

## Review of Approaches To The Study of Spontaneous Psi Experiences

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Abstract — Twelve approaches to the study of spontaneous psi experiences are described: individual case study, case collection, survey, cross-cultural, longitudinal, clinical, psychological, phenomenological, archetypal, folklorist, active imagination, and social constructionist. The review begins with the older and more commonly used approaches. Although all 12 methods have been reported in the literature, the primary ones used thus far in parapsychology are the individual case study, the case collection, the cross cultural, the survey, and to a lesser extent, the clinical. The others have barely been tried, yet if given a fair trial, they might prove to be more useful ways of learning to understand the nature of spontaneous psi experiences than the first three, although the latter will always be useful for different purposes. In general, the more commonly used methods aim at establishing that the experiences occurred as reported and at delimiting the characteristics of the cases and details of their incidence. The lesser used methods are aimed at understanding the personal (and sometimes general) meaning of experiential accounts of psi experiences. Throughout the author has also interjected her own personal views of which approaches are to be preferred at this time, and why.

### The Individual Case Approach

In parapsychology, a major investigative approach is the individual case study, which emphasizes ascertaining exactly what happened and when, and obtaining corroboratory statements from witnesses to the experience and the event with which it is associated. Generally, only recent firsthand accounts with available documentary evidence and the testimony of independent witnesses are considered acceptable. This approach is used in order to obtain proof that these experiences are in fact what they purport to be: examples of an ability to obtain information about something that is, has, or will happen without using any sense modality or rational inference. (It is impossible to rule out coincidence, but the thinking goes that although one or two details might occur coincidentally, as the number of correct details becomes higher, the likelihood becomes smaller that the experience occurred simply by chance.) Hardly any attempt has been made in these case studies to find out what the percipient (experient) thought about the experience or how it may have affected him or her.

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It is beyond the scope of this paper to review all the collections emphasizing individual cases. I will cite only a few English-language examples. One of the earliest was Crowe's (1848) *The Night Side of Nature*. The study of individual cases was used extensively by the (British) Society for Psychical Research (the founding of which in 1882 is the generally accepted event that initiated the systematic investigation of psychic experiences). Because their chief aim was to establish whether or not there was a psychic component involved in these experiences people report, or whether they could be explained away by delusion, sensory cues, cryptomnesia, fraud, or coincidence, they emphasized the evidential features of each case, and tried to obtain corroboratory statements from witnesses. Thus, this approach to individual cases could also be called the evidential approach. Some of the best known works produced by these workers are *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886/1970), *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (Myers, 1903/1954), and two works by Mrs. H. Sidgwick (1885, 1922), the latter one being a continuation of *Phantasms*.

In the United States, J.H. Hyslop also collected cases emphasizing their evidential features (e.g., Hyslop, 1918), and W.F. Prince (1928) published case accounts provided by famous persons. Since the 1960s, psychiatrist Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia has made several intensive studies of reincarnation-type cases that epitomize the individual case study approach with the emphasis on evidence (Stevenson, 1966/1974, 1975, 1977, 1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1987a).

At the 1991 Isthmus Conference held in April 1991, philosopher Stephen Braude (1991) took Stevenson to task for not studying the experients involved and their needs and desires. Psychologist Emanuel K. Schwartz was one of the first to offer this criticism of studies of spontaneous psi experiences in general, writing: "in the main, the experiences have been viewed not as human experiences, but as abstract, isolated 'phenomena.' That is, the experiences have been studied for their own sake and the human being who had the experience has often been neglected" (Schwartz, 1949, p. 135). Moreover, he advocated (as do I) that spontaneous cases be referred to as psi experiences, not phenomena, because "the concept of phenomenon in this context seems to presuppose a separation of the experience from the experiencing agency" (p. 126).

In recent years, Stevenson (1971, 1987b, 1987c) has argued persuasively for the importance of making firsthand investigations of spontaneous psi experiences, not only to establish evidentiality, but because valid conclusions can only be drawn from case reports that have been authenticated. This view is based on what Hoyt Edge (1982) has called foundationism plus entity metaphysics, which together form the basis of the empiricist tradition in science. Edge (1982, 1990) shows how in science this tradition is being replaced by what he calls an "activity metaphysics." Other parapsychologists who have challenged the empiricist approach are Hess, 1988a, 1988b; Mindell, 1972; White, 1990; and Wooffitt, 1987, 1989.

Recently, Hess (1988b), Moody (1987), Schouten (1983), and White (1985) have criticized the evidential approach on the grounds that the mindset that is

compelled to emphasize proof necessarily diminishes the possibility of studying meaning.

Raymond Moody, in a groundbreaking book in which he studied psychic and related experiences surrounding the death of Elvis Presley (Moody, 1987), stepped back and looked at the customary approaches to such experiences: (a) that of the sympathetic investigator who tries to rule out normal explanations in order to cite the experience as "evidence" for ESP or reincarnation or some other parapsychological claim, and (b) that of the skeptic, who tries to debunk the experiences and explain them away. Moody points out, however, that although they appear to be diametrically opposed, both of these approaches share a common feature: "the notion that the ultimate purpose of the investigator of supposed paranormal experiences must be to determine whether or not the experiences are 'real'" (p. 132). This emphasis on evidentiality, pro or con, has had an unfortunate result in that seldom has there been in either approach "any sort of sympathetic exploration of the emotional context of psychic experiences" (p. 132).

Moody proposes that we let go of "the artificial requirement that a study of purported psychic experiences must have as its aim either to 'prove' or to 'disprove' the 'reality' of psychic experiences" (pp. 132–133). He feels that by doing so "one can approach them in a much more balanced fashion and can comfortably explore their human meaning" (p. 133). He also specifies that in studying psi experiences researchers should be "sensitive *not* only to the apparent peculiarities of sensory perception and/or cognition with which they are associated, but also to the emotional context . . . in which they occur" (p. 154).

Could it be that we are dealing with a kind of complementarity situation in which either we can seek evidence or we can seek meaning, but we can't do both? If so, the dichotomy may refer not so much to something about reality that is external to the investigator and the other principals involved. Rather, it is likely that the split is within the investigator. These experiences can be approached with the left brain, or the right, but it is difficult for the same individual to do both. This raises the possibility of having teams of two investigators, one imbued with the desire to obtain evidence and the other primarily concerned with meaning. They would work together at every stage of the research, thus insuring that both sides would be represented throughout.

### Case Collections

The second approach used in parapsychology is that of collecting cases in order to make generalizations based on the group of cases as a whole. The books by Gurney, Myers, and Podmore (1886/1970) and Myers (1903/1954) already cited are also examples of this approach. They analyzed the characteristics of the cases and grouped them into classes. This approach of studying the generalizable features of cases was carried to a high level by G.N.M. Tyrrell (1941/1953) in his study of apparitions.

Probably the person most often associated with case collections is Louisa E. Rhine, whose husband J.B. Rhine brought the study of parapsychological phenomena into the laboratory at Duke University in the late 1930s. She studied the unsolicited experiences sent to the Parapsychology Laboratory and those that were received as a result of appeals in the mass media or solicited at lectures. She wrote many articles in scholarly journals and several books describing her results (e.g., L.E. Rhine, 1961, 1967, 1981), and a *Festschrift* (Rao, 1986) was published in honor of her work. She made no effort to corroborate the experiences or to obtain additional details. This was not because she wanted to emphasize the personal meaning of the experiences over the evidential; rather, the Rhines' position was that spontaneous cases could not prove the existence of psi, but if patterns in sufficient numbers were noted, they might tell us something about the psi process that could be used in experiments. (Hardly any experiments have been initiated to follow up her leads, however.) Shortly before her death, she published a book in which she summarized her research (L.E. Rhine, 1981), saying that her aim had been to understand the experiences "and the processes that produced them" (p. viii). She analyzed thousands of cases, using only two selection criteria: that they seem "to be contributed in good faith and by apparently sane individuals" and "that the experience should have in it an apparent psi factor" (L.E. Rhine, 1951, p. 166). She classified the experiences into various subtypes of psi such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. She also studied the various forms the experiences took (apparitions, auditory hallucinations, hunches, dreams, etc.) and whether the "message" contained in the experience seemed to relate to an outer event in a realistic, symbolic, or blocked manner.

There have been two recent variants of the case collection approach. One, pioneered by Canadian psychologist Michael Persinger, consists of the reanalysis of spontaneous case collections (e.g., Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886/1970; Mrs. H. Sidgwick, 1922) to see if various psi experiences "occur more frequently during days in which the global geomagnetic activity is significantly less than the days before or after the experiences" (Persinger, 1987).

The other is a relatively new approach initiated by Dutch parapsychologist Sybo Schouten (1983, 1986) and it employs a computerized database of cases. He calls it the "pragmatic approach," and it is of interest not only because of the method but also its chief assumption. Schouten proposes that one of parapsychology's primary problems

can be traced back to the metaphysical approach: the presupposition shared by critics and parapsychologists that the existence of ESP should be proven or has to be assumed before research in this area is permissible or even meaningful. In my view, this presupposition is unnecessary and even in conflict with normal scientific procedure. (p. 327)

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<sup>1</sup> Rhine's attempt to tie in cases with experiments was preceded by Taves (1940), who examined a small sample of cases and suggested several ways in which patterns noted in the cases could be incorporated into experimental designs.

This is a view with which several persons associated with parapsychology concur (Hess, 1988a; Irwin, 1989; Moody, 1987; Neppe, 1990; Schwartz (1949); Swiel & Neppe, 1986; White, 1990). Schouten describes his approach, which is similar to that of sociology:

The pragmatic approach is based on the notion that all human experiences and activities are a legitimate subject for scientific research, including such human experiences as those found in spontaneous cases. These experiences have at least one common property, namely, that the persons who reported these cases felt that these experiences were something special, that they had a paranormal character. It is a legitimate scientific question to ask why those persons, who must have had numerous "normal" experiences in life, singled out one or a few of these and attributed a paranormal character to them. . . . The pragmatic approach implies that we study these phenomena primarily as human experiences. (pp. 327-328)

In a subsequent paper, Schouten (1986) gives another reason for calling his approach "pragmatic": Whereas experimental parapsychology seeks (unsuccessfully) to establish psi as "an operating principle," to study psi experiences is to deal with observables, in effect, with an aspect of human psychology (or anthropology, or sociology, depending on your viewpoint). Schouten employs quantitative analyses of spontaneous psi, using case collections such as that of Gurney, Myers, and Podmore (1886/1970), L.E. Rhine's collection at Duke, etc. He codes each case in regard to a number of variables such as sex of percipient, sex of target person, relationship between percipient and target person, type of experience, type of event, number of correct details, time lapse between experience and report of it, etc. He then can ask questions about individual case collections or make comparisons between collections. He found a number of systematic trends. Another important advantage is that one can investigate hypotheses of a nonpsi nature and test them against the experiences to see if the psi hypothesis holds up. (It is beyond the scope of this paper to report these results.)

### **The Survey Approach**

The survey approach, in which specific populations are sampled and each person surveyed is asked the same questions, was also pioneered by the Society for Psychical Research with its famed Census of Hallucinations (H. Sidgwick & Committee, 1884). Later SPR surveys were conducted by Green (1960) and, most recently, by D.J. West (1990). The purpose of these surveys has not simply been to learn what proportion of the population claims to have had psi experiences, but these British researchers also obtained accounts of experiences and tried to follow up on the more promising ones.

### **The Cross-Cultural Approach**

A variant of the case study and survey approaches has been used by parapsychologists and anthropologists who have studied the occurrence of psi experiences in cultures other than Anglo-American.

Anthropological studies of psi have gained considerable momentum in the last two decades, but it was Victor Barnouw in 1946 who was one of the first to ask whether or not culture exerts an influence upon the incidence of psi phenomena and on the forms that such phenomena take. Anthropologist J.K. Long has written an important paper entitled "Verification of Psi in Ethnographic Fieldwork" (in Long, 1977, pp. 243-256).

This approach naturally lends itself to cross-cultural comparisons. Ian Stevenson (1966) presents observations that "suggest that the patterns of cases of the reincarnation type differ somewhat in different cultures which may all be favorable to the general idea of reincarnation" (p. 231). In a later study, Stevenson (1970a) compared reincarnation-type cases from Ceylon and the Tlingit Indians of Alaska with a sample from Turkey. The evidence from this comparison also suggests that cultural factors influence reincarnation-type cases at several levels. Psychologist/parapsychologists Osis and Haraldsson (1977a) surveyed 442 cases of deathbed experiences in the U.S. and 435 in India via responses to questionnaires and follow-up interviews with physicians and nurses. They did not find that medical, psychological, demographic, or cultural variables appreciably influenced their results. In a later, more complete account of a larger sample, they describe some cultural variations, but the core deathbed phenomena of both countries were consistent, and the phenomena reported were not always in line with the prevalent culture's beliefs (Osis & Haraldsson, 1977b). Sociologist Craig Lundahl (1981-82) studied Mormon near-death accounts for depictions of the "other world." He found them similar to most such accounts, except that they were more cooperative, organized, and stratified. Statements about the family, socialization activities, buildings, etc. differed from those in this world by being more highly organized, possessing a strict moral order, and a positive social atmosphere, similar to Mormon culture. A study by Canning (1965) confirms this. In another investigation, Lundahl (1982) notes that Mormon NDEs differ from the accounts reported by other researchers in that they contain "requests to do something in this world from those in the other world and the reception of religious and other types of instructions from those in the other world" (p. 178). Lundahl and Widdison (1983a, 1983b) note similarities between Mormon teachings and NDEs. Becker (1984) observed parallels between Pure Land Buddhist visions and NDE phenomena. Meadow (1985) surveyed Indo-European eschatology, shamanism, and NDEs and found that psychological and cultural needs are reflected in afterlife beliefs. She proposes that such experiences may themselves have influenced religious beliefs. Irwin (1987) studied heavenly stereotypes and suggested that the pastoral imagery often associated with NDEs indicates that the latter may be socially conditioned. Sheils (1978) examined beliefs about OBEs in 67 non-Western cultures using the Human Relations Area Files. He reports: "The data reveal that . . . OBE beliefs appear in about 95 percent of the world's cultures and that they are striking in their uniformity even though the cultures are diverse in structure and location" (p. 697). Anthropologist David Read Barker (1980) reports a review of the ethnographic literature of a worldwide sample of 68 non-Western societies using

the Standard Crisis Cultural Sample (Murdock & White, 1969) and the Human Relations Area Files in order to canvass authoritative accounts of psi in these cultures. There have been other cross-cultural studies, of which these are a fair sample. For a review of the use of cross-cultural methodology with spontaneous psi experiences, see Winkelman, 1982.

At the individual case level, David Hess (1988a) has recently introduced a cross-cultural comparison of two well-known poltergeist cases, the Gaurulhos case in Brazil and the Powhatan case in the U.S. According to the participants and researchers involved, sorcery was the favored explanation of the Brazilian case, whereas recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis (RSPK) was preferred in the American one. Hess points out that cultural comparisons such as his relativize what is considered in English-speaking countries to be "a 'universal' and 'scientific' interpretation of the poltergeist: RSPK theory" (p. 271). Each interpretation appears to mirror its cultural context. Is one right and one wrong, or are each examples of culture-bound theories? If the latter is the case, in a sense we could never come up with a universal explanation of poltergeist phenomena, even though the phenomena observed might be the same throughout the world, although we might be able to make predictions regarding specific cultural samples.

In another study, Hess (1990) attempts to show that "ghostlore reflects lived experiences, social action, and practiced rituals" (p. 407). He also proposes that anthropological theoretical frameworks developed to study "nonceremonial spirit possession will bring a new level of richness to the ethnological study of ghosts" (p. 407). He cites several studies, beginning with Crapanzano (1977), that illustrate a "newer, 'interpretive' approach [that] shows how spirit possession can help lead to a redefinition of self . . . or of the domestic unit" (pp. 408-409).

Hess reports on his interviews with the principals involved in three Brazilian cases of claimed poltergeists or hauntings, for which he uses the term *spirit infestation*. Hess brackets the question of whether the origin of the phenomena reported was normal or paranormal and focuses on the psychological and cultural meaning of the phenomena in the families involved. He shows how, theoretically, these cases of poltergeist and haunting parallel cases of nonceremonial spirit possession reported by anthropologists. He also found some evidence that suggests that there was domestic violence and abuse by male authority figures of the young female apparent poltergeist agents, drawing comparisons with similar observations in cases of multiple personality (e.g., Kenny, 1986).

Crapanzano and Garrison's (1977) collection of anthropological studies of possession was compiled in part to address the middle ground between "the minutiae of ethnographic description to the generalities, commonalities, and universals of ethnological speculation" (p. 20). Their contributors attempted to provide "an adequate account of exactly what possession meant and what role it served for the individual living in a world where possession was believed possible" (p. 20). Each author tries to theorize meaningfully about possession while at the same time remaining faithful to the viewpoint of the possessed person.

Often in science a subject is opened up by asking a different question or coming at the data from a different viewpoint. A fresh view can result in a huge influx of new activity at several levels: theory, methodology, and application. David Hess (1988a) asks what may be just such a question, and he transforms what has heretofore been an impasse into an opportunity. (Although he writes about poltergeist cases, his argument could apply to any parapsychological or other exceptional human experience.) He writes:

A more relativistic and anthropological perspective would substitute the question of "Can we explain the poltergeist?" with "How do we interpret the poltergeist?" In other words, what does the poltergeist mean to the people whom it afflicts? In what ways is it serving as an "idiom of distress" (Crapanzano, 1977) for the articulation of conflicts, needs, dilemmas, and both personal and cultural meaning? From this point of view, both the RSPK and the sorcery interpretation become not endpoints but starting points; they become pathways to the discovery of the meaning of the poltergeist to the afflicted. (p. 271)

### The Longitudinal Approach

A very important but little used approach is the longitudinal study in which the experiences of a single person or group of persons are studied over a period of time. This method has probably not been used much because it requires someone who has had several experiences over a time period, that is, a person who is thought to be psychic. (Psychics have their own agendas, which often do not include scientific observation and investigation.) A study from Germany was conducted by Schriever (1988), who reports on a 30-year case study consisting of 3,000 dreams of a single individual. The dreams were examined for evidence of precognition. Nancy Sondow (1988), an American psychologist, charted 96 of her dreams (from a series of 943 dreams recorded over 50 months) that she considered to be precognitive. She found that the number of precognized events declined with the passage of time.

Gardner Murphy (1953) recommended the longitudinal approach, urging that fresh cases be collected and scrutinized for signs of a "chronic individualism." Morton Leeds (1944) recorded his experiences of *déjà vu* over a period of time at the suggestion of Gardner Murphy. An excellent example is the wife of philosopher Frederic C. Dommeyer, who over a period of 22 years was able to predict correctly when she would soon (a few hours to a week) receive money unexpectedly whenever she dreamed of excrement (Dommeyer, 1955, 1956; Ehrenwald, 1956).

Michael Cocks has written me about a book he is working on which describes "a *series* of synchronistic dramas, based on archetypal themes, and extending over several years. Here we truly have the feeling of participating in a much wider consciousness than that which the mind of a mere individual can comprehend" (personal communication, May 20, 1990, pp. 10–11). He proposed that

perhaps "a person who has recurrent experiences reveals himself in his experiences" (p. 102). It is possible that the stamp of individuality may be expressed not only in the form, type, and imagery of the experience itself, but also in its effect on the individual. In connection with this, Mindell (1972) observes that "every synchronicity deals with an essential leitmotif in his patient's life . . . certain people became often involved in certain types of synchronicity" (p. 19). He found that some of the recurring synchronistic images dealt with light bulbs, death, creative work, hunger, riches and poverty, physical illness, psychosis, divination and falling in love. Another Jungian therapist, Robert H. Hopcke (1988), notes that there are two types of synchronistic events in analysis: "Those occurring during the analytic hour proper, which are shared by analyst and patient. . . and those occurring outside the hour" (p. 60).

Aziz (1990) offers the best explication of synchronicity that I have seen. He develops a broader view of synchronicity than that presented by Jung and also looks at the synchronistic event in greater detail. Especially important for our purpose is that he describes four levels of meaning in synchronistic events: (a) the objective level: an objective event and an intra-psychoic state form meaningful parallels; (b) the feeling level: the synchronistic experience is accompanied by a numinous charge; (c) the subjective level: the experience plays a meaningful role in the context of the experient's psychological development; and (d) the archetypal level: the presence of objective meaning, which is independent of consciousness (see pp. 64-66).

A variant approach that combines the longitudinal, clinical, and experimental approaches was reported by Jungian therapist Miltiade Rhally (1963) and is described by White (1965). Over a period of two years, Rhally conducted ESP tests at the end of each of 135 analytic hours with the same patient as subject (who was not known to be psychic). The overall results were at chance, but in a post hoc analysis of the data of individual sessions he found that the results correlated significantly with various psychological variables and with the ups and downs in the analysis. He also discovered that he and the patient had apparently shared several dreams.

Another form of the longitudinal approach is the dream-sharing approach pioneered by Montague Ullman (1980b), in which a small group of people meet periodically (e.g., once a week) over a long period of time to share their dreams. Once a person has told his or her dream, the group takes over. Responding at a feeling level, they try to identify with the dream, make it their own, and tell the other group members what they think might be the import of the dream. Ullman stresses that the dream images are to be taken as visual metaphors. He says that "the group, if you give them enough time, will come up with [many] possibilities, not as interpretations, but as metaphoric possibilities" (p. 223). He adds that although our waking lives are lived in a dualistic framework in which individuals are separate, dreams have a kind of nondual quality in which we both are and are not the image. And whatever this dimension is, Ullman (1980b) says it "is an aspect . . . that is somehow or other compatible, conducive to psi experience" (p. 224).

This dream-sharing approach also provides some insight into the psychodynamics involved in psi. He says: "My impression is that, in the group, what soon becomes evident are different kinds of emotional linkages — paredchild, sexual linkages — which then become the emotional conveyor of psi responses. There may have been more psi effects between A and B than between A and C, and that may be related to these deeper human needs that are operating in the situation" (p. 225).

A variant of the dream-sharing approach is the dream helper ceremony developed by Henry Reed and Robert L. Van de Castle (1990), which is based on Reed's method of dream incubation for receiving self-guidance (Reed, 1976). He developed a ritual involving use of a special dream tent as a place conducive to dream incubation. When incorporated in a group situation, Reed observed:

The dream tent . . . seemed to provide the community as a whole with a means of self-reflection and growth. One incubant had a dream about the community which, when enacted by its members, provided a meaningful symbolic psychodrama revealing existent patterns of interpersonal conflict and providing means of reconciliation. This dream served to creatively reintegrate the individual incubant into the community. I also observed instances of apparently telepathic dreams, but particularly provocative were dreams of community members on the night of an incubation ceremony which went beyond telepathy to suggest that an individual incubant's healing dream involved a transformation for the entire community of dreamers. (p. 67)

Reed and Van de Castle (1990) have created an "experimental paradigm involving a group ceremony for getting help from telepathic dreams. It demonstrates that ordinary dreams can contain information and guidance for someone in addition to the dreamer" (p. 1). In a dream helper ceremony, a group of people, for the most part unknown to each other, meet for an overnight healing service. One of them is asked to volunteer to be the target person because he or she is dealing with a current life crisis, but the person is directed not to disclose it to anyone until morning. The other group members are designated the dream helpers. The target person gives each one a personal belonging to sleep on that night, which he or she distributes to the others after leading them in meditation. (Various other rituals are built into the ceremony but space does not permit describing them all.) In the morning, the group convenes and tells their dreams. Usually they do not think they have had dreams about the target person until all the dreams are described and common elements noted. The presence of these common elements "encourages the helpers to accept the possibility that their individual dreams may be related to the target person" (p. 4). The target person then responds to the accounts, describing his or her problem, and noting possible helpful elements. As the group discussion progresses, it "takes on a definite therapeutic tone. Although the original intent of the dreaming was to help the target person, the emotional sharing reveals how the dreams are relevant both to the target person's critical situation and to unresolved aspects of the dreamers' own lives as well" (p. 7). Reed and Van de Castle (1990) conclude that "the ceremo-

ny . . . provides a repeatable demonstration of apparent psi dreaming, with many of the characteristics of spontaneous cases of ostensibly psychic dreams" (p. 10).

### The Clinical Approach

A sixth method has been pioneered by psychiatrists (primarily psychoanalysts). They have made a study of psi as it occurs in the therapeutic situation. There the elements of psi often have been embedded in the latent content of the therapeutic dialogue, so this approach is not available to untrained persons, nor is it especially suited to the investigation of spontaneous psi experiences in the general population. Nevertheless, the work itself is very important because in the cases reported it provides insight into the psychodynamics of psi. It also provides independent verification of psi itself because the therapy moved forward only when the psi interpretation was applied to the analytic material and taken seriously (Eisenbud, 1952, 1955). Eisenbud (1963) points out that in the traditional parapsychological approach, the *degree* of correspondence is what is important, whereas in the clinical approach, it is the *form*. Here a correspondence is used "as a point of departure for the uncovering and exploration of further correspondences; but these additional correspondences would be of a somewhat different order" (p. 122). He adds that in the clinical cases what is important is the meaning for the individual, and this is expressed in unique symbolism that is specifically of relevance to the patient at that particular moment. He further describes the difference in the two approaches as follows: "Whereas to parapsychologists the case material becomes of interest only insofar as it supports the assumption of psi in the picture, to psychoanalysts the psi hypothesis becomes of interest only insofar as it may be required to explain the case material" (p. 128). A collection of clinical papers was edited by Devereux (1953). Ullman (1976, 1977, 1980a) has written three excellent overviews. For individual case studies, see Coleman, 1958; Ehrenwald, 1948, 1955, 1978; Eisenbud, 1982, 1983; Nelson, 1965; Servadio, 1955; Ullman, 1959.

Ehrenwald (1955, 1956) used *psychological significance* as a criterion of psi that can be established by psychoanalytic inquiry into dreams.

If such an inquiry reveals the presence of a dynamically meaningful relationship between, on the one hand, the "tracer" [or potential psi] element contained in the dream and, on the other, the agent's personality and emotionally colored preoccupations, then the suggested paranormal interpretation may indeed be regarded as psychologically significant. It may then be used as an added criterion to justify the telepathy hypothesis. (Ehrenwald, 1956, p. 72)

Thus, although a quality of meaningfulness may not be superficially obvious, a depth psychological approach may reveal it.

As we get deeper into the psychology of psi and synchronicity, there is a class of experiences that I have found reported only in the Jungian literature, which has always seemed highly meaningful. In these cases when a patient resolves a

complex that has affected not only the patient but also a significant person in his or her life, then even though that person is not made consciously aware that the complex has been resolved, he or she (often at a distance) begins to behave as if the situation were known. For example, one such case is reported by Frances Wickes (1927/1988). One of her patients was a woman who had problems with her husband, and so became overprotective of her son, feeling that she could not live her own life unless she felt her son was safe. Because her love smothered any chance for him to exercise his own initiative, he finally ran away, leaving her bereft. She had previously abandoned analysis because she could interpret her own dreams only in terms of her son. When he left she returned to analysis, but still clung to the hope that he would return and her life be rejuvenated. Wickes writes:

At first the analysis followed the old pattern, but as the dream sequence developed and dealt more and more with the symbols of transformation, she saw them as arising within her own psyche and having relation to her individual need and to her life as a woman. She stopped struggling to make them mean what she intended them to mean. She let them act upon her.

Summer came and she was leaving town. It was her last hour of analysis before fall. As the hour drew toward a close, there came to her, like the breaking of a new dawn, a consciousness of her own separate life, a gift originally given, an individual potential which was hers to live, whatever might happen in the life of another. She said: "I am going to take up my own life and learn to live it even if I never see him again. My sorrow will go with me always but it will be my own life that I shall live." It was the end of the hour. The clock struck twelve.

Three days later she received a letter. Its date was the day of her decision. It read: "Dear Mother, I am sitting on a hillside three thousand miles away. Just now I heard the clock strike nine and suddenly I felt that a fear that had been with me always was gone. I am coming home."

The striking of twelve had occurred simultaneously with the striking of nine in the far-away village. It was at the moment of her decision that the fear of her enveloping love fell from him. There had existed between them an identification so close that it was not broken by separation nor by the thousands of miles between them. Only when, by conscious act of choice, she broke the threads that bound her life to his, could he feel released from his fear of her. (pp. 75-76)

### The Psychological Approach

Psychologist Gardner Murphy was very interested in taking a psychological approach to spontaneous psi experiences. When he chaired the Research Committee of the American Society for Psychical Research in the 1960s, he instituted a survey of psi experiences that he hoped to treat psychologically as well as parapsychologically. He wrote a series of articles on spontaneous psi for *This Week*, a widely syndicated Sunday magazine supplement, and he solicited experiences. Out of 1,200 replies, about 300 appeared to be psi experiences. Accounts of the 17 best cases were published (Dale, White, & Murphy, 1962). The authors had hoped to arrange the cases in a manner that was psychologically meaningful, but they lament:

As soon as one begins to look for psychological criteria for grouping spontaneous experiences, it becomes evident that the information usually gathered when investigating such cases is not complete enough to give a clear psychological picture. A complete re-examination of the questions ordinarily asked in the investigation of spontaneous cases seems to be called for. We need sophisticated methods of inquiry concerning the percipient's state of mind, his relationship to the other persons involved in the experience, his attitude toward the experience, and the impact the experience has upon him. We have not yet reached the point in the investigation of spontaneous cases where a *psychological approach* is a reality. (Dale, White, & Murphy, 1962, p. 6)

Since 1962 when Dale, White, and Murphy wrote their paper, a number of useful questionnaires have been developed dealing with psychological aspects of spontaneous psi in general or specific aspects. There is space here to cite only a few: Cooperstein (1990); Greyson (1983b); Millar (1990); and Twemlow, Gabbard, and Jones (1982).

Relatively early in his career, Gardner Murphy (1943a) made a study of spontaneous psi experiences and developed a seven-fold classification of a sample of published cases in terms of internal indications of the types of motivation involved. He notes that the cases discussed indicated that "we are sufficiently motivated, apparently, to make paranormal contact. The problem is to learn how and why we manage so successfully to block ourselves, and thus how to remove the barriers" (p. 190–191). He takes up the latter problem in a subsequent article (Murphy, 1944). E.P. Gibson (1944), acting on Murphy's (1943b) suggestion, examined 313 cases from *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886/1970) in order to determine whether the agent's or the percipient's motive was stronger. L.E. Rhine (1957a, 1957b) and I. Stevenson (1970b, 1982) have also examined motivation. Earlier, E.M. Sidgwick (1924) also dealt with this question.

Ira Progoff (1973, pp. 100–116), after Jung, begins with the assumption that psi experiences occur and that they occur spontaneously and unconsciously. He proposes relating Jung's classification of the unconscious to whatever level of the unconscious is mirrored by the psychic experience (e.g., whether the personal, transpersonal, or psychoid layer [the latter is Jung's term for a *tertium quid* that has some qualities of both] of the psyche is being mirrored in the conscious mind or outer environment of the person concerned).

Psychologist Alexandra Teguis and sociologist Charles P. Flynn (1983) report on a number of spontaneous cases of "possessions" and "hauntings" that they investigated that illustrate some psychosocial variables associated with these phenomena. They complain that in the parapsychological literature

there has been relatively little effort to understand paranormal events as integral elements of individuals' overall backgrounds and present life situations. This undoubtedly stems from the tendency to focus on the apparently extraordinary character of the individuals involved and the sensational nature of the paranormal events—a tendency that unfortunately has led most previous observers to place less emphasis upon the holistic patterns of interpersonal relationships, background factors, and social-psychological variables that we have found to be crucial to understanding the nature, etiology, and meaning of such occurrences. (p. 61)

Henry Reed (1991) is conducting pioneer research into the psychodynamics of spontaneous cases, especially as regards intimacy and psi. As an example, he emphasizes the fact that spontaneous ESP not only tends to involve persons who are emotionally close, but it also has a tendency to ferret out intimate secrets. Even ESP experiments have shown that psi seems to be activated when routines are changed or even when errors are made—as if to demonstrate that nothing is hidden from psi, whether intentionally or not (Rao, 1968; Schmeidler, 1962; Weiner & Haight, 1979; White, 1975; Woodruff, 1960). Also relevant is the literature on nonintentional psi (Kennedy & Haight, 1978; Schechter, 1977; Stanford, 1974a, 1974b; White, 1976). For more cautionary views of the latter, see Schechter and Stanford (1978), Stanford (1990), and Weiner and Geller (1984). Of intimacy and psi, Reed observes:

In relationships, hiding certain facts can be a form of deception. It is also a barrier to intimacy. As a relationship is forming, and curiosity is high, such secrets may be especially vulnerable to detection. (Reed, 1991, p. 19)

Reed (1991) quotes some examples of children who uncover family secrets by ESP, which were reported by psychiatrist B.E. Schwarz (1971). Reed cites examples of ESP revealing secrets re extramarital affairs and secret pregnancies. Other cases concern children discovering the nature of unopened presents by ESP. Parents use ESP to uncover mischief on the part of their children. Reed observes: "A family secret can be its own kind of crisis. A family is bound by intimacy. Secrets, whatever their nature, create boundaries between individual family members. ESP serves to bridge these boundaries" (p. 20).

Reed notes that spontaneous psi experiences are often shrugged off as coincidence, but he observes that many of the experiencers who have had these experiences have strong bodily reactions. They are convinced they have not just experienced coincidences. This corroborates what E.K. Schwartz (1949) insisted upon many years ago:

No spontaneous case honestly reported at once in detail is too trivial. Even experiences that are only suggestively "parapsychological" should be reported. For vague hunches and chance coincidences may contain the nucleus of some psi element, especially if the human being who has the experience, experiences at the same time an emotional awareness of its being "parapsychological." It is my opinion that the accompanying affect, the sense of conviction that the experience is "parapsychological," is the critical factor that distinguishes the psi experience from the chance occurrence or coincidence. (p. 126)

Reed (1991) suggests that calling these experiences "just a coincidence" itself can be a form of resistance—a means of erecting a barrier to the intimacy that ESP tries to bridge. Such persons are attempting "to deny the connection to remain free of the implied claim of intimacy" (p. 49).

### **The Phenomenological Approach**

German parapsychologist Gerda Walther (1955) proposed at the first international conference of the Parapsychology Foundation conference in 1953 that the phenomenological method should be used in parapsychology, and she applied it to telepathy. Few parapsychologists have followed her, although Marilyn Schlitz (1985) applied it to the problem of replication in parapsychology, Gauger (1979) to meaningful coincidences and Locke and Schlitz (1983) to remote viewing.

Barrell, Aanstoos, Richards, and Arons (1987) point out that the main value of this approach is that

it undercuts the reliance upon constructs about phenomena. Instead, it gives priority to the project of explicating phenomena as they present themselves, that is, as they are given in the immediate experience of the person who lives them. Phenomenological research aims to *understand* the meaningfulness of human experience as it is actually lived (p. 446).

Giorgi (1975), who is a leader of the phenomenological school today, describes a method of "natural meaning units," which themselves can be analyzed individually. Spontaneous psi experiences could be treated in this way, and the phenomenological method could be used to examine why the experient thinks his or her experience is exceptional, when it occurred, how it felt, and what was its impact.

Carlos Alvarado (1984) studied phenomenological aspects of out-of-body experiences. Two 1990 doctoral dissertations, by Allen Cooperstein and Charles Millar, report on use of the phenomenological method in the study of psi. Cooperstein (1990) described and studied the psychological experiences associated with healing efforts made by transpersonal healers. Millar (1990) used a phenomenological approach to analyze the results of a questionnaire completed by 139 psychic practitioners, emphasizing disturbing aspects of the experience of "psychic opening."

Psychotherapist/parapsychologist James Carpenter (1988) draws an analogy between the discovery of meaning in a psychotherapy session and in a psi experiment (p. 223). Perhaps the analogy is even more appropriate between psychotherapy and seeking to understand the meaning of spontaneous psi. Carpenter advocates a phenomenological approach to psychotherapy that may also apply to efforts to disclose the meaning of seemingly trivial psi correspondences.

### **The Archetypal Approach**

This approach has been pioneered by Jungians who are interested in the archetypal symbolism of psi experiences. Under the guidance of Jung himself, his assistant Aniela Jaffé (1963/1978) obtained more than 1,500 experiential accounts following a notice published in a popular Swiss newspaper. In brief, Jaffé followed L.E. Rhine's approach but diverged when it came to analyzing the

experiences. Her report presents those cases "which illustrate specific points concerning psi or archetypes, or both. . . . These examples are followed by the author's analysis and interpretation, primarily based on analytical psychology, mythology, religion, and folklore" (White, 1964, p. 232). Jaffé (1963/1978) wrote that she was "interested in the significance which the experience had for the correspondents and particularly in the meaning of the events as symbols" (p. 10). Basically, she looked for repetitive themes in the accounts and attempted to understand their archetypal significance.

Probably the most ambitious attempt to apply the archetypal approach has been made by Arnold Mindell (1972). He gathered 300 descriptions of synchronous events experienced by 80 of his psychotherapy patients over a two-year period. He administered a questionnaire and also interviewed the experiencers, in the context of analysis, about their experiences. Mindell's goal was to study the collective meaning of these experiences. Some experiencers were able to interpret the personal meaning of their experience, but most drew a blank regarding its collective significance.

Mindell observes that "synchronicities invariably appear when new, startling psychological developments are on the verge of approaching consciousness" (p. 16). Moreover, although they can occur along with creative activity, they also can take place at "the onset of severe neurotic or psychotic fits" (p. 16). He proposes that "the advent of a synchronicity indicates that a dramatic unconscious revelation is at hand; how one takes this revelation determines, to a great extent, the positive or negative character of its effect" (p. 16). His data also indicates that "synchronicities often appear or attempt by their very nature to lift an individual out of his relative isolation, and construct a bridge for relating to the people, plants, and animals etc. of his environment" (pp. 16-17), which is in line with Ullman's (1990) observations on species-connectedness and psi.

Mindell also notes that "apparently synchronicities occur as prefaces to the creation or annihilation of a part of existence . . . . The extremes they portray are relative to the life situations an individual finds himself in at the time of their occurrence" (p. 20).

In an effort to investigate the meaning of synchronicities, he set out to find the lost image that joins the synchronistic experience with the outer world and then to investigate this common motif intensively. He used fairy tales as a source of motifs and their potential meanings. He cites von Franz (Franz, 1970, p. 14), who suggested that fairy tales originate not in folk tales but from local mystics and accounts of spontaneous psi experience. She points out that these individual experiences become fairy tales when, as they are retold and handed down, they become more general. That is, instead of saying, "John Jones, the mailman, was walking down Main Street, when he had a vision etc." the story is told of "a mailman" who was "walking down the street." It is then in a form that can, as von Franz puts it, "migrate to another village, for it is no longer bound to a specific person or place" (p. 15). More people are able to identify with this abstracted form of the tale. To check on this, Mindell says he examined reported psi experiences and compared them with Grimm's fairy tales. He writes: "*I came*

*across no modern parapsychological event whose core could not be found in a fairy tale" (p. 27).*

He analyzes some fairy tales from the individual, collective, and psychoid levels. Next, he applies this same approach to some of the synchronistic accounts he received. He devotes a chapter each to various synchronistic themes: divinatory synchronicity, death synchronicity, transference synchronicity.

In his concluding remarks, Mindell suggests the possibility that "a careful inspection of life's events may prove that every intense numinous emotion an individual experiences is synchronous with the environmental physics and psyche" (p. 116). In other words, he proposes that psi experiences have two sides, inner/subjective/archetypal and outer/objective/environmental. This generalization might be difficult to substantiate, for as L.E. Rhine (1961, pp. 128–129) observed, many psi experiences are about trivial events. On the other hand, so were some of the experiences Mindell received. It may be necessary to work with the experient to uncover the meaning. In any case, Mindell and the Jungians have made a valuable contribution in suggesting that each experience has both a personal and a generalizable meaning. The investigator would have to interview the experient to unravel the personal meaning of all but those cases in which the individual's account itself reveals it, but presumably the general meaning could be discerned without consulting the person who had the experience. In any case, the seemingly trivial experiences should not be discarded out of hand. As McClenon points out: "Whenever you throw out cases because they are not evidential [or they are too trivial or for any other reason], you distort your sample" (personal communication, August 14, 1991).

Progoff (1973) proposes that the archetype that is activated in psi experiences and experiments is that of hope (p. 104). Jung, in reading Progoff's manuscript, changed it to the "archetype of the miracle" or of the "magic effect" (p. 105).

Other examples of the archetypal approach are Carol Zaleski's (1987) examination of the relationship of the otherworld journey archetype to accounts of near-death experiences, and Michael Grosso's (1985) consideration of the archetype of "Death and Enlightenment" in NDEs, OBEs, and apparitions in a book on the global need for a new myth of death. MacDonald (1986) found similarities between NDEs and shamanistic experiences, particularly as regards the archetype of the underworld journey.

### **The Folklorist Approach**

This approach has not been used by parapsychologists, but several studies of psi experiences have been made by folklorists. Collections dealing with this approach have been edited by Davidson and Russell (1981) and Davidson (1989). Goss's (1984) study of the "phantom hitchhiker" combines the folklorist, archetypal, and legalistic approaches in one. Folklorist Jan H. Brunvand (1981, 1984, 1986) has popularized the term *urban legends* for oral accounts of unlikely events that probably never happened exactly as related. Nevertheless, they are presented as being true, although often they are embellished with local details.

(Most of these are not accounts of psychic experiences, although he does deal with the phantom hitchhiker theme.) The work of Jaffé (1963/1978), von Franz (1970), and Mindell (1972) on fairy tales and psi can be viewed as a variant of the folklorist approach. Danielson (1983) argues in favor of studying accounts of experiences even if they cannot be authenticated and even if they appear in the popular press. He writes:

Vernacular first-person narratives, those stories common to popular print and conversation, can reveal dramatically the complicated interrelations among the recall of experience, the influence of traditional belief and concept on the account, and the aesthetic decisions made in the performance of the story for the narrator's audience. If we can observe these processes at work in popular materials, we will learn to be aware of them in other kinds of personal experience accounts, even those accepted as reliable and evidential. Thereby the evaluation of narrative sources by parapsychologists will be better informed and more judicious. At the same time the general reader interested in psychic phenomena will be sensitized to the complex ways a story about a ghostly encounter comes to be told. The supernatural "true experience" story is an art form shaped by tradition, convention, and the narrator's performance skills, regardless of its evidential strengths or weaknesses. (p. 197)

Folklorist Claire Russell (1981) studied the "environment" of apparitions and haunted places, where *environment* refers to the social context of the phenomena. She hypothesizes that "ghost occurrences are due to emotional interactions between two or more living people—short-term personal interactions, family interactions, interactions in a community—all of which are predominantly unconscious" (p. 113). She advocates treating the persons involved with respect and accepting their stories as facts, but she cautions that they should not necessarily be taken at face value (p. 113). She refers to the tales surrounding long-term haunts in locations that are related meaningfully to whole communities as *veridical folklore* (p. 115). She analyzes several cases from the literature, supplying possible nonpsi explanations for some and accepting others as containing a genuine psychic element. She hypothesizes that in both types of cases, "a ghost experience is a dream-state while awake, its appearance is subject to its continuing relevance to the social group in the neighborhood, and it expresses the return or re-emergence of repressed information" (p. 128).

### The Active Imagination Approach

Jung (1960) delineated a technique for understanding dreams called *active imagination*. Jungians use active imagination in connection with dream images. It makes it possible to continue while awake a process of imagery initiated while asleep. As Adler (1948) describes what happens: "If we concentrate on them, [these images] form the nucleus for a group of other contents of the unconscious which gather round them" (p. 43). Not only can dream images be continued, but the experient can enter into conversation with the dream images.

Ira Progoff has extended this process, applying it to images that have occurred spontaneously in any form, whether it be inspiration, vision, fantasy, or dream.

Once the images have begun to unfold, he then encourages a dialogue in which the therapist asks questions of the images. He says the answers are often strikingly counter to the normal conscious contents of the imager's mind. Progoff notes that one questions the images in the same way that one questions a medium's controls, which he did in the case of Eileen Garrett (Progoff, 1964).

Mindell (1972) writes that synchronicities constitute "a potentially valuable piece of information which can enrich an individual's psychic horizon" (p. 117). But in order for this enrichment to unfold it may be necessary to do further work with the experience as given. Again, Mindell (1972) notes: "Synchronicity represents the creative temporal birth of timeless holistic patterns which lie along the path of life, waiting to be personally discovered" (p. 118). Active imagination may be a very useful tool for discovering both the personal and the collective meaning of exceptional human experiences. Years ago, I (White, 1960, p. 15) proposed that active imagination be used to extend the meaning of spontaneous psi experiences. I have not followed this advice, nor do I know of anyone who has, but I would like to know of any instances. It seems to me that if dreams are the royal road to the unconscious, then active imagination could be the royal road to that aspect of the psyche that produces spontaneous psi experiences. For, as Mindell (1972) puts it, "active fantasizing, while related to magic, is distinguished from it by the goal of self-knowledge it embodies" (p. 115).

L.E. Rhine (1981, p. 243) has pointed out that many psi experiences seem to deal with trivial subjects and that they can lack a sense of emotional significance. Either way, active imagination can make the experience more conscious. Jungian analyst Aziz (1990) observes:

Quite often the psychic material that is initially regarded as insignificant turns out to hold the key to one's psychic progress. It is not uncommon, for instance, for a dream that was considered at first glance to be absolutely meaningless, "so 'cheap' that people do not even look at it," to be later seen, after a more careful examination, to contain information of great value to one's individuation. In light of the fact that the unconscious is always, so to speak, a step ahead of consciousness, this type of development is not surprising. It is of the greatest importance, therefore, in dealing with the symbolical material of the unconscious, that the xenophobic tendency of consciousness to reject and even eliminate the unknown, the stranger, is properly checked. This is particularly the case with active imagination, where the symbolical images must be given the freedom to "develop according to their own logic" until a more or less complete statement of the central theme is produced. With the development of this central theme, the first stage of the transcendent function is thus completed. (p. 26)

The *transcendent function* referred to by Aziz is Jung's (1960, pp. 67–91) term for a view that mediates between conscious and unconscious, going beyond both. It is constellated in the course of active imagination when the experient achieves an entirely new view of a (unconscious) psychic content by actively (consciously) attending to it. It seems to me that it would be very worthwhile to apply active imagination to seemingly trivial psi occurrences. At the very least, as Hall (1977/1991, p. 322) points out, they should provide striking parallels

between the dreamer's unconscious processes and the situation to which the experience relates. We may also get into the shared type of psi experience with which Ullman (1980b) and Reed and Van de Castle (1990) have worked.

Another "problem" encountered in the study of spontaneous psi experiences is what Eisenbud (1949) has called "errors, misses and near-misses — any departure from the strictly veridical" (p. 254). These "misses" could turn into "hits" by serving as keys to opening many psychic doors and windows if combined with the clinical approach. How this would work has been described by Ullman (1984), who writes:

Paranormal cognition is rarely, if ever, precisely on target. There is enough similarity to the real event to classify it as paranormal, but it is generally embedded in the idiosyncratic productions of the particular percipient. What I am suggesting is that what we all recognize as the elusive aspect of the psi event may simply represent the emergence of a metaphorical statement in which the psi factor is one among many in the creation of the metaphor. Its frustrating elusive character then becomes an interesting allusive one. If the connection to metaphor is valid the task of the investigator becomes somewhat more difficult. He or she has to use a double-barreled approach that will identify both psi and the metaphor. (p. 141)

As I pointed out in an earlier paper (White, 1985), James Hillman (1967, 1972, 1983; Hillman with Pozzo, 1983) has perhaps gone further than anyone in letting the deep psyche speak for itself and in exploring the inner/underside of the mind. He uses the terms "insearch," "living in," and "internalization" to describe

the work of turning daydreams and fantasies into scenic "in-scapes" wherein one can enter and which are peopled with vivid figures with whom one can converse and feel, and touch their presence. This, then, would be psychological insearch. Such imagination costs great effort. The work of converting fantasy into imagination is the basis of the arts. It is also the basis for the new steps we take in life, since the visions of our personal futures come first as fantasies. (Hillman, 1967, p. 117)

It also may be a means of answering the question many people who have had spontaneous psi experiences ask: What does this experience mean? The answer would come, I feel, not if we continue simply to conduct surveys and investigate experiences with a view to authenticating them. Those are outer-world approaches. We need an inner-world approach. Along with the change in direction there should be a change in the underlying assumption from the view that spontaneous psi experiences are events to one in which they are indications of a *process* taking place within an individual or group. It therefore behooves us to make an intensive study of the context of the experience, both inner and outer.

Another way of looking at spontaneous psi would be, instead of assuming a psi experience is an end result, to view it as the *beginning* of a potentially creative process. We then could inquire as to where the process is trying to take the experient (see White, 1985, p. 184). Mary Watkins (1986) has done this by

examining the phenomenology of dialogues with imaginary others, viewing them as a means of growth and creativity. She proposes that the emergence of imaginal presences should not be viewed as pathological or as inferior to abstract thinking but as an alternative thinking mode. She presents an approach whereby "these dialogues can be differentiated in terms of certain formal criteria, having to do with the development of the characterization of both self and imaginal other, the mode of relation between the two, and the quality of awareness of the dialogue and the characterizations" (p. 149).

All spontaneous ESP experiences can also be viewed as imaginary dialogues if looked at only from percipient's subjective awareness. The classification of various types of ESP experiences in a manner similar to that used by Watkins might yield interesting results. But in addition to granting the subjective experience a reality coequal perception, in these cases the other to which the experience relates is not imaginary but seemingly *actual*. The symbolism of ESP experiences can be sensorially verified. If nothing else, the relationship between self and other in the spontaneous psi experience merits study because it is unique. Parapsychologists have examined the relationship of the experience to external reality. Now someone needs to examine the relationship between the purported veridical "other" of the psi experience and the experient's imaginal reality.

### **The Social Constructionist Approach**

Robin Wooffitt (1988), a British sociologist, has taken a social constructionist approach to the study of spontaneous psi experiences that is rooted in an analysis of the linguistic practices used by the percipient to describe his or her experience. He was guided by some arguments from the philosophy and sociology of language that "have had an important influence on our understanding of the medium through which people make accounts of their experiences-ordinary language-use" (p. 139). He draws on the work of J.L. Austin, who viewed speech as a series of actions, which Wooffitt points out, implies "that any use of language, even descriptions, can be analyzed in terms of the Speech Acts through which it is constructed" (p. 140).

He notes that in studying spontaneous psi cases, especially those of the nonrecurrent type, researchers are not likely to have direct access to the actual event being described. What they have to work with are the reports of the percipient(s) and any witnesses. Wooffitt (1988) argues that "language is a constructive medium" (p. 147). Using linguistic practices to analyze an account of an auditory hallucination of sounds purportedly made by a spirit, Wooffitt shows that "to assume that an account is merely the reporting of some state of affairs is to overlook the competencies and interactional issues which inform the way an account is produced . . . . The phenomenon being reported is methodically and systematically assembled with a view to specifically social considerations" (p. 147).

In this pioneer attempt, Wooffitt highlights features of language-use that are not specific to accounts of psi experience as such; rather, they are aspects of lin-

guistic analysis that can be applied to any verbal report. Thus, he treats accounts of psi experiences as any other verbal account. The main concern of this approach is how people describe their experiences rather than what they claim to have experienced. Moreover, he shows that reports of psychic experiences are selected "from a range of possibilities, and . . . speakers design their utterances with a view to the actions they wish to perform with them. In short, that language is an interactional and constructive medium" (p. 141). In other words, no account is delivered in a vacuum. Any speech or verbal report is directed at an audience, even if that audience is only imaginary, and words are selected (not necessarily consciously) to produce a certain effect on others.

Wooffitt briefly points out how this social constructionist approach can be used in further research aimed at studying the social organization of accounts of psi phenomena. He writes:

Accounts could be investigated to determine if there were any systematic structural features in the language used to describe the paranormal. How do speakers use descriptions to convey that the event being reported was "real," and not the result of hallucination or misperception? Through what socially-organized linguistic practices do speakers construct their own reliability as competent observers? By researching issues such as these it may be possible to shed light upon the question of how paranormal events are conceived in our culture, and the conventions associated with these experiences. (p. 148)

Another approach to the social construction of reality is described by lucid dream researcher Stephen LaBerge (1985). In lucid dreams, the dreamer is aware that he or she is dreaming and feels in full control of his or her normal conscious faculties while aware of being in a dream state. LaBerge observes that experiences of shared dreams (i.e., two or more people have the same dream at the same time) "raise the possibility that the dream world may be in some cases just as objectively real as the physical world. This is because the primary criterion of 'objectivity' is that an experience is shared by more than one person—a fact supposedly true of mutual dreams" (p. 206).

He proposes that OBEs are "variant interpretations of lucid dreams" and that "dream telepathy will provide the basis for an explanation of the occasional accuracy of paranormal OBE vision" (p. 206). He then goes on to propose that mutual lucid dreams in the laboratory can serve "as a means of testing the objective reality of shared dream worlds" (p. 207). (For suggestions as to how to go about experiencing shared lucid dreams, see Szot, 1988.)

LaBerge proposes an experiment in which two dreamers share lucid dreams while being monitored in a sleep-dream laboratory. They would agree ahead of time to meet each other in their lucid dreams, and each would signal the other at the same time. If they were truly sharing the same world in their dreams, he assumes that simultaneous eye movement signals would be registered by the polygraph. But if they did not evidence simultaneous signals, one would have to assume that they were not sharing the same reality but the same plot. The latter result would not be unusual. He says, however, that

if they did produce simultaneous eye-movement signals, we have incontrovertable [sic] proof for the objective existence of the dream world. We would then know that, in certain circumstances at least, dreams can be as objectively real as the world of physics. This would finally raise the question of whether physical reality is itself some kind of mutual dream. Perhaps what really happens is the balanced result of a myriad of interactions contributed by all of us dreaming the dream of consensual reality. (pp. 227–228)

Thus, lucid dreaming might be used to examine the social construction of reality.

Woofitt's (1988) socially constructed reality is a linguistic one. The shared dream would be another form of social construction, an experiential one, that preceded the linguistic expression of it. The linguistic account would also be preceded by the joint signal, and conceivably, by the coincident plethysmograph recordings. Of possible relevance in this context is sociologist Aaron Cicourel's (1974) proposal that rather than the accustomed view that language comes first, "there might be a set of cognitive abilities through which human infants acquire a sense of social structures, and it is through these abilities that particular languages, among other things, are acquired" (p. 229). If this is the case, it is possible that this seemingly innate cognitive ability is psi-based or psi itself.

There are other hints in the literature of what we might call shared psi experiences, or are they offshoots of a temporary to more-or-less permanent group mind? Some such possibility is indicated by New Zealand vicar Michael Cocks (1981), who writes:

Before the Stephen experience [an experience of group unity] came our way, I had been writing what was intended to be a doctoral thesis on observed synchronicity, or meaningful coincidence. This had been going on for three years. Then by synchronicity I met, on a single day, people from different parts of the world. Ever since, we have been imaged together in the mind of God, even though physically separated by half the world. If you think that is begging the question, I could say it differently, and say that I have observed continual amazing synchronicity between us. (p. 38)

Cocks writes that the group has produced "two or three thousand pages of synchronistic data" (p. 43) in a seven-year period. (This is reminiscent of the famed mediumistic cross correspondences; see Saltmarsh, 1938.)

Also relevant to any consideration of a social construction of reality are the various forms of collective apparitions. Hart and Hart (1933) collected authenticated instances in which two or more individuals simultaneously saw the same apparition, eliminating all those that could possibly be explained by suggestion, sleepwalking, mistaken identity, etc. They collected 79 cases of collective crystal visions, reciprocal (shared) dreams, collectively perceived apparitions, and those in which both the appearer and the percipient were aware of seeing one another. They discuss in what respects these apparitions could be said to be "objective." They write: "Ultimately, the objective reality of an experience is to be measured in the degrees to which it is capable of being shared with other peo-

ple" (pp. 243–244), which brings us back to linguistic (and possible prelinguistic) factors.

Early theories of apparitions tended to prefer a telepathic or ESP-based theory of collective apparitions (for a review see Hart & Collaborators, 1956). Braude (1986) brings the survey of theories up to date, including one involving PK. He also cites instances such as D.D. Home's "earthquake effect" and other phenomena in which groups of people shared "experiences produced so thoroughly or expertly that all present agreed as to the nature of the extra-subjective phenomena they apparently witnessed" (p. 45).

### **The Experience-Centered Approach**

"Experience-centered approach is a term introduced by behavioral scientist David Hufford (1982). He views it not as a replacement for other approaches but as an addition to them. He points out that one advantage of this approach is that it can be useful as a means of gaining

a better knowledge of the experiences lying behind a particular supernatural belief and to begin to consider the role of those experiences in such belief. A major advantage . . . is that it does not require presuppositions about the ultimate nature of the events investigated, although it can provide some information relevant to investigations of that nature. (p. 256)

Many parapsychologists would say this method is not adaptable to parapsychological investigations, because they are only interested in the "ultimate nature of the events investigated" (p. 256).

I think Hufford has laid the foundations for a useful approach to spontaneous psi, and that the relevance of the findings of an experience-centered approach may be considerable, especially if, as I believe it could, it can give us a better handle on psi experiences than we now possess. Thus, I have adopted the term and have made three suggestions for applying my version of it to the study of psi experiences (White, 1990).

The first was to remind parapsychologists that laboratory investigations were initially undertaken in order to better explicate what was happening in the experiences that people have. Experimentation now has a life of its own, and almost no effort is made to relate the findings to people's actual experiences. It has become an end in itself, and for the past 50 years much effort has been expended in attempts to find an experimental paradigm that can be repeated, with some success, but not enough to convince skeptics of the ontological reality of psi. Nor is there much interest in investigating the experiences themselves. So I proposed that we again turn to experiences to learn more about the nature of psi from them, so that we could make better use of the experimental method than we are now. Given our present ignorance, our experiments are not advancing the field to any appreciable extent. We need to broaden the context within which we

view psi experiences. I think the required context must be sociological, not just psychological. However, at base it is experiential, not experimental.

Second, I proposed that we study a much broader range of experiences than we have been doing.<sup>2</sup> Thus in addition to studying the various kinds of psi experiences delineated by Rhine, we also should study so-called UFO experiences, OBEs, NDEs, mystical experiences, synchronicity, peak experiences, and even experiences of creative inspiration. I reasoned that there may be a continuum involved, and if so, by studying just the narrow band of psi experiences we would not see it. Moreover, psi experiences are sometimes experienced along with NDEs, OBEs, mystical experiences, and UFO experiences (Alvarado, 1986; Cassirer, 1988; Greyson, 1983a; Groth-Marnat, 1989; Ring, 1981, 1982; Sabom, 1982; Stratton, 1957). In addition, some persons undergoing these types of experiences find that afterward they begin to have psi experiences. Persons who tend to have incubus or supernatural assault experiences (Hufford, 1982) and those who experience frequent nightmares (Hartmann, 1984) also tend to have OBEs and ESP experiences. Kohr (1983) found that NDErs were to a significant extent more likely to report psi and psi-related experiences, dream experiences, and mystical states than non-NDErs. Thomas, Cooper, and Suscovitch (1982-83) found that those who report NDEs are much more likely also to report spiritual and mystical experiences. McLaughlin (1983) found a significant correlation between depth of NDE and a subsequent increase in religious activity and awareness of the importance of religion.

Third, I called for new approaches to the study of these experiences, approaches that emphasized the meaning of the experience for the individual involved, not in the sense of imposing meaning by secondhand interpretations of the data, but by studying the meaning expressed in the experient's own words—meaning inherent in the experience itself or the experient's associations to it.<sup>3</sup>

The work of three Topeka psychiatrists on OBEs could serve as a prototype for investigating other psi experiences. Using an 85-item questionnaire, Twemlow, Gabbard, and Jones (1982) surveyed 339 persons who had reported having had OBEs and 81 who had not. One area dealt with on the questionnaire was the impact of the experience. Most of the experients had very positive reactions, especially the 281 (83%) who were mentally calm during the experience. A total

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<sup>2</sup> I have since read Peter Nelson (1989), who proposes that existing surveys of psychical and mystical experiences usually ask only one catch-all question, but the variety of experiences that have been offered in response suggest that a broader phenomenon may be involved than had been indicated by previous studies. He terms this class dimension of experience the praeternatural, explaining: "They appear to derive from a 'supernatural' source or somehow stand apart from everyday sensate experience" (p. 187). He includes 11 categories of experience in this class, which is for the most part equivalent to what I call exceptional human experience. Briefly, they are conversion, presence of God, mystical experience, the sacred, near-death experience, visionary (veridical) experience, contact with the spirit realm, out-of-body experience, remote perception (ESP), existential void, and other-world experience (shamanic-like) journeys or encounters. Nelson suggests that because he used separate questions that emphasized different salient features of the broader class of the praeternatural (or EHE), "we have demonstrated that the percentage of experients in the population may be even greater than other studies have led us to believe" (p. 210).

<sup>3</sup> For a provocative discussion of the role frames of meaning play in the interpretation of the results of psi experiments, see Weiner (1986).

of 188, or 55%, felt the experience changed their life (whereas 46, or 14%, said it did not) and 266 (78%) became interested in psi phenomena as a result of the experience (whereas 46, or 14%, said they did not). One hundred thirty-six (40%) felt it was the greatest thing that ever happened (as opposed to 177 or 52%) and 281 (83%) thought it developed in them a greater awareness of reality (as opposed to 47 or 14%). The authors observe: "These accounts reflected a large number of subjects who were dealing with issues associated with major life changes requiring much introspection, review, and assessment of personal strengths and weaknesses" (p. 454). In another article reporting on this same population, Twemlow (1989) notes: "Time after time, subjects described a striking shift in some of their existential concerns with an intensely focused introspective post-OBE phase" (p. 39). Thus, the OBEs tended to occur during times of intense personal growth and development.

In a recent survey of the first 50 accounts labeled as "supposed extrasensory perception" taken from a larger sample of 5,000 accounts of spiritual or religious experiences in the files of the Alister Hardy Research Centre, Rosemary Dinnage (1991) found that "it appears at least to be not unusual for them to be felt as reassuring, or spiritually enhancing, or even productive of a complete life change" (p. 359). In another recent preliminary survey of the attitudes of 22 (mostly) members of the Society for Psychical Research and the Scottish Society for Psychical Research, Julie Milton (in press) found that five experiencers felt that a psi experience had changed their lives and that "all types of experience were capable of enhancing the experient's spiritual or philosophical outlook" (p. 7).

Another approach to the personal meaning of spontaneous psi experiences has been pioneered by Grof and Grof (1986), who view at least some psi experiences as instances of spiritual emergency, of "episodes of nonordinary states of consciousness accompanied by various emotional, perceptual, and psychosomatic manifestations . . . [that indicate the experient is] undergoing an evolutionary crisis rather than suffering from a mental disease" (p. 7).

In the search for the personal meaning of individual psi experiences, it may be necessary to know not only the physical, psychological, and social situation of any given experience but to be able to place it in the context of the experient's entire life history. As an example, Twemlow, Hendren, Gabbard, Jones, and Norris (1982) describe a patient whose psi experience "enabled him to protect himself from external physical threat, keeping him one step ahead of the dangerous and unpredictable environment in which he lived, and provided him with an intrapsychic method to cope with chaotically split and highly affectively loaded internal objects" (p. 41).

In a sequel to this paper I would like to outline the framework for a new experience-centered approach to exceptional human experiences and to describe several new approaches to studying them based on methodologies and theories drawn from the social sciences and humanities. In advocating these new approaches, some parapsychologists may argue that I have abandoned parapsychology and am doing anthropology or sociology or just plain fantasy with no regard for the ontological reality of psi. I would like to present a metaphor to

clarify my position. Let us say that psi as an ontological reality is represented by a bar of iron that weighs 1000 tons. It sits on one shore of an ocean, and the goal of understanding psi lies in a case perfectly fashioned to hold the bar that rests on the opposite shore with thousands of miles of ocean depths separating them. We have been trying to transport the bar to the other side by means of hand-crafted rafts that cannot bear the weight. I am suggesting that we transport the bar by means of a freighter or an ocean liner that is equipped to carry such massive weights. I do not propose that we abandon the cargo but the means of conveyance that we have been using because it is not adequate to the task. There are many ships we can choose from, all of them already made. I have tried to describe a few.

Of the methods covered in this paper, to my mind the archetypal, cross-cultural, longitudinal, clinical, phenomenological, psychological, active imagination, and social-constructionist methods hold out much promise and should be developed and used by persons in different social situations as well as societies. In the investigation of spontaneous psi, the surface has barely been scratched. Three clinicians, when doctoral candidates (Cooperstein, 1990; Mindell, 1972; Nelson, 1987), have made a start at uncovering some of the layers involved, but much more work is required. Another angle is to become aware of the way in which both thinking about psi experiences and the ways that have primarily been used to investigate them are genderized. Hess (1989) has taken a big step in this direction, suggesting that mainline parapsychology identifies both psi itself and studying spontaneous psi experiences as feminine, whereas the quantitative experimental approach is masculine-identified. General awareness of this hierarchical concept could help to build bridges between the "hard and "soft" sides of psi research. Beyond that, giving rein to a feminist approach to psi, whether in life or lab, could inject new life into parapsychological investigations, perhaps especially those of spontaneous psi experiences.

An approach similar to the one advocated here has been used by Peter L. Nelson (1990), who calls it an "ontologically neutral methodology" that entails suspension of "all assumptions vis-a-vis the ultimate nature of the things and events of our world and *return to the empiricism of our direct experience* (James, 1967)" (Nelson, 1990, p. 36).

But whether we emphasize evidence or meaning or something else, it is essential that we learn more about the basic characteristics of psi experiences, to build what Gardner Murphy (1960) called a "taxonomy of the paranormal." Moreover, as Alvarado (personal communication, August, 1991) points out:

We need to relate those characteristics to other variables so that they do not remain at a purely descriptive level. I tried to do this in my 1989 JSE OBE paper [Alvarado, 1989]. Work along these lines could eventually help us to have typologies of experiences and thus reach an understanding of the shape of the experience (cultural and social context need further attention here).

Whatever approach we take, I submit that we consider the possibility that the investigator is just as much involved in case studies as in experimental work, and that if we want our data to shed new light on the problem of psi, in order to be able to see it we have to find ways of using or developing our own visionary capabilities.

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