

INVITED ESSAY

What I See When I Close My Eyes*

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Abstract — After two decades of parapsychological research, my purpose in writing this essay is to encourage researchers who are interested in understanding psychic phenomena to look for ways to have ESP experiences themselves. In no other field do experienced and thoughtful researchers set up observational experiments, and then ask inexperienced or randomly chosen passersby to look through the microscope and report what they see. I will describe here some of the things that I have seen. I am a good visualizer. When I close my eyes I usually see reasonably sharp and clear pictures. The bad news is that the images that I see with my eyes open are not much sharper or clearer, although they are much more stable. I would like to share my thoughts about psi perceptions, from the point of view of a legally blind researcher. What that means in my case is that my corrected visual resolution is ten percent of that of a person with normal vision.

Introduction

A person with poor visual resolution experiences the world in terms that are very similar to a participant in a remote viewing experiment. Things are not out of focus. Rather, they are projected onto a film that is of too coarse grain to resolve the fine details. Fine detail pertains to the number of line pairs per mm that can be resolved. It is a function of the object's size and its distance from the viewer. For example, I can easily identify all the stars on the constellation Orion, but I cannot resolve the individual stars in the Pleiades, not because they are too small, but because they are too close together when they form an image on my coarse-grained retina.

I believe that a number of misconceptions have been formed about psi functioning because of the expectation that psi should be like vision. A normal eye can resolve line pairs so close together that the resolution is limited only by optical diffraction effects of the finite sized lens of our eye. Our retinal film is so fine grained that during the day it allows us to see as perfectly as is possible given the size of our lens. We can resolve about one milliradian, 10 cm at 100

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meters (a single hand at the distance of a football field). The reason that eagles see better than we do is because they have both bigger eyes and finer grain film. When I am looking out over an audience, I am absolutely confident that I am talking to people, rather than stuffed animals, for example. But from the stage I cannot identify anyone, unless they have distinctive properties of size, shape or hair. The people are not out of focus, they are just too far away. It is an important distinction, because it appears to pertain to the way most people perceive psi targets. In the psi perception of visual targets, my personal experience coincides with the fragmentary images that characterize the initial perceptions in the SRI data, as described in *The Mind Race* (1984), and with the ideas of Warcollier in *Mind to Mind* (1963), and Upton Sinclair in *Mental Radio* (1971). These fleeting and fragmentary images are very similar to those from the process called "graphic ideation" described by Robert McKim in his 1972 book *Experiences in Visual Thinking*. In that book he explains how solutions to mechanical engineering problems are extracted from the unconscious through the process of sketching meaningless doodles with the intention that the answer will appear. Even though you may not recognize the early sketches, eventually something will appear that you will be able to identify. Does that sound familiar? McKim's book makes it convincingly clear why artists are often our best psychic subjects. They are not more psychic than the rest of us. However, they have much greater control over their visual imagery processes, through which psychic data may be mediated in the case of visual targets. They have experience in stabilizing and examining their visual images. We should learn to teach mental imagery skills as part of our research.

There is no reason to believe that this fragmentary image production is a characteristic of psi. It closely resembles the data we have seen from hospital patients who have had their cerebral hemispheres surgically disconnected, and who are asked to draw a picture of something they are reading about, or feeling, with an eye or hand from the opposite side of the body from the one that is doing the drawing. It represents a disconnection between the knowing and the doing parts of the brain. Fragmentation appears to be a natural method for extracting information from the unconscious. One should not expect an object to have the same projection on the physical plane as seen by the eyes as it has on the psychic plane and perceived by psi. I am not using the term "psychic plane" in any metaphysical way. I use it as a reminder that we presently know nothing about the form of interaction between distant and/or future targets and our awareness, although every day we are learning a great deal about the elements of the psychological and physiological processes which facilitate psi.

Experiences with Visual Imagery

My initial interest in psi came from my college days when I was a performing amateur magician. Every magician has had the experience of doing a mental trick with his eyes closed, and becoming aware of information that has entered his mind, beyond what he already knew from trickery. I had these

experiences on stage and in small parties; and as a young scientist, I became interested in the work of J. B. Rhine who seemed to be doing real magic, without sleight of hand.

My clearest psi experiences have been spontaneous, My first clear psi perception came to me in 1956 when I was riding in a car with the sun shining in my eyes. With my eyes closed, I got a mental picture of Hebrew writing (which I don't read under any conditions). There were white characters on a black background, with little flowers by the edge of the page. I saw red flowers with green leaves. Associated with this was an oval table with candles on it. I related this image to my boss who knew of my interest in psi, and who was driving me home from the Long Island laboratory where we both worked. He said that it sounded to him as though I was describing the library of his friend Prof. Schriber, a Hebrew scholar in Brooklyn. He called Schriber that night and obtained a copy of the manuscript that Schriber had been working on at that time. It was a white on black photostat of a Hebrew book, and Schriber was putting green checks next to the correct parts and red balls next to the parts that he thought should be changed. There were no red and green flowers, but the elements were there for me to confirm when I finally was able to see the pages a few days later. That is probably the sharpest image I have ever had; and I will never know if I could have read it if it had been in English, but I feel I could have.

A more complete image came to me in a dream at a scientific conference several years later, where I was to give a technical paper. I had a dream that the person who was going to speak just before me was dressed in a tuxedo with a red carnation in his lapel, and he was going to sing his paper. That was a dream that did not reflect any wish fulfillment or previous day's residue on my part, and it did have the unique clarity and bizarre nature that I have come to associate with pre-cognitive dreams. On my way to breakfast I went to the conference room to see what it looked like, and there at the lectern I found a man in a tuxedo with a red carnation. I went right up to him and asked him if he was going to sing. He said "Yes. But not until later." He was the band leader and would be using our conference room later in the day for a banquet. I would not have recognized the band leader, except for his clothes and context, which is, unfortunately, the way I recognize most people.

I can think of only one psi event in which I did clearly recognize someone. About ten years ago when I was getting ready for a solstice meditation, and decided that it would be a good opportunity to do a precognition experiment at the same time. I purchased a racing form, and I am ashamed to say that I did my meditation on the eighth race at Bay Meadows. Of course, I didn't look at the paper at all before the meditation. I sat down with my candle, and after a few deep breaths, Michael Murphy, the founder of Esalen, appeared to me, head and shoulders, just looking at me! After about twenty minutes, I looked at the paper, to see if I could find any correspondence between Mike Murphy and the eight horses running in the eighth race. It turned out that one of the horses was named "Friend Murph." My son went to the track the next day, bet my

\$5.00 on Friend Murph, and at five to one, he won \$25.00. In the dream, Mike was close enough to me so that I did in fact recognize him.

These three experiences are all examples of spontaneous psi. The conditions would all be considered psi conducive. One was a hypnagogic state, one was dreaming, and the last was meditative. These experiences, together with many other precognitive dreams, have not, I am sorry to say, taught me any great lessons. Usually, even the most high-quality precognitive events or dreams in my life are humorous, rather than meaningful. However, they have had a great impact on me, in that, over many years these and many other psi events have served as constant reminders that psi is in my life, and that this is the area in which I should be working. They are also important to me because they have given me first-hand knowledge regarding the form and substance of psychic perception, so that I don't have to rely only upon other people's descriptions of their mental pictures. I have my own personal data with which to work.

My great interest for the last two years has been to bring psi under conscious control, so that it could be used with confidence. Three years ago at a meeting, I spoke of the importance of the experimenters sharing love, and trust, and grace in order to achieve reliability in psi functioning. Accuracy will come from time to time without these conditions, but not reliability. We all have an idea of what is meant by love and trust. What I mean by grace is a feeling of harmony, and even more important, unequivocal acceptance of psi miracles among the group doing the experiment. Ken Wilber describes this kind of transparent relationship in his remarkable book *No Boundary* (1979). Until we have a significantly better description of the interaction of psi targets with our perception of them, I will continue to view psi experiences as miracles masquerading as data. Our goal is to get beyond the holistic, gestalt type of perception which characterizes much of psi data. The gestalt is the patterning force that holds the image together. We know that analysis and intrusive memory are the enemies of psi, but we must learn to make use of them constructively if psi is to be brought to consciousness and volitional use.

With this goal in mind, several of us in California have formed an informal group of very experienced researchers who are willing to share their own introspections about personal psi in experimental situations. Although these exercises are carefully conducted, they are not all double blind, and we are all exquisitely aware of the potential problems of sensory leakage (especially unintentional whispering). In an experimental situation the only comment that an interviewer can make is either, "tell me more about what you are seeing," or "what are you experiencing that makes you say 'such and such'." Usually the interviewer, if there is one, will be in the next room. This is all process oriented research, free at last from the analytic requirements for "P values" from sponsoring organizations.

Under this friendly telepathic protocol, I have described many objects in boxes and many mental pictures thought up by an experimenter. A common experience associated with trying to psychically create visual pictures associ-

ated with the psi target is that it is just like searching for a memory. When you try to remember a forgotten name, you may struggle and struggle, and then give up. Only then will the name appear, upon your release of effort. You will then be confident of the correctness of the name because of its congruence with your expectation. In the case of searching for psi images, one looks for incongruous and surprising pictures, so that they can be separated from old pictures residing in memory. The process feels the same. It is as though in one case you are trying to remember something you have known before, and in the case of psi you are trying to remember something for the first time. Physicist Gerald Feinberg thought that precognition was a case of "remembering" your own future mind.

Larry Dossey, in his book *Recovering the Soul* (1989), says that we do this by reaching into our eternal and nonlocal mind. We know from our own parapsychological research that this mind transcends both space and time. Nonlocality has come to the forefront in physics since laboratory experiments have demonstrated its existence. David Bohm called this nonlocal interaction "quantum interconnectedness." Bohm describes a holographic universe in which we can experience distant points in space-time, because we interact with a small piece of the universal hologram where our perceptual center is located. This center is more or less co-located with our body. Every piece of a hologram, of course, contains a representation of the whole image. But, smaller pieces sampled from the "big" hologram will have lower resolution, just as we experience in psi perception; as compared, for example with vision.

A more down to earth example of nonlocality is the phenomenal connection between identical twins separated at birth and reared apart. There are books written on the reunion of twins who grew up, for example, on opposite coasts of the United States, and at age thirty met each other for the first time. In one case I remember each man had become a telephone company linesman, married a woman named Josephine, and had a dog named Penny. They were both wearing blue work shirts, white pants, gold-rimmed glasses, and had mustaches. The connection was no doubt made possible by their common genetics, but I would say that the commonality was due to a psi connection.

Two thousand years ago Patanjali said that we obtain psi data by accessing the akashic records which contain all information past, present and future. One accesses it, he says, by "becoming it," with a single-pointed focus of attention. These views of collective unconscious are called by many names, and have been with us for millennia. This picture of psi functioning suggests that the information is always with us and available. It is not a new theory, but it seems to fit the data better than the information transmission model. Can this picture of omni-present data be tested?

A target I recently had to describe was shown to me in a sealed cardboard box. This remote viewing object was a papier-maché star. I looked at the box, closed my eyes and simply saw a star filling the box, which is what I reported. I believe that with targets that are archetypes we see fragments and then instantly fill in the rest of the picture from memory. We have come to consider

these as "hot" targets which are almost always described correctly. Examples from recent experience are: an apple corer, eye glasses, collapsible silver cup, dolls, stars, shiny things, Swiss army knife, magnifying glass, Santa Claus, a coke bottle, (or Santa with a coke bottle), land/water interfaces, and wind mills. These archetypes come partly from visual cortex architecture and partly from memory constructs.

My next target in that series was an object in a shopping bag. I described what looked to me like a "furry stuffed animal, perhaps a teddy bear." I was asked, "what do you see that makes you say 'teddy bear'?" I took a break, which is an essential part of the remote viewing process to clear one's mental slate, to ready it for a new image. A break simply means that I opened my eyes, and took a few deep breaths. I then looked again and saw what looked like the bear standing up on two feet, like the "honey bear," the familiar plastic honey container. I described that, and said that it reminded me of a "troll". That was the end of the trial, because the target was a troll doll. I was asked if there was anything further to see, and I offered that the doll (which had now been confirmed) seemed to be wearing a crown on his head and a smock-like dress. It was in actuality, an angel troll, with a halo sewn to her hair.

The final object in the series was a perfectly smooth spherical silver ball with a bell inside. I described it as some kind of crystal with sharp edges and facets. It was as though the featureless ball had no hooks or handles to mentally grab on to. I believe that seeing a featureless ball had no surprise value for me, so I created something more interesting.

In electrical engineering, one speaks of a matched filter, into which you can put a very noisy signal, but only a prescribed signal can come out. If any of that signal is present in the input noise, you will get a pure representation at the output. I believe the star was a perfect example of that kind. It now seems clear that if a target cannot be easily described or conceptualized, it is much more difficult to bring into awareness than is a target that is an archetype resonating with special brain cells or memories.

Finally, telepathy experiments are more problematic, because there is great uncertainty as to what the target really is. In one such trial, I was to describe the "object" that the interviewer said she had clearly in mind. I closed my eyes, and immediately came up with a picture of a "blue house with white trim." I said that the house had "two stories, with a peaked roof, and a gable on one side." My interviewer said, "that's my house (in Eugene, Oregon), and it's not a gable, it's a solar heating panel." Her actual target was her little dog who lives in the house. I never saw the dog. Color is often an important and correct perception for me in this type of trial. Recently I had confident and correct mental pictures of a "red wooden doll," "two blue bottles," and a "green mass with bright orange above." The first two targets were hidden objects, the latter was a mental marigold, but I never saw the flower. From across a room, I could easily recognize such a plant, although I would not be able to resolve the leaves.

From our experiments with targets, both large and small, I am now convinced that the reason that targets with low spatial frequency (low-resolution

targets) are much easier to describe has nothing to do with ESP. Rather, it is a common factor to all of our ordinary visual, perceptual processing capabilities and habits. One of the keys to separating the psychic signal from the mental noise is that the mental image of the psi target usually has greater surprise value than the noise from memory or imagination. In addition, one is able to move and shift one's point of view for true psi images, especially large outdoor targets. For example, I recently described correctly an island target as "covered with fir trees, except for an area that is clear-cut down to the orange-brown earth by the sea." I then described a house by the shore, and some of its contents. But, I started out with a mental picture of a very large building in a city, until I saw the sea at the edge of my mental field of view. At that point I was whisked out to sea, where I found myself looking down on some islands, of which I described the largest. The clear-cut area was not known about by my interviewer, but was confirmed with a phone call the following day.

But, vision is not the only sensory modality available to psi. We recently had an almost purely telepathic demonstration in our little psi research group. We were discussing the extent to which psi was a memory-like phenomenon, and our host said that it interested him that we could instantly tell if we had ever heard a word or name before. How could we search the entire contents of memory so fast? For example, he said, who knows what "cherk" means? Five of us held up our hands. He said, "how could you know what it means, I just made up the word?" Even though he knows several modern and ancient languages, the surprising answer is that five of us (not including him) had just had dinner at a Cuban restaurant, where the waitress told us that the specialty of the house was catfish with "cherk" sauce, which some of us had ordered. The only place that our host could have accessed the word was from the minds of the five of us who had just experienced it for the first time, a half hour before. In a follow-up investigation, I discovered that there is no such thing as "cherk" sauce. The restaurant manager explained that our waitress was from El Salvador and doesn't speak English very well. The sauce is really "jerk" sauce, and appears that way on the menu. This event is therefore an example of almost pure telepathy, in that the only possible other source for "cherk" would be retrocognitive clairaudience!

Conclusion

In sharing these personal experiences, I do not think for a moment that they are a substitute for laboratory research. However, I strongly feel that researchers have a unique perspective to bring to bear on the interpretation of experiential psi data. Because, after all is said and done, it is all data. Our significant accomplishment as psi researchers over the past two decades, is that psi is no longer elusive. We can demonstrate it when we need it for study and investigation. Our task now is to discover where it comes from. My goal in all this is two fold. First, to try and develop the capability to integrate psychic abilities into my life, as our much-missed colleagues Pat Price and Hella Hammid so

often demonstrated. Through this I hope to gain the knowledge to allow me greater contact with that life-sustaining extended consciousness, the source of all psi, that Bill Roll calls our "long body." Secondly, as a scientist, I am convinced that we significantly misunderstand our interconnectedness, and our place in the space-time metric in which we appear to be embedded. We parapsychological researchers were the first to devote our scientific energies to exploring the nature of this, our nonlocal universe.

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