which captures the image – a detail which would also greatly be affected by the range / price range concerned. As a general rule - the better the technology, the less 'faulty' the end result. Also, this style of camera – detachable, telephoto lenses, etc – will, by physical design, never suffer from the lens / flash / depth of field equation required to produce Orbs.

A brief example of this latter mentioned aspect occurred relatively recently, when, simply from observing the design of an acquaintances camera – with a protruding, hooded lens – it was possible to 'guess' that it probably didn't suffer from the Orb effect. The gentleman concerned admitted that C.P.C. did occasionally affect his photographs, but, on the whole, very infrequently indeed.

Furthermore, only a week or so later, I attended an investigation at an exceptionally 'dusty' site with the researcher concerned. We both used our cameras during the stay.... my snapshot style model never failing to capture an orb, while his photographic exploits were, apparently, totally orb-less!

Putting the Orb into true historical context, it has to be stated that - in some 20+ years serious study of ghost research - the very first time that I heard the word 'Orb' associated with paranormal activity falls well within the last decade.... Unfortunately, this is the place where one of the key sticking points in the pro / anti Orb argument appears - i.e. Very few (so called) investigators working nowadays have personally seen / lived through the 'birth' of the Orb effect. Personally speaking, this development occurred more than mid-way through my foray into the research field. In comparison, 99% of (alleged) researchers have, themselves, been 'born' into an already 'Orb charged' field!



Historically speaking, Orbs first began appearing on U.S. based web sites during the mid to late 1990's. At that time, very few people this side of the pond had ever heard of this (alleged) phenomenon – and those that had could only draw their experience of the subject from State-side internet sources. The reason for the Orb literally being 'born' in the U.S. was simply the fact that the States are, as a rule, more technologically advanced – from a 'man on the street / consumer' point of view – that us Brits.

The greater accessibility of the Internet in the U.S. at that point meant that a great many American paranormal research groups had their own web site. (In comparison to the four or so British sites that a general search on 'Yahoo' could uncover at the same date). Likewise, the digital camera was already

being used by U.S. consumers some while before such technology was generally accepted and utilised in Britain. Needless to say, this gave rise to digitally produced images – and all their associated faults – appearing generally in the U.S. first.

Orbs: Damage Done – Associated bunkum:

At the end of the day, what I find infinitely more perplexing than the actual mechanics of the phenomena itself is the sheer ease and speed at which a simple ‘technical glitch’ has become an integral part of modern ghost-lore!

At a core level, the acceptance of the Orb (as an aspect of ghostly phenomenon) is undoubtedly rooted in society’s current ‘quick fix’ attitude to most matters. Interest in the paranormal has never been so strong and, as with any topic that attracts the attention of the masses, there invariably follows an overwhelming need to immediately ‘experience’ a subject first hand. For many, the quirks of camera technology provides the opportunity to fulfil this requirement without question or too much effort, no matter the end cost to the field concerned.

Something highly revealing, from a psychological / sociological angle, is the (often bewildering) array of theories now being openly bandied about in (so called) research circles regarding these anomalies. A number of peculiar claims have emerged in recent years which, at face value, are solely aimed at backing up the ‘orb as a form of paranormal activity’ theory. Typically, even under the mildest of scrutiny, such claims clearly carry no weight whatsoever –which can only serve to cast doubt on the sincerity, general investigative prowess and very intellect of the people bandying such theories about(?)

One of the most preposterous of the above mentioned notions is the (a) ‘Orbs are the first stage in the physical manifestation of an apparition / spirit’ claim. (Anyone who has had the misfortune to have seen Living T.V.’s ‘Most Haunted’ will no doubt be familiar with this ridiculous suggestion). Looking into the statement objectively, by this rationale, someone has evidently scrutinised an orb (with the naked eye) and, at first hand, watch it physically develop into an apparition..... No – I don’t think so either! The statement is, by far, the most widely used maxim regarding this subject, with not one scrap of evidence ever actually proffered to back it up! Still, it has now – to many – become an accepted ‘fact’.



In furtherance to the above, what is now to be thought of the (so called) psychics who claim to be able to ‘sense’ Orbs? With the understanding that such things are merely CPC – what is this saying about the honesty and reliability of the medium concerned?

Another such notion is the (b) ‘Orb’ / ‘True Orb’ conundrum. I first became aware of this ridiculous phrase a couple of years ago, after voicing my opinions about the alleged phenomenon on a paranormal related internet forum. A number of correspondents immediately took me to task and told me that they had actually been talking of ‘True Orb’s’ and not the kind produced by C.P.C. When I questioned them as to precisely how they could differentiate (if there was actually anything to compare between in the first place?), I was informed that their photographs had been sent to paranormal ‘experts’ who had studied the images and proclaimed them to be ‘True Orb’s’ and not dust, etc. This same phrase was later used on a popular paranormal related T.V. programme by an alleged researcher who said that they had to study some orb related images to ascertain whether they were ‘True’ in nature(?).....

Needless to mention, any such abilities are completely unfounded and

undoubtedly rooted in the swollen ego of the (alleged) researcher concerned!!

One particularly pathetic suggestion that you will frequently find mentioned is the argument that © digital cameras are possibly ‘mediumistic’ in nature! Needless to mention such a notion truly transcends the state of ‘clutching at straws’

Another frequently quoted, clearly erroneous, maxim is the (d) ‘Why do Orbs only appear on photographs taken at haunted sites?’ (An observation usually produced halfway through an argument with the word ‘then’ tagged on the end of the question).

From a psychological angle, perhaps the most telling by-product of this subject is the sheer number of people who now claim to be (e) ‘seeing’ orbs with the naked eye. It has to be implied that this is nothing more than a ‘by-product’ simply because this form of sighting motif has only become popular in recent years – i.e. since the orb craze began. Needless to mention, there is precedence for sightings of such things as ‘spirit lights’ going back many centuries, but, even then, the bulk of such encounters seem firmly rooted in ghost-lore itself rather than hinting at any real, credible instances. Also, the physical description of such lights does not tally with the unmistakable, cellular appearance of the photographed orb. First person visual encounters with orbs – matching descriptions that tally with photograph examples – are a wholly recent development and, as such, have to be treated as highly suspect indeed.....

Orbs: Damage Done 2 – A Few Personal Examples:

At the time of writing (Oct 05), one particular gentleman has recently taken me to task regarding my beliefs on this subject and subsequently e-mailed me a number of digitally produced photographs containing Orbs (and other examples of so called ‘light phenomena’) which he claims to have seen with the naked eye before photographing. All that can be said on the matter is the simple fact that: (1) the Orbs depicted in the photograph are all too clearly out of focus airborne debris particles and (2) the bulk of the ‘light phenomena’ shown conform to other faults and effects typically associated with such cameras / camera technology....(?)

As with any subject, the act of challenging personal belief systems is a frequently infuriating and fruitless task, whatever the grounds of your argument. The unbending power of belief - and the potential for bending the truth in defence of such – is a motif which clearly runs the full length of the paranormal field, from potential witness to (alleged) researcher.

Only a few months ago, a young man phoned me up one day and kindly

offered to show me some 60 orb photographs that he and his partner had recently taken in their new flat. He had already begun musing over the fact that he hadn't realised that their flat was even 'haunted', when I reassured him that 'dust' was the problem in question rather than anything 'ghostly' in nature....

The subsequent silence spoke volumes, until the gentleman eventually piped up, somewhat incredulously: "So you're trying to tell me that I've taken 60 photographs of dust...!?!". As soon as I replied in the affirmative, he instantly thanked me for my time and unceremoniously hung up!

As far as the young man was concerned, (a) I evidently had no idea what I was talking about and (b) he would seemingly be happier in thinking that his new home was 'haunted' rather than consider the fact that the flash was situated too near the lens of his digital camera!?

While both a ridiculous and, unfortunately, familiar motif, the real irony is you could have bet that, within a minute of hanging up, the gentleman concerned would have been back on the internet looking for another group who would take his photographs 'seriously'. Needless to say, under the current climate, he wouldn't have to look very far and – following some visits from gesticulating psychic types – his flat is currently undergoing an exorcism as I write.....!!



On a number of occasions, I have found myself voicing reservations over (digitally) produced orb images, only to be told that the parties offering the

shots also had a selection on standard 'film' photographs too. I have never failed to ask to see the (film) photo's concerned, but, despite being promised the proof time and time again, not once has anyone ever come up with the goods!

In mentioning the above, I am certainly not doubting the fact that the orb effect can be obtained through the use of film cameras. On the contrary, as already stated, it is quite possible, though exceptionally rare. Of course it is purely a matter of conjecture on my part, but from a psychological 'personal belief being challenged' angle, what I am actually willing to question is the simple notion that the particular images mentioned above had actually existed in the first place?

Such images only seem to have been proffered following an anti-orb diatribe and a guess that the technology concerned was almost definitely digital format. Would it be presuming too much that, as with any sudden challenge to a strong belief, a knee jerk reaction will frequently follow in defence, possibly leading to the "Oh no – I have captured orbs with a film camera too!" retort?

As the sole basis of our field is (or should be) the objective assessment of evidence – both first hand and proffered – we can only, to the best of our ability, draw our conclusions from what we are (or, often more tellingly, what we are not) presented with..... As in any walk of life, people are seemingly quite willing to lie – or perhaps 'bend the truth' a little - in defence of their personal belief system.

From a research point of view, a prime example of 'fact bending in defence of belief' occurred a number of years ago now when I became embroiled in an internet based argument with a particular (self-professed) research group. Cutting a long story short, the group concerned had gained some fame (notoriety) around that time by their presence in a Cable / Sky TV documentary series. Through a forum, I had condemned a number of their alleged research practices and beliefs – with one of the main points at question being the fact that they were unquestioningly presenting Orbs as a type of paranormal phenomenon. Time and time again throughout the argument, I had stressed that such effects were all too obviously technology / camera based....

Some months later, the group concerned appeared on TV again – this time in a 'live' ghost hunt broadcast. At a point during the show, the group leader – my main adversary throughout the above mentioned fracas – appeared on screen and blatantly addressed the subject of Orbs. In brief, he claimed that the expert technicians involved with his group had recently been carrying out considerable tests regarding the appearance of Orbs and they could now categorically state that such things definitely had nothing whatsoever to do

with the camera technology..... (The only thing missing was a knowing wink and V sign at the TV camera!)

Needless to mention, the main problem with their argument was the simple fact that, had they truly donated a mere few minutes of their time to investigating the effects of C.P.C. on digital technology, they could not have possibly failed to have proven, without a doubt, the simple formula: Digital camera + Airborne Debris = 'ORBS'!!

The very fact that the group concerned chose to overlook (lie about) such a glaringly blatant outcome clearly bears out their willingness to 'bend facts in defence of their beliefs' and only stands to highlight their reliability and integrity as supposed paranormal researchers.....

Brief Summary.

As mentioned previously in these notes, the orb is only one small aspect of what's currently wrong with the paranormal field today. A multitude of other topics would have adequately served as the basis for this type of 'rant' – i.e.: the gratuitous and unquestioned use of psychics as investigative tools; use and abuse of E.M.F. meters as investigative tools, etc. However, no other subject within the paranormal realm could have so perfectly encapsulated and illustrated the blatant, wanton stupidity that we constantly find ourselves being presented with these days in the name of ghost research!

At its most basic level, the orb has transcended its original, paranormal framework and serves to wonderfully reflect the - frequently mind boggling – gullibility / arrogance levels of the society in which we live.....

But really - this has always been the basis of such a problem, hasn't it? When dealing with a matter that has been laid open to and so actively attracted the attention of the masses, we are now basically having to deal with the general mentality / intellect / integrity levels of the society which we are living in. This is not to imply that society is, as a whole, 'stupid' or 'dishonest' – but we only have to look in the evening newspapers and read any average days tales of murder, riot, theft and intrigue to see what the world about us is actually capable of. As with the world around us, the paranormal field – from the layman 'Most Haunted' fan to the supposed, accredited paranormal researcher and everything in between – is made up from the very same melting pot.....

Cutting an already long story short, I will be the first to hold my hands up and admit that I honestly do not have the first notion about the paranormal. However, as I hope that this diatribe will convey, I do happen to know a few things about people..... and, as they say: 'There's nowt so queer as folk'!!

