PSYCHIC PHENOMENA: MEDITATION, PERCEPTION ACTUALITY - AN AUSTRALIAN STUDY

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Bachelor of Arts

This thesis is presented for the degree of Master of Philosophy of Murdoch University
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the findings of an investigation into contemporary psychic phenomena as reported by Australian students. It asks the question: ‘do people experience psychic phenomena?’

The study is an empirical one of reported psychic phenomena. It uses a questionnaire which involves the matching of perceptions of specific psychic phenomena, rather than an examination of psychic phenomena as such. The questionnaire is based on a medical diagnostic model. Its findings are benchmarked against a previous study and compared with other empirical studies.

A comparison of the study’s findings with those of more directly religious investigations undertaken overseas in countries with a longer monotheistic religious history than Australia:

- provides insight into the Australian attitude, generally recognised as being secular, towards psychic and or spiritual experiences;

- indicates that meditation is not necessarily a prerequisite for experience of psychic and or spiritual phenomena; and
argues that commonalities between specific experiences, reported not only within the Australian secular survey but also as reported in the predominantly religious overseas studies, demonstrate that the scientific requirement of repeatability has been met, thus providing ground to believe in the actuality of the reported experiences.
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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Supernatural occurrences that involve altered states of consciousness and result in the experience of psychic/spiritual phenomena are regularly reported by the media. They currently form the basis for a number of popular TV programs. As recently as August 2006, Compass, an Australian Broadcasting Corporation Television (ABC-TV) program about faith, values, ethics and religion, devoted an entire session to reporting progress on investigation into the phenomenon of the near-death experience.\(^1\) Other more fictional entertainments such as The X Files, Charmed, Sea of Souls and Medium familiarise us with the supernatural but rarely convince us of its actuality. Can there be any basis for these reports and, more importantly, evidence to support them? Are they really nothing more than fantasy, mere hokum cooked up for our entertainment by the media? TV critic and sceptic Mark Butler, who personally admits to enjoying such programs, considers ‘... the supernatural to be another manifestation of humanity’s infinite ability to delude itself.’\(^2\)

It has been suggested that the role of television viewing parallels that of family worship, also that ‘a certain kind of viewer’ may find spiritual meanings in specific films.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) ‘The Day I Died,’ Compass (Australia: ABC-TV, 1988-...), episode aired 20.08.05 and also 21.8.06.


\(^3\) Ann Hardy, Film, Spirituality and Hierophany (Lampeter: Religious Experience Research Centre, 2002) 10-13.
Consideration of formation of religious identity through television, together with reflection on neglect of the spiritual and non-material dimensions of
contemporary human life, as posited by Christian authors such as Fox⁴ and Millikan,⁵ may possibly indicate that an interest in psychic phenomena represents something more than a search for entertainment. Nevertheless, frequent exposure to such television programs, for whatever reason, may cause one to speculate just how many ‘ordinary’ people, by which I mean the sort of person one might meet in any street on any day, might believe that they had encountered a psychic phenomenon. The research project, reported in this thesis results from such speculation.

SECTION 1: PSYCHIC PHENOMENA DEFINED

Within his comprehensive literature review of the occurrence of altered states of consciousness Kokoszka states that:

An altered state of consciousness is a state in which ‘extraordinary’ content is experienced or in which the manner of experience is unusual.⁶

This definition is applicable to the particular states of consciousness under consideration in this thesis. These states of consciousness, sometimes referred to as ‘exceptional human experiences,’⁷ or ‘nonordinary states of consciousness,’⁸ include

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hearing voices, seeing visions, out-of-body experiences and experience of spiritual
presences. They are commonly recognised as psychic phenomena, manifest within
spiritual and or mystical experiences, by sources as varying as Underhill,\(^9\) Forman,\(^10\)
Melton\(^11\) and Hope and Townsend.\(^12\) Consequently, an understanding of ‘psychic’ as it
is used in this study, is very relevant.

A difficulty in this field is that ‘psychic’, referring as it does to a wide range of concepts
and activities, has many variables and is frequently used as a generic term. Within this
study, the term ‘psychic’ does not relate to activities such as popular astrology, use of
crystals thought to contain magical powers, channelling, fortune telling and
mediumship. Drury considers that such practices represent a plunge into irrationality. He
states that they have rightly become a target for derision and criticism.\(^13\) Wilber is also
critical, considering them to be ‘magical’ and ‘narcissic’ — a source of embarrassment
to transpersonal psychology.\(^14\) Discussion of these activities does not fall within the
parameters of this thesis. Excluded also, is consideration of research techniques such as
the use of Zener Cards and Ganzfeld

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experimentation employed to prove the reality or otherwise of extrasensory perception.

It is appropriate to reflect that the word psychic is derived from the Greek: *psukhikos* meaning ‘of the soul or life’ — a definition which more closely resembles the term psychic as used in this thesis. Psychic/soul phenomena, which arise through the experience of altered consciousness or may in themselves be considered as an altered state of consciousness, often occur spontaneously, leaving us with cataleptic impressions that, in the truly Stoic sense, we simply cannot doubt.¹⁵ They are experiences that have the capacity to change us forever. In this study, in order to avoid repetition, the term *psukhikos* will occasionally be used synonymously with the term psychic.

**SECTION 2: CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS PSYCHIC PHENOMENON**

Western society has been greatly influenced by *psukhikos* phenomena. The three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam rest firmly on a foundation of prophetic visions and mystic experience — many of which are clearly recognisable as experiences of psychic phenomena. The Bible provides details of such occurrences. The story of Samuel in the Temple (1 Sam 3:4-10) provides an excellent example of clairaudience or loquation. We read that the Lord called Samuel three times but on each occasion the boy thought that Eli was summoning him because ‘…Samuel did not yet

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¹⁵ Ancient Stoics such as Cleanthes and Chrysippus claimed that our thought and experience includes ‘cataleptic impressions’, whose veracity is self-evident.
know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him’ (I Sam 3:7).

This point is noteworthy and will be discussed in Chapter Two, Section Four.

Verse 10 tells us:

And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel.
Then Samuel answered, speak; for thy servant heareth.16

It is not clear whether Samuel actually saw the Lord, which is most unlikely, given the Jewish belief that to see God was to die (Exod 33:20), but if he had this would provide an example of clairvoyance. However, as the verse says that ‘the Lord came, and stood’, it appears to suggest that in some way Samuel was aware of God’s presence. This awareness of an unseen presence is commonly known as clairsentience and will also be referred to in Chapter Two, Section Five.

Psychiatrist, J. W. Perry, writes that the following visions and revelations shared by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians altered the basis of Paul’s religious life and provided the foundation upon which he defined the new credo of Christianity: 17

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up into the third heaven.

And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

16 All biblical references cited within this study are sourced from the King James Version of *The Holy Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, undated).

How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (2 Cor 12:2-4)

Hope and Townsend suggest that the 2 Cor 12:1-5 represent a description of an out-of-body experience18 On the other hand, Professor Paul Badham believes that 2 Cor 12:1-5 provides a description of a near-death experience. Badham also suggests that St John of the Cross’s comments on 2 Corinthians indicate that St John of the Cross ‘almost certainly had a comparable experience himself.’19

Paul’s own descriptions of his conversion on the road to Damascus, where he was blinded by the light and encountered Jesus, as revealed in Acts 9:1-19 and Acts 26:14-19 allow no room for doubt as to his conviction of the actuality of his visionary experience.

Whilst these historical examples are credited as canonical text and gospel, Perry20 and Blackmore21 write that contemporary psychic experiences are, in general, invalidated by modern culture. Reports about psychic experience are not taken very seriously in Australia (a country named by Benedict XIV as ‘the country in which Christianity is

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declining fastest’). For example, a major Australian newspaper recently prominently captioned an article about visionary experience, accompanied by stigmata, as ‘Is This A Bleeding Miracle?’ — a mocking parody of a national tourism campaign.

Because auditory and visionary experiences are no longer acceptable, many people hesitate to share their experiences fearing that they will expose themselves to ridicule and criticism. As Northcote remarks:

Paranormal proponents seem almost to expect at some stage to be called a ‘loony,’ ‘kook,’ ‘weirdo,’ or to be made the butt of jokes that bring into question their mental stability.

The denial of psukhikos phenomena is also recognised by Grof, who alleges, ‘modern psychiatry does not differentiate between mystical or spiritual states and psychotic episodes’; moreover, that people who report an experience of psychic phenomena may be hospitalised and prescribed ‘suppressive pharmacological treatment.’

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22 ‘The Rebirth Of Christ, Religious Revival reflects humanity’s quest for meaning.’ Editorial The Weekend Australian, April 15-16, 2006, ‘Last year Benedict XIV named Australia as the country in which Christianity is declining fastest.’


25 Grof, The Cosmic Game, 8.
Nevertheless, a contention within this thesis is that despite the denial of psychic phenomena by postmodernists,²⁶ such experiences are still evident within Australian society and that it is also possible to demonstrate the frequency of a range of specific psychic phenomena within a given group of ordinary Australians.

**SECTION 3: BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT STUDY**

A problem in attempting to examine an experience of psychic phenomena is that, because it is difficult for the subject to repeat the experience on demand, scientists and sociologists, in general, do not accept the reality of the experience. The problem of repeatability or replication has been addressed by Professor Gerhard Wassermann, holder of a Ph.D in quantum mechanics, and one time lecturer of applied Mathematics at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne. Wassermann states that, for the purposes of research, case reports of spontaneously occurring psychic phenomena of a specific class, resemble and can be considered to be as valid a research tool as human medical case histories of a particular type of illness. Medical case histories (like case histories of psychic phenomena), vary in precise detail from case to case but also, for the same illness, share striking common class characteristics which make diagnosis possible for each particular class of illness.²⁷ In support of his thesis on *Shadow Matter* (a substance which has connections with superstring theory) Wassermann examined 81 case histories

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²⁶ Within this thesis the term postmodern refers to the period which began to replace Modernity around the middle of the last century. The postmodern paradigm is characterised by a plurality of constructivistic assumptions.

of recorded incidents where people had encountered a paranormal experience, and concluded that because of the similarity of the reports there is ground to believe in the actuality of the experience.\(^{28}\)

Wassermann’s methodology appears sound but his findings are based on recorded data and although the sources might be considered reputable, many of them are quite old and all occurred in Europe. There is little evidence of hard research conducted on the paranormal as experienced in Australia. The majority of information available in this country relates to data collected in either Britain or America. These issues were addressed by Nattress\(^ {29}\) who tested Wassermann’s methodology by undertaking a survey which presented a series of class characteristics to a group of 100 Australians\(^ {30}\) in order to discover how many individuals within that group evinced those characteristics. The characteristics chosen were those associated with six experiences, generally recognised as being of a psychic nature: the out-of-body experience, the near-death-experience, clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience and aura viewing. Since the content of psychic experience may on occasions overlap, each of these six experiences might be considered as being a class characteristic and psychic phenomenon in itself or as class

\(^{28}\) Wassermann hypothesizes that man consists of an ordinary matter body and, in addition, a Shadow Matter Body which includes a Shadow Matter Brain. Furthermore, that after the death of the ordinary matter body the Shadow Matter Body and its Shadow Matter Brain could live on – possibly indefinitely. The persistence of Shadow Matter could account for a number of psychic phenomena such as: ghosts, out of body experiences etc.

\(^{29}\) Emma Nattress, The First One Hundred, An Inquiry into the Actuality of Psychic Phenomena (Unpublished work, 2002).

\(^{30}\) Nattress’ sample included Australians domiciled in Perth, Kununurra, Halls Creek, Hedland, Sydney and Canberra.
characteristic generic to a larger and more complex psychic phenomenon.\textsuperscript{31} A secondary aim was to try and determine whether or not participation in meditation had any impact upon an individual’s propensity to experience out-of-body experiences or other possibly psychic occurrences.

Nattress’ proactive approach, in seeking information from people irrespective of their experience of psychic phenomena, is comparable with that of Kenneth Ring.\textsuperscript{32} Ring’s systematic collection of accounts from adults who had come close to death (there was no stipulation that they had to have had any experiences) played an important role in validating Kübler-Ross\textsuperscript{33} and Moody’s\textsuperscript{34} near-death experience research.

The results of Nattress’ project appeared to validate Wassermann’s methodology but produced some unlooked for outcomes. Over sixty per cent of participants indicated that they had recognised and experienced one or more of the specifically described phenomena. The most commonly experienced class characteristic was awareness of an invisible presence. This was experienced by forty-nine per cent of all participants or seventy-nine per cent of those who had reported one or more incidents of psychic experience. A number of participants sensed that the unseen presence was a figure of


\textsuperscript{32} Kenneth Ring, \textit{Life at Death – A Scientific Investigation Of the Near-Death-Experience} (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1980).


\textsuperscript{34} Raymond A. Moody, \textit{Life after Life} (Covington, GA: Mockingbird, 1975).
spiritual significance. As these results differed greatly from expectations prior to data collection and analysis, when it had been postulated that the percentage of psychic experiencers within the sample group might possibly fall within the range of three to four per cent, with five per cent being the absolute maximum, it was decided to present the questionnaire to a further one-hundred volunteers.

For this second survey (Nattress 2) copies of the questionnaire, with reply paid envelopes, were deposited at a meditation centre in Perth and at a New Age coffee and book shop in Fremantle, Western Australia. However, this method was not cost effective as many more questionnaires were taken than were returned. Of those that were returned, the percentage of participants who volunteered that they had experienced psychic phenomena was greater than that found in the first survey (Nattress 1). This was interesting but unsatisfactory in that there could possibly be a bias in these results due to the fact that people who frequented the two venues might be considered as being those who had a particular interest in spirituality and psychic issues. Consequently, this second study was discontinued.

Nevertheless, the findings of these Australian studies had similarities with those listed in Pupynin and Brodbeck’s survey of Religious Experience in London, although the British survey was a direct inquiry into religious experience and the Australian survey was designed to be secular.35 The methodology used for sample selection in the British

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35 Year Book of Australia 2005, Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 339. Statistics, in this publication, show a marked decline in the number of Australians claiming Christianity as their religion. People in the 18-24 years of age group being the most likely to state that they had no religion.
project was virtually identical with that used in the first Australian study in that
questionnaires were distributed to colleagues, friends and people previously unknown to
the researcher. A critique of these three research projects is that different results might
have been achieved if participants had been selected by means of a random selection
process.
The original study (Nattress 1) had been undertaken with the primary aim of testing Wassermann’s methodology by presenting a series of class characteristics to a group of individuals, in order to discover how many individuals within that group evinced those characteristics. However, consideration of Pupynin and Brodbeck’s study raised questions about the correlation between experiences of psychic phenomena, religious experience and the role of learned concepts. Might there be a possibility that psychic phenomena as experienced by people, from ‘older countries’ with a greater religious history than Australia, would differ greatly from that of Australians? A need for that further and more detailed research involving both primary research and textual content was clearly indicated.

Given the vastness of the field of consciousness from which psychic phenomena emerge and the variety of such phenomena, in so far as it is possible, within the constraints of time and length, the immediate aims of the study now became:

1. to provide insight into the Australian experience by examining a number of reports of altered states of consciousness, generally recognised as being of a paranormal or supernatural nature, in order to test for the scientific requirement of repeatability and thereby reason to believe in the actuality or otherwise of these phenomena;

36 For example, European settlement, in Western Australia, did not begin until 1823.
2. to consider the Australian experience, generally recognised as being secular, in the
   light of more directly religious investigations undertaken overseas; and

3. to determine whether or not participation in meditation has any impact upon a
   subject’s propensity to experience these phenomena.

Studies regarding altered states of consciousness/psychic experiences have to date been
mainly theoretical.37 This study is primarily empirical. An empirical study of subjective,
reported experiences, with comparison to previous findings, has not previously been
undertaken in Australia or elsewhere. It will, therefore fill a ‘Knowledge Gap’.

**SECTION 5: ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS**

The complex and subtle ground from which psychic phenomena arise and the intensely
personal effects which experience of the phenomena may have upon some individuals,
require greater and more in-depth examination than the present study affords. Therefore,
although, some consideration of the causes and effects of psychic experiences, as
postulated by scholarly writers, cannot be excluded, with the exception of meditation as
a possible trigger for psychic experience, other causes and effects are generally not the
main focus of interest. It is also recognised that much more could be said regarding the
complexity of eastern and western religious philosophy; however, within this study

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constraints of time and length prevent detailed discussion. In the chapters that follow, the main interest is upon reported accounts of psychic phenomena as such.

The next chapter (Chapter Two) reviews some of the extensive literature relating to psychic phenomena that have given rise to religious experience, considers arguments as to the possible impact of meditation as a catalyst for psychic experiences and examines Nattress’ six examples of psychic phenomena: the out-of-body experience, the near-death experience, clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience and aura viewing. It also draws attention to blurring of boundaries between experiences judged to be of a religious nature and those deemed to be merely psychic. It argues that, within studies of psukhikos phenomena, empirical research has provided tangible results.

Chapter Three will contest the assertion that the failure of replication (with respect to paranormal phenomena) prohibits scientific confirmation of these subtle phenomena. In this chapter, it will be argued that methodologies used by the medical profession to diagnose elusive conditions may also be used to confirm experience of psychic phenomena. Details of a survey, based on this concept, will be discussed.

Chapter Four will report on the survey’s findings and provide comparison with overseas studies. These findings and comparisons, together with key points from the literature review, will contribute to the discussion in Chapter Five. Chapter Five, the final chapter, will contain the study’s final conclusions and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 2 - THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The current research utilises previous and current perspectives on particular aspects of psychic phenomena, with a primary object of developing a better understanding of contemporary psychic experience in Australia as compared to the experience of such phenomena in older and less secular countries. Of particular interest is the work of scholarly writers published by the Religious Experience Research Centre
in Great Britain and reports of practical research conducted in the United States of America.

Although studies in mysticism and psychic phenomena are not as numerous in Australia as they are in countries with more extensive religious histories, an effort has been made, wherever possible, to consider texts and views presented by Australian authors or by authors who have lived in Australia for a considerable period of time. It is recognised that some of these texts might not be considered as being scholarly but without their inclusion it would not be possible to fully appreciate the Australian experience. Furthermore, as much of the literature dealing with psychic phenomena is heterogeneous, this review by necessity considers studies not directly related to the phenomena.

Areas to be examined include: a brief overview of some research approaches to generic perspectives on psychic phenomena; meditation and its role as a possible trigger for the experience of psychic phenomena; and an examination of specific phenomenon such as the out-of-body experience, clairvoyance, clairaudience, the sensory perceptions of touch and smell; and the ability to see auras.

\footnote{Founded in 1969 at Manchester College, Oxford as the Religious Experience Research Unit by Professor Sir Alister Hardy FRS. Later situated at Westminster College, Oxford from 1991-1995 and known as the Alister Hardy Research Centre. The Religious Experience Research Centre is now situated at the University of Wales, Lampeter.}
SECTION 1: HOW SOME RESEARCHERS HAVE DEALT WITH THE PROBLEM OF PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

The variety of psychic phenomena to be considered, within the current study, are primarily of a cognitive nature. Since nothing to do with the mind is repeatable in all experiments, notwithstanding that psychology is considered as a science, the study of cognitive subjective experiences has proved to be somewhat of a stumbling block as far as scientific research is concerned. In fact, as far as purposeful investigation of psychic matters is concerned, this does not appear to have begun until the latter part of the nineteenth century with the founding of The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in Britain in 1882 and the founding of the American Society for Psychic Research (ASPR) some six years later in the United States of America.

1902 saw the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a general study of mysticism by American psychologist and ASPR member William James. This was followed in 1903 by the posthumously published work of founding SPR member Frederic Myers — *Human Personality and Its Survival After Bodily Death*. Both works have been reprinted many times.

Aldous Huxley, who provided a foreword to the 1961 reprint of *Human Personality and Its Survival After Bodily Death* and may have been influenced by Myers’ work, has suggested a novel way of examining altered states of consciousness. Huxley likens the world of visionary experience to the antipodes of everyday consciousness. In comparing
consciousness to (the then partially unexplored) Australia, he argues that although creatures such as the platypus, kangaroo and wallaby might appear strange and improbable, they exist naturally being neither human inventions nor controlled by man and, as we have not yet reached the expertise of zoologists (in the field of human consciousness), all we can do is to go to the mental equivalent of Australia and collect specimens. Specimen collection is an ongoing process — currently two web sites, the first in Australia: [www.death-book.com.au](http://www.death-book.com.au) and a second one in Britain at the Religious Experience Research Centre: [www.alisterhardytrust.org.uk](http://www.alisterhardytrust.org.uk), invite reports of psychic and religious experiences.

Huxley’s concept of observing visionary experiences as empirical phenomena, regardless of their reality or otherwise, is echoed by Argyle, who recommends adopting a non-ontological approach to the study of religious experiences, that is, to study them as ‘empirical phenomena’ irrespective of their truth or validity, as a partial response to the polemics of psychology and religion. The non-ontological approach, in presenting empiric studies of reported experiences, is extensively demonstrated by Myers, and James. As James writes:

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…treating these [experiences] as purely subjective phenomena, without regard to the question of their “truth”, we are obliged, on account of their extraordinary influence upon action and endurance to class them amongst the most important biological functions in mankind.7

The above quotation is indicative of the emphasis which James places on the consequent results of the reported experiences rather than on any particular psychic phenomena which may have generated the result.

**Surveys of Religious Experience**

Whilst James and Myers were pioneers in seemingly different fields, James in the study of religion and Myers in the area of psychical research, James’ study, like that of Myers, provides many examples of religious and or mystical experience that are synonymous with experience of psychic phenomena. However, despite the similarities of many of the experiences described within these studies, the transcendental argument8 has failed to convince sceptics of the actuality9 of either contemporary religious or psychic experience.

James’ approach to the study of subjective mental phenomena primarily through introspective observation is admired by Wallace who writes ‘It is with introspection

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7 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 506.

8 The transcendental argument, developed by Kant, states that, whatever the sceptic says, it is given that we have certain experiences. Given that we have these experiences, the next stage is to ask what must be the case in order for these experiences to be possible.

9 In this thesis ‘actuality’ is used in the sense of describing something that has happened, whether or not it can be philosophically argued that the event is real or imagined. It is outside the nature of this thesis to discuss the nature of reality.
alone that consciousness and a wide range of other mental phenomena can be examined directly.\textsuperscript{10} This opinion is not shared by Kokoszka, who is critical of a proclivity within the psychology of consciousness to favour the development of theoretical conceptions at the expense of empirical studies. He argues that: ‘…such speculations do not provide any progress as long as they are not proved by empirical data.’\textsuperscript{11}

Whilst it is true that examination of altered states of consciousness that give rise to the experience of psychic phenomena has, in the main, depended on self examination, rather than objective measurement, it is possible that comparison of such autobiographical accounts may reveal similarities in experiences that are quantifiable.\textsuperscript{12} For example, in presenting 3,000 reports on contemporary religious experiences, collected as if they were biological specimens, Hardy, like James, argues that spiritual experience and, its sometimes accompanying, psukhikos phenomena are a normal biological attribute of the human species. Hardy writes:

\begin{quote}
What we have to do is to present such a weight of objective evidence in the form of written records of these subjective spiritual feelings and of their effects on the lives of the people concerned, that the intellectual world must come to see that they are in fact as real and as influential as are the forces of love.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{11} Kokoszka, ‘Occurrence of Altered States of Consciousness: An Overview,’ 94.


From the above extract it can be seen that, as is the case with James, Hardy’s main interest is in the effect of the experience upon the person concerned rather than the actual phenomenon itself.

Hardy’s study, published in 1979, and resulting from eight years work undertaken by the Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College Oxford, contains many examples of psychic phenomena ‘… that appear to have given rise to religious feelings in the persons concerned.’ The development of twelve main divisions with sub-divisions (providing 92 categories in all) by Hardy and his team indicates that research in this area of consciousness had progressed from merely collecting specimens, as advocated by Huxley.

A possible flaw, which in some circumstances may have been unavoidable, was Hardy’s decision to exclude reports ‘…that appear to be purely psychic in nature’. In doing so he does not appear to have considered that contributors, who provided accounts of personal experiences to a study about religious experience, might have expected their reports to be accepted as such. However, in acknowledging that separation of the spiritual from the psychic was problematic, Hardy notes that a closer study of the relationship between the psychic and spiritual experiences is ‘clearly desirable’.

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14 Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 44.
15 Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 44.
16 Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 44.
Although Robinson\textsuperscript{17} and Woods\textsuperscript{18} consider Hardy’s study to be both scientific and empiric, Hardy himself regretted its lack of quantitativity and looked to others, including Hay\textsuperscript{19} and Beardsworth,\textsuperscript{20} to provide more statistical research.

In \textit{A Sense of Presence} (1977) Beardsworth provides accounts of ‘ecstatic and mystical episodes’ from the first one thousand responses provided to Hardy. Within this work, which is devoid of statistical analysis, Beardsworth adopts a phenomenological approach, choosing not to comment on the relation between psychic and spiritual experiences. He has also exercised editorial prerogative and omitted certain classes of phenomena, for example smells ‘…since only four cases were reported…’\textsuperscript{21} Beardsworth’s deliberate omission, as with Hardy’s earlier decision to exclude the ‘purely psychic,’ detracts from the scientific validity of the work. The relevance of the experience of smell was later recognised by both Hardy\textsuperscript{22} and Woods.\textsuperscript{23}

Argyle notes than Hardy's records (and by extrapolation the work of Beardsworth) recognised a number of psychic experiences including ‘out of the body experiences’,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Timothy Beardsworth, \textit{A Sense of Presence} (Manchester College Oxford: The Religious Experience Research Unit, 1977).
  \item Beardsworth, \textit{A Sense of Presence}, x.
  \item Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature of Man}, 43.
\end{itemize}
‘contact with the dead’ and near ‘death experiences’ as varieties of religious experience, but argues that, in his opinion, psychic experiences do not lead to the positive outcomes associated with religious experience. This viewpoint seems to be at odds with Hardy’s inclusion, within his study, of 544 examples of visionary experience and 179 out-of-body experiences which meet the criterion of eliciting religious feelings in the experiencers. Positive outcomes arising from near-death experiences and out-of-body experiences are commented on by Badham and also by Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones. In ‘The Out-of-Body Experience: Phenomenology,’ American researchers Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones, reporting on the findings of a survey involving 339 cases of out-of-body experiences, found that many participants considered the experience as having been of ‘lasting benefit,’ ‘spiritual’ and had resulted in ‘change towards a belief in life after death.’

With David Hay, research of consciousness progressed from collecting and cataloguing trophies to hunting for particular specimens. Working in cooperation with Hardy, Hay

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26 Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 44.
27 Badham, Religion and Near Death Experience.
28 Stuart Twemlow, Glen Gabbard and Fowler Jones, ‘The Out-of-Body Experience: Phenomenology,’ in Robert Monroe, Far Journeys (New York: Broadway Books 2001), 274-290. Note: This major psychological study of the significance of the out-of-body experience to the individual, may be considered as being partially religious in nature. It enquires into belief systems, religious backgrounds and the meaning of the out-of-body experience as perceived by participants.
put the following question, later to become known as ‘The Alister Hardy Question,’ to 150 postgraduate students at Nottingham University:

Do you feel that you have ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, that is different from your everyday self?\(^{30}\)

Responses to Hay’s survey included examples of visionary experience and out-of-body experiences.\(^{31}\)

Hay’s study is considered as quantitative by Hardy.\(^{32}\) However, as the title of the paper — ‘Religious Experience Amongst A Group of Postgraduate Students: a qualitative study’ suggests, this was not Hay’s opinion. A further survey on religious experience, conducted by Hay and Morisy through National Opinion Polls Ltd (NOP) and involving approximately 2,000 participants, of whom over 34% provided an affirmative answer to ‘The Alister Hardy Question,’ provided quantitative data about the participants. Quantitative data within the NOP Survey related to religious beliefs, church attendance, age, sex, income and location, rather than the variety of experience.\(^{33}\) Accordingly, a further survey, of 107 subjects, randomly selected via the electoral rolls of the City of Nottingham was undertaken. This survey yielded a positive response from 62% of participants — almost double that provided by the NOP Survey. Hay believes that the

\(^{30}\) Hay, cited in Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 125.


\(^{32}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 124-130.

greatly increased response resulted from the use of trained interviewers spending up to an hour or more with each participant.34

Hay’s opinion with regards to personal interviewing techniques appears to be confirmed by Pupynin and Brodbeck’s Religious Experience in London (2001) — a more recent British study which has connections with the Religious Experience Research Centre (now re-located to The University of Wales). The aim of Pupynin and Brodbeck’s research project was ‘…to know: do people have religious experiences, and if so, what are they?’35 Within Religious Experience in London the term ‘religious’ is used in the broader more spiritual sense of describing ‘issues of deep meaning, truth and purpose’ rather than the religious experience of formal religious institutions and or/sects.36 This small study, involving personal contact with 40 people (friends, colleagues and members of the public), provides many examples of psukhikos experiences but differs from the previous three in that it allows for direct response to mystical and paranormal experiences.37 However, in common with the already mentioned studies associated with the Religious Experience Research Centre, undertaken by Argyle, Hardy, Beardsworth and Hay, its interest is primarily in the difference the experience makes to the experiencer rather than ‘… in the reported nature of the experience.’38 This may be

34 Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 130-132.
36 Pupynin, and Brodbeck, Religious Experience in London, 7.
37 It is also of interest because of the diversity of the participants, 30% of whom originate from countries other than England, including Zimbabwe, South Africa, Israel, New Zealand, India and America.
38 Pupynin and Brodbeck, Religious Experience in London, 9.
indicative of an ambivalent attitude towards psychic phenomena and, as Hollenback notes, many scholarly works on mysticism and religion have tended to marginalise the significance of psychic phenomena.  

Secular Research
Within the field of secular research, although the difference that experiencing psychic phenomena makes to the experiencer is not marginalised, it is the phenomenological nature of the experience that receives more attention than either its cause or effect. This can be clearly seen in psychophysiological research undertaken by Jones and Tremlow, Tart, and Monroe with respect to the out-of-body experience and, to a lesser extent, within Wassermann’s enquiry into the issue of ‘Shadow Matter’. Also within Nattress’ research, which although it had the additional aims of testing Wassermann’s methodology and an interest in meditation, the main focus was to know: do people experience psychic phenomena?

Although Nattress’ questionnaire, detailing six class characteristics deemed to be psychic phenomena, allowed for no suggestion of religious experience, either of the formal variety or in its broader spiritual sense, it is of interest to note that responses provided by participants had similarities with responses provided to more directly

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40 In this thesis, ‘secular research’ describes research with no specific religious connotation.


religious surveys. Since the majority of such responses involved sensing the unseen presence of a figure of spiritual significance, these findings are suggestive of a lack of clarity or blurring or merging of boundaries between experiences judged to be of a religious nature and those deemed to be merely psychic.
Meditation can involve concentration, contemplation and abstraction, all of which are regarded as conducive to a heightened spiritual awareness of one’s self – God and or Consciousness by authorities as varied as Brunton, Visser and Drury. However, in Australia, most meditation groups emphasise meditation for practical reasons such as improvement in health and stress reduction. It is unlikely that many Australians initially engage in meditation with the intent of achieving an altered state of consciousness — although, as North notes, this may unexpectedly be the result. Hollenback states that ‘mystical states of awareness’ and ‘supernormal powers’ are the ‘by products’ of meditation. Professor Hollenback argues that altered states of consciousness involving psychic phenomena, such as, clairvoyance, out-of-body travel and the ability to see auras, do not usually reveal themselves unless one has engaged in meditative practice. If Hollenback is correct, it might be reasonable to expect that some of the many Australians who engage in meditative practices would occasionally experience spiritual and or mystical experiences. But such psukhikos experiences, if they do occur, are not commonly reported. Lack of confirmation of such experiences may

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indicate that they do not occur at all or may possibly indicate cultural processes leading to their suppression or denial, which Hay believes, to be the case in contemporary Britain.\footnote{David Hay, University of Aberdeen, website Available: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/staff/david-hay.shtml (Accessed 12 May 2005).} On the other hand, such paucity of information may merely denote a lack of data collection and research.

In considering whether or not meditation has any influence on the individual’s propensity to experience psychic phenomena, it is probably helpful to have some understanding of the meditation process. This is no easy task. Firstly, it is extremely difficult to find a short description which clearly defines what exactly happens when one meditates. Secondly, meditation involves a number of techniques that lead to a particular experience or range of experiences. Well-known meditation techniques include: (1) breath control (usually involving counting the number of breaths or merely observing the breath); (2) body scanning (directing the attention to particular parts of the body); (3) focusing on a particular object; (4) the use of mantram (repeating a particular phrase) and (5) observing one’s own thoughts (sometimes known as ‘insight meditation’). Some of these techniques are related to physical well-being and others impact upon the psyche. However, as meditation takes place in the mind its results are cognitive, subjective and exclusive to the meditator.

It is known that meditation techniques, carried out by skilled practitioners, are effective in controlling the pulse.\footnote{H. Benson and M. Klipper, The Relaxation Response (London: Collins, 1975).} Physiologically, meditation alters the electrical activity of the
right and left hemispheres of the brain. The Electroencephalograph (EEG) which monitors the electrical activity of the brain records a number of rhythms or waves that may be found in the cerebral cortex. During meditation the shift from the faster Beta brain waves to the slower Alpha, Theta and Delta waves leads to subjective perceptions of relaxation and peace and a number of attendant benefits, including reduction in muscle tension, slower breathing and a reduction in blood pressure for those whose pressure is high.\textsuperscript{52}

Researchers Robert Monroe\textsuperscript{53} and Charles Tart\textsuperscript{54} record that, during out-of-body experiments, subjects display distinctively altered brain wave patterns. Contributions to understanding the neurophysiological aspects of meditation have been made by scientists such as Peter Fenwick\textsuperscript{55} and James Austin.\textsuperscript{56} However, as meditative states engage capacities of the human mind which lie outside the normal structure of the logical processes of intellect,\textsuperscript{57} it may be that pursuing medical models is indicative of western preoccupation with process rather than outcome. This is not the case within

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Benson and Klipper, \emph{The Relaxation Response}, 87.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Robert A. Monroe, \emph{Far Journeys} (New York: Broadway Books, 2001).
\item \textsuperscript{54} Tart, ‘A Psychophysiological Study of Out-of-Body Experiences’, \textit{Journal of the American Society for Psychic Research}.
\item \textsuperscript{55} P. Fenwick, ‘Meditation and the EEG,’ in M.A. West (ed.), \emph{The Psychology of Meditation} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 104-117.
\item \textsuperscript{56} J.H. Austin, \emph{Zen and the Brain: Towards an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ainslie Mears, \emph{The Wealth Within} (Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1978), xxi. Melbourne psychiatrist Ainslie Mears is regarded a pioneer of meditation in Australia, and celebrated as being the teacher and mentor to Dr Ian Gawler. In the 1970’s Mears developed a technique which he called ‘\emph{Mental Ataraxis}’ (later recognised as a form of meditation) which was successful in controlling and eliminating pain.
\end{itemize}
Hindu psychology, where consciousness is viewed from a first-person perspective or how things appear to the experiencer, rather than from a western scientific third-person position. Rao argues that electrophysiological measures only have the capacity to indicate states of mind, such as whether a person is awake, sleeping or dreaming, and are not reliable in measuring either subjective states or the content of such experiences.\textsuperscript{58} Rao’s opinion appears to lend support to the assertion made by Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis that EEG evidence is inconclusive and suggestive only of a possible link between brain wave patterns and altered states of consciousness.\textsuperscript{59}

**Western Perspectives**

In *The Eucharist and the Continual Remembrance of God*, Gabriel O’Donnell and Robin Maas remind us that meditation was vital to medieval Christianity not only among mystics and cenobite communities but for the populace in general. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (meditatively focussing on ‘the body of Christ’) was a common practice. After the Reformation, in the sixteenth century, this practice was discontinued by Protestant churches and eucharistic devotion and adoration became associated exclusively with Roman Catholicism.\textsuperscript{60} Meditation in any form is not a regular feature

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\textsuperscript{60} Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions For The Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 424.
of Protestant liturgy and there are those who clearly differentiate Christian meditation from other forms.  

Some Christians may also be uncomfortable about the use of mantra, which might be considered to represent ‘vain repetitions’ (Matthew 6:7). Others feel that classic eastern mantras for example: *Om Namah Shivaya* – meaning ‘I bow to the Lord, who is the inner Self’, are not appropriate. Some teachers, such as Lawrence LeShan, who advocates selecting a mantra randomly from the telephone directory, state that the actual word used is not important. Others believe that mantras should be more wisely chosen. This may well be a valid point in the light of the use of affirmations in improving sporting performance or making life-style changes. Furthermore, teachers associated with *The World Community for Christian Meditation* advise that it is important to choose an appropriate mantra and to ‘…stay with the same word. Thus it becomes rooted in the heart and becomes a way of praying always.’

Edwards argues that meditation is still the essential foundation of all Christian prayer — ‘Contemplation depends upon meditation, and contemplative moments often occur

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precisely within meditative prayer’. He compares the New Age meditative technique of visualisation (which leads to personal transformation through the creative use of the imagination) with the prayer exercises in St. Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* and finds that they have a close similarity. Edwards suggests that the Saint uses the word contemplation for what would be commonly recognised as meditation. However, Hollenback chooses the term ‘recollection’ as the best descriptor for the process whereby a Christian mystic ‘…learns to ‘focus one-pointedly his or her mind, will, imagination and emotions on the object or goal.’ in preference to other terms, such as ‘meditation’ ‘contemplation’ ‘stilling the mind’ and ‘centering the mind one-pointedly’ which have a range of slightly different connotations dependent upon the intent and background of the meditator.

Recollection is certainly a term much used by St Teresa of Avila who, like Catherine of Sienna and St John of the Cross, engaged in lengthy periods of contemplation. This contemplative practice resulted in the experience of a variety of supernatural experiences such as, hearing voices or music and seeing visions, and also other experiences that are beyond human capacity to describe and are simply called ineffable. But, as Robert Gimello argues, it is probably incorrect to assume that meditation in itself is a form of mystical experience. Gimello’s point of view is that it is more sensible to

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think of meditation as a means to an end.\textsuperscript{69} There is little doubt that mystics have deliberately used meditation as a tool to achieve ecstatic stages. Some, like St Teresa of Avila, have left detailed accounts of the processes which resulted in spiritual and or mystical experiences.\textsuperscript{70}

The development of a schema of deliberate, focussed concentration rather than spontaneous prayer, in order to achieve an ecstatic state, is common to Christian, Buddhist, Sufi and Hindu mystics. Within Christian mystical traditions this schema is often represented as a series of stages or rungs in a ladder, which the mystic climbs through systematic and prayerful meditative practices in order to achieve union with God. Heiler points out that the deliberate construction of a ‘ladder of prayer’, which classifies the subtle and differing levels of consciousness leading to ecstasy, requires psychological and analytical skills of the level demonstrated by mystics such as St Teresa of Avila, Bernard of Clairvaux and Angeleus Silesius. He observes that such a ladder has the following three aims:

1. Axological: the value of the psychic states is estimated from the completed mystical experience, that is ecstasy.

2. Psychological: by the description and analysis of the prayer-states the mystic seeks to come to a clear understanding of his [sic] own experience


\textsuperscript{70} In her autobiography, St Teresa of Avila provides detailed descriptions of specific mystic and visionary experiences which she encountered through meditation and contemplation. She writes that her purpose in doing so is to hopefully prevent others ‘… to whom the Lord gives these experiences from feeling surprised and thinking them impossible, as I used to.’ Teresa of Avila, \textit{The Life of Saint Teresa}, trans. J.M. Cohen, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957), 191.
3. Pedagogical: the detailed description of the psychic experiences should make it possible for other men [sic] to have these experiences and by these steps of prayer attain to perfect union with God.\(^{71}\)

The use of an iconic spiritual ladder, prepared with the intent of providing spiritual guidance to others, is demonstrated by St John Climacos’ manual *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.\(^{72}\)

In discussing methods of ‘calming’ Gimello presents a summary of the ‘eight stages of absorption’ or ‘trance’ which describes the internal processes of Buddhist meditation.\(^{73}\) This description of methods of calming, provided as a guide to would-be meditators, essentially has the same function as Heiler’s ‘ladder of prayer’ and appears to support premises made by Heiler\(^{74}\) and Brown that specific meditative stages are ‘of cross-cultural’ and ‘universal applicability’.\(^{75}\)

Dr. Ian Gawler, previously head of The Australian Cancer Foundation and promoter of meditation as a complimentary treatment for cancer patients, has identified a number of meditative stages which provide a useful description of how the meditative practitioner

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\(^{71}\) Heiler, *Prayer*, 194.


\(^{74}\) Heiler, *Prayer*, 194.
might experience the meditative process. Broadly speaking the stages may be summarised as follows:

1. A relaxation phase, during which the body relaxes and it is common for the meditator to be conscious of mental activity and to wonder if anything will happen.

2. A stage of patchy concentration, as with time and practice the meditator is conscious of concentration on a meditative technique and an increase in physical relaxation.

3. A stage of sustained concentration of an intellectual, analytical type, within which, as the mind becomes stiller and more focussed, the body may feel lighter. Some people experience pleasant sensations of floating or bodily movement such as swaying.

4. Contemplation, involving sustained concentration as before, but now of a more abstract nature. This stage is also accompanied by pleasant sensations, the feeling in the head being akin to that induced by certain pain killers or an anaesthetic.

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5. The fifth stage is a transitional one, bordering between the previous one and stage six. Some people may experience, colour, sounds or even visions.

6. During this stage, which contains several grades of experience, body awareness ceases as does awareness of the surrounding environment.

7. This final stage is one of illumination and direct perception of knowledge. (It should be noted that to reach the seventh stage may take weeks, months or even years.)

Although Gawler’s teaching is not aligned to any religious or spiritual tradition, his provision of these stages for the benefit of students is comparable to the Christian ‘ladder of prayer’ and the Buddhist ‘eight stages of absorption’ as discussed by Heiler and Gimello. Gawler remarks that ‘Meditation is a process intended to lead to a direct experience of a higher level of consciousness.’

Other Perspectives
Harrison describes the meditative person as someone walking along a cliff edge of awareness, having sleep on one side and everyday consciousness on the other. The aim being to remain on the edge of the cliff without either ‘dropping off’ into sleep or returning to normal consciousness with all its stress and worry. This condition of being


78 Eric Harrison,— Talk given during meditation class held in October 2000. Harrison, a Perth based author and meditation teacher (trained in Buddhist methods), bases his teaching on science and psychology. He has taught over 15,000 people how to meditate.
fully aware at all times, even to the point of maintaining awareness during the dream state has been carried out for thousands of years by Tibetan Buddhists, who developed special techniques to induce lucid dreams. Brunton lays emphasis on the necessity of maintaining a seamless awareness and the importance of the pre-sleep or hypnagogic (from Greek, meaning leading into sleep) condition. He refers to Tripura, an ancient Sanskrit manuscript which says that ‘Unbroken supreme awareness even in the dream state is the mark of the highest order of sages’. Brunton, like Monroe, teaches that through concentration and meditative practice, the subject can experience the distinct sensation of being separated from the body and standing behind it like a fleshless spirit. He emphasises, ‘We are not here speaking in a spatial metaphor but in literal descriptive terms’. Moreover, he is confident that this experience is not an hallucination (any more than normal life may be considered to be an illusion or hallucination) and urges subjects to strive towards this achievement. This state of ‘seamless awareness’ recognisable as sahaja samadhi is sought by those who practice Siddha yoga. Author and kundalini yoga practitioner, Peter Hayes describes it as a spontaneous state of samadhi that remains continuous and unbroken throughout the waking, dreaming and deep-sleep states. Sahaja samadhi has been defined as being ‘extroverted mysticism’ as opposed to ‘introverted mysticism.’ In the case of introverted mysticism or samadhi, the yogi experiences a contemplative state


81 Brunton, The Wisdom Of The Overself, 405.

82 Hayes, The Supreme Adventure, 200.
of bliss that is transient whereas *sahaja samhadi* remains continuous and unbroken (without any loss of the normal human faculties) twenty-four hours of the day.\(^{83}\) The following report of spontaneous *sahaja samhadi*, is recorded in Hardy’s *The Spiritual Nature of Man* as an out-of-body experience (which it is). However, it differs from other out-of-body experience in that the experiencer reports that her body was physically active and able to interact with other people during the experience. This report is included, despite its length, because it provides an example of an unplanned or unsought psychic experience:

In June 1915 I went to stay at Tintagel with my children, aged 4 and 5; we lodged half a mile away from the little town. I knew no-one there. The weather was warm and sunny. Almost every afternoon I took them to the church cliff, where they played and I read devotional literature (all I had taken with me: the Bible, the *Imitation*, Prayer Book, etc.) and attended church. It was peaceful. The cliffs face west. The sun shone over the sea. I got up at about 4 p.m. to collect the chicks and their toys to go back for tea, and looked about us. Looking inland, I saw every hedge giving off golden flames, quivering. I stared. Was it my eyesight? For the June sun was blazing its glittering path across the sea towards us. Then I turned and saw my double, my body, getting up and busying herself with the children. Putting them in their little push-chair. ‘She’ did not see me. I was bewildered. I was her exact duplicate, to her watch bracelet. I felt myself; I was warm and solid. ‘She’ presently went off, dawdling and talking to the tinies, they did not see me either. I went along too, walking independently of them, and trying to understand what had happened. They stopped to watch a hedgehog; picked flowers and I waited nearby for them to go on again. I watched ‘her’ closely. I felt some vague jealousy of her, the chicks not missing me; but at the same time, I was realising an extraordinary happiness, as if all sadness and weariness with our altered circumstances simply did not matter any more. A great peace filled my mind.

We arrived. Mrs. B. had laid tea. ‘She’ took the chicks upstairs to tidy, and I waited at the foot, hearing it all going on. They came down, sat at the table and Mrs. B. came in with the tray. I hoped that she would see me, for it worried me a

little not to be seen by them. But she didn’t. I stood, my back, to the empty fire-
place, and found that I was standing a foot or so above the floor level. I could
return to the floor. Was I dead? I couldn’t be dead; ‘she’ looked as well as usual.
So was I, who felt well as never before. I was very curious. Routine continued.
By 7 p.m. she had put them to bed, I looking on, and had come down stairs.

I went out again, across some fields, by a short cut to the same cliff to watch the
sun set and the glorious afterglow over the Atlantic; to a stile, where I would sit.
A rough slate and turf wall had been passed. ‘She’ climbed it. I sailed over it, but
otherwise walked. ‘She’ perched on the stile, and, there being a bit of broken
brick wall some way away, I went and leaned against it. I could do that!

By 9 p.m. ‘we’ were back at our digs again, in the sitting room, where Mrs. B.
had lighted an oil lamp. ‘She’ as usual went out to the kitchen for a glass of milk
and a chat with the B.’s But I had had time to think, and stayed in the parlour,
and sat down. I wondered, am I dying? Will ‘she’ die in her sleep? If so, I must
write three letters.

I wrote them, and evidently must have been back in my body again, without
remarking on it? I don’t know. What I do know is that when ‘she’ went presently
up to bed, I had those letters in my hand. While ‘she’ prepared for bed I leaned
against the window, watching her, and watching the night roll slowly up from
behind Kingsdown - my last recollection.

Next morning, Mrs. B. woke me with early morning tea, and I was in bed.
Hastily I covered the letters, which I saw on the night-table, and that was that! I
was not dead: ‘she’ was not dead.

It was not the end. Half way through dressing ‘we’ separated again. The
condition continued all day, so that I grew used to it. Eventually we were
spending the afternoon again on the cliff. The hedges still flickered with little
live golden flames. All was serene. At no time did any persons appear; we had it
all to ourselves. It came to 4 p.m. I was standing near them ‘she’ busy as on the
day before, and I looking out to sea, when the glorious light slowly changed and
began to dim, and it grew ever darker and darker, as if the sun had ceased to
shine and night were coming on. But the June sun was still shining out of an
unclouded sky, its brilliant path shining over the sea and ‘she’ and I were one
again. But the sunlight was as a weak candle-glimmer to the light in which I
must have been living without knowing it. Back came sadness and human
‘trouble’ – things gone that could never come again.

It never happened again.84

84 Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 37-38.
It could be argued that the narrator of the above paragraphs had, through reading religious literature, inadvertently fallen into a meditative or recollective state which resulted in the psychic experience. It could equally be argued that achieving ‘one-pointedness’ whilst supervising a four year-old and an eight year-old does not greatly seem to be a possibility. Nevertheless, support for Brunton’s opinion that consciousness is capable of viewing itself is to be found in Siddha literature\(^{85}\) and also in Wassermann’s final work — *Consciousness and Near Death Experiences*\(^{86}\).

**Psychic Phenomena**

Meditation is integral to a number of Eastern religious traditions, many of which are non-dualistic. Within Kashmir Shaivism, the belief is that God is universal consciousness and awareness; by contraction this consciousness becomes matter – the world and its inhabitants. Through meditation and other means, individuals achieve expansion and become one with God. Swami Muktananda (1908-1982),\(^{87}\) (successor to Bhagawan Nitananda), and Hayes, teach that within the Siddha tradition visions and sounds encountered during meditation are not to be rejected, and although not the ultimate aim of the practice, are regarded as milestones along the way. Moreover, progress towards unity with God can be measured by encountering specific psychic phenomena.

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\(^{86}\) Gerhard D. Wassermann, *Consciousness and Near Death Experiences* (Oxford: Mandrake, 2001) 139-149.

Within the Buddhist tradition, although the desired outcome is not unity with God but the cessation of all cravings, experienced meditators may advance to a stage where they have access to a range of supernatunal or psychic powers such as clairvoyance, clairaudience and retrocognition. However, as Gimello notes, in general, a cautious attitude is adopted towards psychic phenomena and mystic experiences.

Mears writes that *Mental Ataraxis* (meditation) should only be practiced for short periods of about ten minutes possibly two or three times a day as the very relaxed state has the capacity to induce subjective phenomena (lights, visions etc) which could become addictive. Mears’ conviction that the cultivation of such sensory phenomena can be harmful for people with existing psychological problems is supported by Epstein and Lieff. Indeed, for many people, even without the intrusion of psychic phenomena, attempts to still the mind can be exhausting and traumatic.

From a western perspective, the definitive description of the impact of meditation upon the psyche has probably been made by Ken Wilber. Wilber, transpersonal theorist and author of many works on human consciousness, states that meditation eventually dislodges that part of the unconscious that is the home of the self’s defences. When this

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88 There is no concept of God within Buddhism.


happens the submergent unconscious (Jung’s Shadow) and the emergent or higher consciousness become aroused with the result being that meditators and theorists are confused as to whether meditation is the door to the Devil or to God.\textsuperscript{93}

However, in considering the possibility that meditation may increase a person’s propensity to experience psychic phenomena, it is important to realise that the mind, where meditation happens, is not the brain.\textsuperscript{94} It is not a physical organ and as such remains inaccessible to current objective measures. Consequently, content and assessment of the meditative experience is unique to each individual, and the value of the experience is dependent upon that individual’s perception.

\textbf{SECTION 3: THE OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE}

The term ‘out-of-body experience’ was introduced by American transpersonal psychologist Charles Tart in 1960. Tart’s purpose was to provide a non judgemental alternative to names such as astral projection, ESP projection, doubling and astral travel.
because these terms, in Tart’s opinion, suggested knowledge of the causation of the experiences.\textsuperscript{95}

Tart’s nomenclature has been popularly accepted with the result that the term OBE is now used as a sort of catch-all for a wide range of experiences including mind travel, remote viewing, shamanistic practices and drug induced mystical experiences. One survey finds that 95\% of world cultures believe in out-of-body experiences.\textsuperscript{96} This does not mean that everyone’s concept of what exactly constitutes an out-of-body experience corresponds. There are differences in experiences, particularly in the case of the near-death experience, where interpretation of the event is dependent upon cultural and religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{97} Furthermore, personal research undertaken by Robert Monroe\textsuperscript{98} and by Dr. John Lilly\textsuperscript{99} indicates that the borderline between inner and outer experiences is somewhat blurred.

The simple out-of-body experience considered within this study is one that has occurred spontaneously or through meditative practice, either intentionally or unintentionally. It is defined as:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones, ‘The Out-of-Body Experience, Phenomenology,’ Monroe, \textit{Far Journeys}.
\end{itemize}
A vivid feeling of being detached from one’s body, usually involving observing it and its environment from nearby.\textsuperscript{100}

The near-death experience is defined as:

An experience, instances of which have been widely reported, in which a person near death is apparently outside his body and aware of it and the attendant circumstances as separate from him.\textsuperscript{101}

Two points to be noted are:

- An out-of-body experience can be experienced without progressing to a full-blown near death experience.
- Experiencing a near-death experience always involves an out-of-body experience.

This is not to suggest that all other forms of out-of-body experience will be ignored. Their interconnectivity as altered states of consciousness demands attention and must be acknowledged whenever relevant to the study.

**The Simple Out-of-Body Experience**

In *Beyond the Body* (1982) Dr Susan Blackmore, theorises that the out-of-body experience’ is an altered state of consciousness characterised by vivid imagery in which the subject’s cognitive system is disturbed, losing input and control and replacing the normal reality with one drawing upon memory. This position is not supported by the reported content of numerous out-of-body experience accounts. For example, reports

\textsuperscript{100} Collins English Dictionary, Australian Version.

\textsuperscript{101} Collins English Dictionary, Australian Version.
collected by Agostini¹⁰² and by Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones show that typically out-of-body experience subjects advise that they were shocked back into their bodies by the total surprise of observing something never seen before. Twemlow Gabbard and Jones, having studied 339 reports of altered states of consciousness — resultant from a variety of causes, note that a commonality among out-of-body experience reports is:

… the ordinary, even mundane content of the experience, its vivid emotional impact, the sense of a complete functioning self located outside the brain and the considerable surprise when the physical body is seen, and the way this anxiety triggers the delicate balance of the alteration of consciousness causing a restitution of the normal cognitive set of ‘in-body state.’¹⁰³

This would appear to weaken Blackmore’s hypothesis as it is unlikely that the content of a memory, being by its nature something already known, would be sufficiently traumatic to shock someone back into their body.

Blackmore is noted as one of the few researchers to have personally experienced out-of-body experiences, albeit drug induced. Drawing upon her own experiences and citing Rogo’s 1984 paper — Ketamine and the near death experience,¹⁰⁴ she states that drug induced out-of-body experiences are not as vivid as naturally occurring ones.¹⁰⁵


Blackmore does not go into detail about her ketamine induced out-of-body experimentation but her description of an earlier experience resulting from experimentation with cannabis in the 1970s\textsuperscript{106} is critiqued by St. Clair. St Clair finds that a number of details described by Blackmore are questionable. She notes that Blackmore reported that she saw the ‘silver cord’ and a ‘duplicate body’ whereas during an out-of-body experience or near-death experience the cord is felt and the experiencer is the other body.\textsuperscript{107} St Clair’s criticism highlights the problems associated with using the term out-of-body experience as an identifier for a range of subtly differing experiences. For example, some aspects of Blackmore’s experience reflect astral travel as explained in Carrington and Muldoon’s \textit{The Projection of the Astral Body}, published in 1929, and now out of print but quoted in many parapsychological reference works.\textsuperscript{108} Other aspects of Blackmore’s experience have similarities with out-of-body experiences incurred during mind travel as described by Monroe\textsuperscript{109} and also by Glaskin.\textsuperscript{110} Nevertheless, since out-of-body experiences, whatever their cause, are noted as leaving a lasting impression on the subject it is probable that Blackmore’s contention regarding the vividness of natural out-of-body experiences, as opposed to induced ones, does have some basis. It would be significant to know if Blackmore has ever experienced a non-


\textsuperscript{109} Robert A. Monroe, \textit{Far Journeys}.

\textsuperscript{110} G. M. Glaskin, \textit{A Door To Infinity – Proving The Christos Technique of Mind Travel} (Bridport UK: Prism Press 1989).
drug induced out-of-body experience against which she could benchmark the experiences which she describes. Unfortunately, no details of such an experience are recorded by Blackmore.

More recently Blackmore observes that out-of-body experiences can be induced by electrically stimulating the region of the brain that controls body image. She writes that out-of-body experiences (and near-death experiences) are the results of random neural activity in the brain induced through a number of natural stressors such as: fear or lack of oxygen which may trigger ‘the release of pleasure-inducing endorphins.’\(^{111}\) Blackmore’s opinion with regards to the effect of stress engendering chemicals upon the brain appears to reflect Huxley’s opinion that all experiences are chemical (cf Section Four of this Chapter — Clairvoyant and Clairaudient Experiences).\(^ {112}\) However, she does not fully support his argument that it possible for such experiences to be of a divine or spiritual nature, suggesting rather that changes brought about by experiencing an out-of-body experience do not support the concept that the soul has temporarily vacated the body.\(^ {113}\) On the other hand, quantitative studies demonstrate that for many people an out-of-body experience results in increased spirituality and a change in attitude towards life and life after death.\(^ {114}\)

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In the *Spiritual Nature of Man*, Hardy (who does not distinguish between the out-of-body experience and the near-death experience) in recording 179 reports of out-of-body experiences, which in his opinion generated religious sentiments in the experiencers, notes that the majority of these experiences were spontaneous, ‘…coming unexpectedly “out of the blue” to someone in normal good health.’\(^{115}\) However, as argued by Edwards, there are connections between meditation and contemplation\(^{116}\) and Hardy also provides an account of an out-of-body experience which occurred after extended reading and contemplation of ‘devotional literature’.\(^ {117}\) The out-of-body experience lasted intermittently for approximately two days, suggesting, (as noted in Chapter Two, Section Two) a relationship between the out-of-body experience and *sahaja samadhi*. Hardy observes that out-of–body-experiences ‘can be intentionally brought on by yoga training.’\(^ {118}\)

The following, which provides an example of an out-of-body experience unintentionally brought on by yoga practice, also supports Twemlow Gabbard and Jones’ observation that a commonality among such reports is their ordinary and even mundane content.\(^ {119}\)

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\(^{115}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 35.


\(^{117}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 37-78.

\(^{118}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 35.

Once during the 1980s, in Kalgoorlie WA, I had a yoga teacher called Helen. I know little about Helen’s private life except that her husband was the manager of the local branch of the Commonwealth Bank and that she played bridge. Helen was a mature lady of great elegance and serenity with a figure that was the envy of many younger persons. She seemed to float rather than walk. Seeing her waft through the aisles of the local supermarket was almost a spiritual experience. In an effort to emulate Helen (if yoga could do this for her, it was definitely worth a try) a friend and myself attended weekly yoga classes.

One week it was advertised that an afternoon seminar on yoga would be held at the local high school and that during the session a talk would be given by a visiting yogi from Perth. This was big stuff for Kalgoorlie, which is a gold mining centre and was (and may well, still be) as near to being a wild west, frontier town as Australia has ever produced. On the appointed afternoon, Eastern Goldfields High School gymnasium was almost wall to wall with people sitting on yoga mats or cushions.

At the conclusion of the talk, the gist of which was that you can’t control life but you can try to control your reaction to it (in retrospect, rather an appropriate topic), Helen invited the yogi to conduct a relaxation exercise. The exercise known as *Yoganidra* (body sleeping-mind awake) was familiar to all who had attended classes and we swiftly settled into the familiar routine. But, this time it was different – within a few seconds of going into the relaxation mode I suddenly found myself having an aerial view of the entire proceedings from a point located in the top right hand corner of the gymnasium. I could clearly see my teacher, Helen, the yogi and all the participants including myself. The gymnasium of Eastern Goldfields High School is an unlikely place to have a spiritual and/or mystical experience. And this was neither. It can best be described as a total surprise. My immediate reaction was one of shock. The only word that flashed through my mind was a four letter one, whereupon I experienced the sensation of travelling very fast in a downward direction. It was although an elastic band had been released and I was quickly snapped back into my own body.

Whilst I have never had another out-of-body experience, this single occurrence is something that is etched on my memory forever.120

Yoga is not the only way to let go of the body. Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones note that in addition to meditation, pre-existing out-of-body experiences conditions may include

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120 Nattress, The First One Hundred, Introduction, vi-vii.
running, day dreaming and even childbirth. Out-of-body experiences are reported to occur as a result of tiredness; and are often reported as happening when the subject is about to fall asleep or has just woken up. It has been suggested that out-of-body experiences transpiring at these times may be the result of hypnagogic or hypnopompic hallucination. This theory is refuted by Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones, who report that, in contrast to the clouded state of consciousness that accompanies hypnagogic and hypnopompic conditions, the out-of-body experience state is one of mental clarity, with a sense that perception is located somewhere other than the brain.  

In considering consciousness and perception, in relation to the out-of-body experience, it is worth mentioning that a number of authorities equate consciousness with mind and consider both to be products of the brain. Others, including Wilber and Tart, who writes that in a world which only recognises the physical, consciousness ‘becomes an epiphenomenon,’ are critical of theories that consciousness is merely the result of neural functioning. However, despite his opposition to the ‘dis-spirit’ effect of a totally scientific worldview, Tart is of the opinion that scientific methods of investigation can lead to greater understanding of psychic and spiritual phenomena.

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123 Wilber, The Eye Of Spirit.


125 Tart, ‘Perspectives on Scientism, Religion, and Philosophy Provided By Parapsychology,’ 94-95.
Use of scientific methodology is also supported by Blackmore who suggests that the confirmation of the paranormal, in accordance with the scientific criterion of repeatability, may actually confirm the existence of consciousness.\textsuperscript{126}

Long, on the other hand, does not doubt the existence of consciousness. In fact, he compares it to a three-story car park with street level being consciousness ‘where you are now’, the next level is the subconscious ‘where all your thoughts come from’ and the third level is the unconscious. Moreover, he intimates that the subconscious tries to prevent you from reaching the unconscious.\textsuperscript{127} Long’s schema is rather broad and like other western descriptions of consciousness lacks the preciseness of definition to be found within Indian psychology where perception is considered as ‘sensory awareness’; cognition as ‘reflective awareness’; and consciousness is recognised as ‘awareness-as-such.’\textsuperscript{128} Within Indian tradition, the out-of-body experience is representative of an incident of psychic phenomena experienced when the life-force or Self (Self being the more modern term for spirit or soul)\textsuperscript{129} observes the physical body prior to the mind resuming control of the body at the cessation of the deep dreamless stage. This process is explained by Brunton who states that each night the ego mind deserts the body,


\textsuperscript{128} Rao, ‘Perception, Cognition and Consciousness in Classical Hindu Psychology,’ 5-6.

\textsuperscript{129} It should be noted that there those who distinguish soul from spirit. See for example, Ken Wilber’s concept of the interior levels of consciousness in Wilber, Engler and Brown’s, \textit{Transformations of Consciousness, Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development} (Boston Shambhala, 1986), 157-158. See also Ronald Rolheiser, \textit{The Holy Longing, A Search for a Christian Spirituality} (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 244.
initially entering the subconscious and becoming involved in dreams. Beneath the subconsciousness exists the unconscious where no dreams occur. But, irrespective of whether or not dreams are remembered, the mind returns to the body when the sleep period is ended.\textsuperscript{130} And, as noted in Section Two, an individual who has, through meditation or other by other means, achieved a state of ‘seamless awareness’ (\textit{sahaja samadhi}) will be able to observe their own body.\textsuperscript{131}

When the mind becomes free of thoughts (as in meditation) it ceases to exist and ‘\textit{no-mind state}’ comes into existence.\textsuperscript{132} It is suggested that this state may also occur when the mind is about to enter the dream state and during the intermediate period when the mind is returning to the body from the dream state. It may also occur when the mind is diverted or sharply focussed elsewhere, for example: as a result of a car accident. During any such a period of ‘\textit{no mind state}’ it may be possible that the Self is freed to observe the physical body. Whenever this phenomenon occurs it is described as an out-of-body experience. Authorities, including, Scholastico,\textsuperscript{133} Rogo and Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones, have drawn attention to reports of out-of-body experiences occurring during the hypnogogic and hypnopompic states or subsequent to sudden shock or trauma.

The simple out-of-body experience qualifies as a \textit{psukhikos} experience, affording a brief period of grace in which the Self is briefly apprehended or in the yogic sense realised.

\textsuperscript{130}Paul Brunton, \textit{The Wisdom of the Overself}, 69-72.

\textsuperscript{131} Brunton, \textit{The Wisdom of the Overself}, 405.


\textsuperscript{133} Ron Scholastico, \textit{Doorway To The Soul} (New York: Scribner, 1955).
This experience of what it might be like to be discarnate is so fleeting and amazing that experiencers, although profoundly affected, often cannot comprehend or explain what has happened. In many instances our secularised culture does not provide us with the tools to cope with this experience.\textsuperscript{134}

**Validation of the Out-of-Body Experience**

The spontaneity of the simple out-of-body experience precludes its physiological testing — this is not the case with induced out-of-body experiences, which, although they fall within Tart’s nomenclature, are not out-of-body experiences by dictionary definition. There are a number of quite modern techniques which are readily available for those who might wish to separate themselves from their body at will. One such technique, known as the *Christos Technique*, was developed in Western Australia and publicised by the author G. M. Glaskin.\textsuperscript{135} The experiences described by Glaskin reflect those of Blackmore’s personal out-of-body experience and also experiences resulting from techniques used to induce lucid dreaming as described by Stephen La Berg and Howard Rheingold in *Exploring The World Of Lucid Dreaming* (1990). Others who have claimed to be able to induce out-of-body experiences at will include Brennan,\textsuperscript{136}


\textsuperscript{135} Some works credit Glaskin with full development of the Christos Technique but within *A Door To Infinity*, Glaskin makes it clear that he actually came across the method in 1971 through a small Australian organisation calling itself ‘The Christos Experiment’ which published a description of the technique in a magazine called *Open Mind*, written by Jacqui Parkhurst. In his book, Glaskin provides a detailed description of one Christos experiment carried out with the assistance of Jacqui and Nick Parkhurst at their home in Glen Forrest, Western Australia, on the afternoon of Sunday 18 July 1976.

Goldberg\textsuperscript{137} and Monroe, who established the Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences in Virginia.

The induced out-of-body experience is not in itself a psychic phenomena. However, it may give rise to psychic experiences as in the case of Monroe and transpersonal psychologist Lilly. For example: in \textit{Journeys Out of the Body}, Monroe describes how, as a result of out-of-body travel, he finds himself in a region which he refers to as Locale II — an experiential dimension where reality is created by thought and where one could encounter spirits of deceased human beings and spiritual entities; and in \textit{The Centre of the Cyclone} (1972) Lilly, who originally explored inner consciousness by means of sensory deprivation and LSD, reports of encountering levels of consciousness with disconcerting \textit{Bardo} visions.\textsuperscript{138} Connection between these areas of consciousness, as described by Monroe and Lilly, and James’ concept of ‘ultra marginal’ areas of consciousness will be referred to in Section Four of this Chapter, which relates to visionary experience.\textsuperscript{139}

Monroe, described by Hollenback, as being a ‘secular mystic’,\textsuperscript{140} was a committed researcher\textsuperscript{141} and in an interview with Nevill Drury advised:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{137}] Bruce Goldberg, \textit{Astral Voyages, Mastering The Art Of Interdimensional Travel} ( St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2003).
\item[\textsuperscript{138}] Similar to those described in The Tibetan Book of the Dead (cf this Chapter pp 60-61).
\item[\textsuperscript{139}] James, \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, 231-236.
\item[\textsuperscript{140}] Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism - Experience, Response and Empowerment}, 577.
\item[\textsuperscript{141}] Monroe’s sponsorship of their major survey of the out-of-body experience is acknowledged by Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones, 247.
\end{enumerate}
One of the most important challenges that we face as human beings is to convert our religious beliefs into ‘knowns’ – so that our ideas and concepts can then be based on personal experience.\textsuperscript{142}

As Mr X, Monroe submitted himself for a series of experiments conducted under laboratory conditions by Charles Tart to ascertain the actuality of his out-of-body experiences. These results were inconclusive. Further EEGs undertaken by Monroe under the supervision of Dr Fowler Jones and Dr Stuart Tremlow at the University of Kansas Medical Centre indicated an electrophysiological borderline state comparable with that achieved by skilled meditators.\textsuperscript{143}

Tart had more success in his experiments with Miss Z who spent four nights in Tart’s laboratory being monitored by an EEG. This experiment showed that during Miss Z’s reported out-of-body experiences, her eyes did not display the rapid eye movements associated with dreaming and her EEG pattern showed a pattern not associated with either waking or sleep stages of consciousness. Certain elements of Miss Z’s OBE experiences also appeared to be memorable and veridical, namely confirmation of a five digit number placed on a ledge above the bed on which she slept each night during the experiment.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{142} Nevill Drury, \textit{The New Age, Searching For The Spiritual Self}, 200.


Rogo notes that, although he considers Tart’s experiment to be successful, the findings are compromised by the possibility that Miss Z, had she so desired, could have fraudulently seen the five digit number reflected from a clock in the laboratory. However, he concedes that this fraud hypothesis cannot explain the unusual brain wave pattern recorded during Miss Z’s out-of–body state.\footnote{Rogo, \textit{The Return From Silence}, 204.}

Tart’s initiative in undertaking such experiments is commendable but at the end of the day, his results cannot be considered to be by any means conclusive. Apart from the consideration of unintentional fraud (on Tart’s part), it should be noted that Miss Z’s brain pattern as recorded during the experiment was, like Monroe’s, similar to that demonstrated by skilled meditators. Such patterns do not necessarily denote the presence of a psychic phenomenon; for example, in \textit{The Nature of Healing}, an SBS educational film, similar patterns were demonstrated by Perth meditation teacher Eric Harrison.\footnote{\textit{The Nature of Healing} [film] Director Celia Tate, Producer Brian Beaton (Australia: SBS TV, A Reel Images Production, 1991). Available on VHS.} Furthermore, since the induced out-of-body experience and the simple out-of-body experience arise from differing causes and do not provide the same experience because interpretation and meaning differs, it may be that psychophysiological examination of the induced out-of-body experience will throw little light on the nature of the simple out-of-body experience.
The Near-Death Experience

Public interest in the near-death experience was stimulated in the mid seventies when research undertaken by Dr Raymond Moody into the experiences of people who had recovered after almost dying was validated by research undertaken by Dr Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. The reports collected by Kübler-Ross, during her work with the dying, had much in common with those recorded by Moody.

Moody’s description of the near-death experience, which appeared in his first book *Life After Life* (1975), is still the most widely accepted model of the near-death phenomenon. This classic description is the one summarised by all serious researchers in the field - including Blackmore:

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time finds himself moving rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a “body,” but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm bright spirit of a kind he has never encountered before – a being of light – appears before him. This being asks him a question, non-verbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point, he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limits between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds he must go back to the earth and that the time of this death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to
return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

Later he tries to tell others but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.\(^{147}\)

In *Life After Life* Moody notes that, despite striking similarities among various reports of the near-death experience, no two are precisely identical (although a few have come remarkably close to it). From these reports Moody compiled the following list of aspects of the near-death experience.

- Ineffability
- Hearing the news
- Feelings of Peace and Quiet
- The Noise
- The Dark Tunnel
- Out of the Body
- Meeting Others
- The Being of Light
- The Review
- The Border or Limit
- Coming Back
- Telling Others
- Effects on Lives
- New Views of Death
- Corroboration\(^{148}\)

D. Scott Rogo, is critical of Moody’s methodology and literary style, stating that *Life After Life* reads ‘like a highly sophisticated version of Ripley’s Believe It or Not’. He is frustrated that (in his opinion) Moody relates 150 cases of the near-death experience

\(^{148}\) Blackmore, *Dying to Live*, 7.
without making an effort to prove anything. Sadly, Rogo does not appreciate that there is a precedent for Moody’s work in the, already discussed, non-ontological or collective approach to the study of psychic phenomena as advocated by Huxley and demonstrated by Myers and James. In fact, Moody has advanced from merely collecting specimens to classifying them. Moody, possibly because of his medical background, adopted a diagnostic approach involving the comparison of case histories which enabled him to develop the list of symptoms or class characterises which now define the near-death experience. Most researchers appear to focus on Moody’s fifteen aspects of the near-death experience and fail to appreciate that, in the final chapter of *Life After Life*, Moody’s chief concern was about the need to know whether or not the mind is something in its own right and can exist apart from the body (a question that challenges a number of modern thinkers including Blackmore, Penrose, and also Jim Baggott, who in discussing *The Matrix* suggests that we have no real way of knowing whether or not we exist merely as ‘brains in a vat’). As a doctor Moody felt that this had profound

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149 Rogo, *The Return From Silence*, 73-78.


implications for the treatment of patients with mental disorders. Such concern surely displays greater depth of insight than Rogo allows Moody.

Moody’s findings were further confirmed, in a more scientifically approved manner, by psychologist, Kenneth Ring who in 1977 began to collect accounts from 102 adults who had come close to death — irrespective of whether or not they had experienced an out-of-body experience. Ring later was responsible for condensing Moody’s original fifteen points into five key features which he named as the ‘Core Experience.’

Varieties of the Near–Death Experience
With the passage of time and an increase and refinement in the investigation of the near-death experience, its definition (like that of the out-of-body experience) was expanded to incorporate a wider range of psychic experiences. Experiences, discussed within this review include the simple near-death experience, the eschatological near-death experience and the negative near-death experience.

The Simple Near-Death Experience
The simple near-death experience, a term devised by Rogo to distinguish it from the eschatological near-death experience, occurs when a person, as a result of an incident, which they perceive to be life threatening, finds themselves to be outside of their body.

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154 Kenneth Ring, *Life at Death*.
It commonly occurs during surgery when the patient is under anaesthetic or after cardiac arrest. The simple near-death experience does not involve the dark tunnel or encountering a being of light. Its chief characteristic is that people find themselves suddenly observing their body from an exterior position. The experiencers are often able to describe the scene in great detail. Afterwards they report that they were able to observe happenings that occurred whilst they were unconscious. In *Recollections of Death* (1982) Dr Michael Sabom, who uses the term autoscopic rather than simple when referring to this variety of near-death experience, records that a number of patients were able to provide an accurate description of the operating theatre and recall complicated surgical routines undertaken when they were supposedly unconscious and that some of these recollections were veridical. Those who experience a simple near-death experience describe the occurrence in simple and matter of fact terms. The modality of the simple near-death experience account is comparable to the simple out-of-body experience account as described by Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones earlier in this section.

**The Eschatological Near-Death Experience**

The eschatological near-death experience contains most of the aspects of Moody’s prototype for near-death experiences and, although it is different for each person and appears to be influenced by religious and cultural beliefs, the core experience remains the same.

However, Rogo notes that it is known that some people experience elements of the core near-death experience such as seeing deceased relatives, spiritual guides, travelling
along a dark tunnel and even entering heavenly realms without actually being in any
danger of dying.\textsuperscript{156} In some instances people who experience the content of a near-death
experience do not even feel that their lives have been threatened.\textsuperscript{157} Nevertheless, the
majority of those who report that they have experienced a near-death experience,
whether it be a spontaneous experience or brought about by a life threatening incident or
the perception of a life threatening incident, report that their lives have been changed by
the incident. As with the out-of-body experience,\textsuperscript{158} many report that they have lost all
fear of death and others tell of an encounter with an a overwhelming source of love.

**The Negative Near-Death Experience**

Huxley suggests that life after death is a mental state and that the world experienced
after death and during drug induced experiences is a construct of the individual and
other people’s memories and fancies.\textsuperscript{159} He states ‘There is a hell as well as heaven.’\textsuperscript{160}
Some people have encountered unpleasant and even frightening experiences during their
near-death experience. In *Beyond Death’s Door* (1979), Dr Maurice Rawlings, specialist
in internal medicine and cardiovascular diseases, writes that quite often after
resuscitation patients report that they have had terrifying experiences. The following
experience was related to Rawlings ‘by a staunch Christian’ who experienced three

\textsuperscript{156} Rogo, *The Return From Silence*, 163.

\textsuperscript{157} Rogo, *The Return From Silence*, 62-64.

\textsuperscript{158} Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 36.

\textsuperscript{159} See also, Michael Grosso, *Experiencing the Next World Now* (New York: Paraview Pocket Books,

different episodes of heart attack with successful resuscitation and three different near-death experiences:

...The only thing I remember was passing out into blackness and then I saw these red snakes crawling all over me. I couldn’t get away from them. I would throw one off and then another one would get on me. It was horrible! Finally, I was dragged down to the ground by something and then other crawling things started getting on me. Some looked like red jelly. I screamed and cried out, but no one paid any attention to me. I had the impression there were many other people in the same fix all around me. It sounded like human voices and some of them were screaming. It was reddish black in there and hazy and hard to see, but I never did see any flames. There wasn’t any devil, just these crawling things. Although my chest hurt real bad, I remember how glad I was to wake up and get out of that place. I was sure glad to see my family. I never want to go back there. I am convinced it was the entrance to hell.\textsuperscript{161}

Rawlings reports that, for no reason that he was aware of, this patient’s next two experiences “…during other deaths were beautiful.”\textsuperscript{162} However, he is not sure that beautiful near-death experiences are to be entirely relied upon as the Devil is capable of any deception even impersonating an angel.\textsuperscript{163 164}

Badham also accepts the reality of the negative near-death experience and in his paper 

\textit{Religion and the Near-Death Experience in Relation to Belief in a Future Life} draws attention to findings from a survey of 344 near-death experiences in which, ‘Almost 1%

\textsuperscript{161} Maurice Rawlings, \textit{Beyond Death’s Door} (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 101.

\textsuperscript{162} Rawlings, \textit{Beyond Death’s Door}, 102.

\textsuperscript{163} Rawlings, \textit{Beyond Death’s Door}, 100.

\textsuperscript{164} Rawlings is not alone in believing that the Devil can impersonate an angel. See for example, Parry and De Waal, \textit{The Rule of St Benedict} (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000) – rules governing the reception of guests direct that ‘The kiss of peace should not be given until after prayer has been said, since the devil sometimes plays tricks.’ 83.
talked of a hellish experience, 15% felt a sense of fear, and 9% a sense of loss.\textsuperscript{165} Badham asserts that the low level of hellish experience, reported in modern accounts of near-death experiences, is reflective of contemporary religious experience which focuses on love rather than fear. Nevertheless, he also accepts the reality of the negative near-death experience and demonstrates that experiences described as occurring during the both the typical and negative near-death experience have parallels within the \textit{Bardo Thodol} (Tibetan Book of the Dead) and are also reflected in the Scriptures of Pure Land Buddhism.\textsuperscript{166} Comparing the near-death experience with states described in the \textit{Bardo Thodol}, he writes:

So too in the Tibetan Book of the Dead we read that, when the person’s “consciousness principal gets outside its body”, he sees his relatives and friends gathered around weeping, and watches as they remove the clothes from the body or take away the bed.\textsuperscript{167}

But this description of what is purported to take place after a person’s death matches exactly with our definition of what constitutes an out-of-body experience — ‘a vivid feeling of being detached from one’s body, usually involving observing it and its environment from nearby!’ What then is the difference between the out-of-body experience and the near-death experience? It appears that the simple or autoscopic near-death experience, which may or may not extend into a full-blown eschatological


\textsuperscript{166} Badham, \textit{Religion and Near Death Experience}, 7-8.

\textsuperscript{167} Badham, \textit{Religion and Near Death Experience}, 7.
experience, differs very little for the simple out-of-body experience apart from the fact that a life and death situation is involved.

**Validation of the Near-Death Experience**

Badham, like Hardy, perceives the near-death experience to be an example of modern religious experience but does not consider the experience to be sufficiently ‘epistemically coercive’ to provide evidence of an eternal destiny. In common with Rogo he believes that the primary issue of the near-death experience is to prove whether or not there is life after death.

Badham conceives of a test similar, in some ways, to Tart’s experiments conducted with Monroe and Miss Z. Pointing out that 10% of people admitted to cardiac wards can be expected to have a near-death experience, with over half of these having an autoscopic experience, he suggests that a particular object should be placed in hospital wards so that recovered patients could be asked if they had seen such an object. More recently, Sabom has provided advice that a patient who experienced an out-of-body/near-death experience during surgery was able to accurately describe surgical instruments that could not be observed before surgery.

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171'The Day I Died,' *Compass*, ABC-TV, 20.08.05 and 21.8.06.
However, the fact that near-death experiences can occur when people think that they are about to die and the experience can be encountered without being in a life threatening situation, supports the premise that it is not the demise of the physical body which triggers the experience. It is clear that the simple out-of-body experience and simple near-death experience have much in common in that they are the result of a form of consciousness that is different from the variety accepted as being the normal every-day mind state. For most people, the normal every-day condition usually involves some degree of tension, accompanied by attention and continually shifting focus on a multitude of issues and details. Tension has been described as unconscious attention, and meditation as learning to desist from unconsciously using your attention to hold onto your body.\textsuperscript{172} When tension relaxes and the ego mind is stilled, or distracted, or paralysed into inaction by surprise or fear, as in the case of a situation that is thought to be life threatening, or as a result of medical procedures, then, as described within the Indian tradition, the Self observes its body. Afterwards, dependent on the circumstances, the experience is either classified as having been a near-death experience or an out-of-body experience. For the experiencer, who has experienced a separate awareness from the physical body, the relevance of the near-death experience as proof to whether or not there is life after death may be a non-sequitur.

\textbf{SECTION 4: CLAIRVOYANT AND CLAIRAUDIENT EXPERIENCES}

\textsuperscript{172} Long, \textit{The Way In}, 65.
Clairvoyance is defined as ‘the supposed facility of perceiving things or events in the future or beyond the normal sensory contact’. 173 If the clairvoyant experience should involve ‘a mystical or religious experience of seeing some supernatural event, person etc: the vision of St John of the Cross,’ 174 it could be defined as being a vision, which, in turn, can be defined as: ‘a vivid mental image produced by the imagination’. 175 Clairvoyance may be experienced as an actual external vision, or in some instances the experiencer is aware that what is being viewed is an internal picture - merely seen ‘in the mind’s eye’.

Clairvoyance may take the form of a perception of current events, past events (retrocognition) or future events (premonition). Sometimes those who experience visions find that these phenomena are accompanied by sound and voices. St John The Divine relates:

   And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters;  
   and as the voice of a great thunder;  
   and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps; (Rev 14:2)

On other occasions they are accompanied only by voices. Often voices are heard without any visionary experience when this happens it may be termed as an experience of clairaudience. Clairaudience like clairvoyance may be experienced either internally or as

an actual voice. Hardy notes that reports of clairaudient experiences are slightly less prevalent than those which record clairvoyance accompanied by clairaudience.176

**Spontaneous and Induced Experiences**

The capacity to experience clairvoyance and or visionary experiences seems to be inherent within human beings. Accounts of ancient visions are to be found in the religious writings of western and eastern cultures. For example: Arjuna’s cosmic vision of Krishna, ‘With many arms, bellies, mouths, and eyes,’ in the Bhagavad Gita;177 Ezekiel’s vision of the chariot, and creatures having the ‘likeness of a man’ but also having four faces and four wings (Ezek 1:1-28) — comparable to Arjuna’s vision in its strangeness and Paul’s vision of the blinding light in the New Testament (Acts 9:1-19).

The twentieth century continued to provide examples of visionary experience when, on the thirteenth of May 1917, three young children saw a series of visions, six in all, of the Virgin Mary near the village of Fatima in Portugal. These visions were accepted by the Church and the Cult of Our Lady of Fatima, which attracts thousands of pilgrims each year, was authorised in 1930. That visions can be experienced by unlikely people in unlikely places is demonstrated by boxer George Foreman reporting that, in his dressing room, after a twelve round battle with another boxer, he ‘caught a glimpse of Jesus’ which changed his whole life and resulted in him becoming an ordained Minister. 178

Nevertheless, Huxley argues that mystics and visionaries are less common than they used to be. He writes that this is because not only does the modern world not value their experiences but the ‘chemical environment’ actively prevents them. Huxley hypothesises that, within the medieval period, inadequate diet and lack of vitamins coupled with deliberately undertaken physical mortification such as fasting and personal beatings induced toxic conditions that ultimately resulted in altered states of consciousness. He writes:

For cloistered contemplatives, there were several Lents in every year. And even between fasts their diet was meagre in the extreme. Hence those agonies of depression and scrupulosity described by so many spiritual writers; hence their frightful temptations to despair and self-slaughter. But hence too those ‘gratuitous graces’ in the form of heavenly visions and locutions, of prophetic insights, of telepathic ‘discernment of spirits.’ And hence, finally, their ‘infused contemplation,’ ‘their obscure knowledge’ of the One in all.\(^{179}\)

It might be considered that Huxley’s theory goes some way in explaining why George Foreman, after a strenuous boxing match, fought in a non air conditioned stadium in Peurto Rico, experienced a vision of Jesus. The effect of stress in engendering visionary and mystical experiences as opposed to psychotic episodes, although questioned by Underhill,\(^{180}\) is recognised within Zen Buddhism where martial arts students practice

\(^{179}\) Huxley, *Heaven And Hell*, 61.

misogi (strenuous physical meditation) to achieve samadhi.\textsuperscript{181} This pursuit of enlightenment through vigorous physical activity lends support to Huxley’s argument that, as all our experiences are chemical, it is perfectly logical for such experiences to be of both a divine and spiritual nature.

In \textit{Religious Experience in London} (2001) Pupynin and Brodbeck provide the following modern example of deliberately induced spiritual vision, as reported by a 58 year old male accountant who, in the temporary absence of a Temple caretaker, was requested to fulfil those duties until one should arrive from Delhi:

Swami Hari Hariji jocularly signalled and said, “Narayan, you could get the vision of the Lord, if only you pray unto HIM devotedly doing Pooja everyday.”

And I took it seriously and stayed at the Gita Ashram itself much against the wishes of my cousin Dr. Sirinivasan and his wife who thought I was a bit off the track!

At that time I was working as the Chief accountant for Cemenco, Monrovia, Liberia and after my office duty would come back to the Temple and was doing Poojari’s duties. Every morning and evening we used to have “bhajans” (hymns) and worship. And Sundays will be marked with big gatherings of devotees and they were Divinely!

Then there came that particular evening! Lord Krishna and His consort Radhaji were beautifully dressed that evening and were looking beautiful with their celestial smiles. My Guru Swami Hari Hariji’s portrait was placed on the third step of the sanctum sanctorum. After everybody has left, I meditated upon Lord Krishna & Rahhaji and retired to my small room in the corner of the Temple.

It was raining and it was quite warm (rather hot) therefore, I switched on the fan to get breeze cool off. I also used to sing “bhajans” (bhaj means to uplift your heart). My thoughts were only on Lord Krishna and Radhaji and I began chanting “bhajans” for quite sometime and I was the only soul there! And suddenly I had a vision of Lord Krishna and Radhaji and my Guru all three coming out of the Sanctum Sanctorum to my room, to my bedside where I was sitting. The Holy appearance lasted two minutes or so! Despite the fan blowing I was wet and wept deliriously, sort of a [trance] I suppose. Switched off the fan and stayed put in my bed to rewind in my mind what I saw then … fell asleep! What my Guru jocularly indicated had come true! 182

The above example together with the known practice of applying stress to achieve visionary experience, a traditional part of native American Culture and a feature of shamanism,183 appears provide support for Huxley’s position that visionary experience can result from deliberately induced toxicity. However, whilst there is some evidence that the modern world does not value visionary and mystical experiences, his opinion

182 Pupynin, and Brodbeck, Religious Experience in London, 29.

that they are less common is not supported by the results of surveys undertaken by a number of researchers including Hardy, Hay, and Pupynin and Brodbeck.

In the absence of medieval hardship, induced or otherwise, the majority of contemporary visionary experiences, as reported by the above researchers, appear to be of a spontaneous nature. The following two examples of spontaneous *psukhikos* experience, also from *Religious Experience in London*, are provided by a 61 year old, male, practising Christian:

(a) When I was a child around 8 or 9, I had a vision of Christ, clothed in, and shining with gold. It was a brief but powerful vision.

(b) Quite differently, a few years ago, I thought I saw a very poor man, poorly dressed, standing near the exit to Kings Cross Underground Station. As I gave him a second look, I saw he was wearing a Crown of Thorns, and blood was trickling down his face. I was too shocked to stand and stare at him, but after barely a minute I retraced my steps, and went back to where he had been standing, but he had vanished. I believe this was a vision of the suffering Christ.

Each vision happened once only as described above.
(a) may have been a dream. (b) Was certainly in broad daylight.184

Other examples of spontaneous clairaudience and clairvoyance are to be found in James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and in Hardy’s *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (1979), which provides details of 544 incidents of visionary experience and 431 incidents of auditory experience as being examples of contemporary spiritual awareness.

Reports of spontaneous clairvoyance and clairaudient experiences are also to be found in Nattress’ *The First One Hundred* (2002).

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How are Clairvoyant and Clairaudient Phenomena Cognised?

Apart from rare instances, such as Fatima, visions are not generally shared and are therefore difficult to confirm. This raises the question: How is it possible for an individual to have a visionary or auditory experience from which others, in the same vicinity, are excluded? We have been taught to trust that which we can see. We use catch-phrases like ‘right before your eyes’, ‘I never would have believed it if I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes’ and also ‘seeing is believing’. But, we are incorrect, if we believe that what we are seeing is actually the object or objects literally in front of our eyes. This is not so, for as Hollenback observes, even normal visual perception depends on using one’s imagination as a tool to ‘…hallucinate an optically correct picture of the object.’\(^{185}\) The human eye has a lens and is often described as being like a camera but it does not operate at all like a camera. It does not send tiny pictures of external objects to the brain. Gregory relates that our eyes feed our brains with information coded into neural activity, chains of electrical impulses, which by their code and patterns of brain activity, represent the object on which we focus. To the brain the pattern is the object. ‘No internal picture is involved.’\(^{186}\) Tart writes that because perception of conscious experience is fabricated by neural activity, rather than being in touch with reality, our consciousness exists in ‘a simulation of reality.’ A simulation which is representative but not ‘equivalent to external reality.’ He argues that what is considered as normal reality may be defined by cultural expectations, resultant from the simulations of the majority, rather than by the individual’s experience of reality. Furthermore, those who


simulate a reality that involves hearing voices are liable to be regarded as abnormal. Tart’s position is supported by recent scientific measurements which indicate that because of a unique combination of genetic, physiological and psychological factors everyone experiences the world differently. These differing world experiences tend to suggest that it may not be impossible for an individual to have visionary or auditory experiences from which others are excluded.

Many people also have a capacity to see with the mind — to visualise or see things that are not external objects. With minimum practice, most people can develop an ability to readily form inner pictures by closing the eyes and imagining scenes as if on an internal video screen. This technique of visualisation is widely used to improve sporting performance. It is sometimes used by counsellors and or neuro linguistic practitioners to assist clients to overcome phobias such as fear of public speaking or flying and is also practised by Tibetan Buddhists who aim, through intensive visualisation practice, to be able to clairvoyantly observe the object of their visualisation at will. However, for the majority of ordinary people whatever is seen is not created internally or built up gradually by will power, it is a spontaneous visionary experience — in some cases almost like a brightly coloured photograph. Huxley notes that when we visit ‘the

190 Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, Joyful Path of Good Fortune, 514-517.
191 See, for example, Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 187; Hollenback, Mysticism – Experience, Response and Empowerment, 238-240.
antipodes of the mind’ we may expect that whatever we see there will be more brilliantly coloured than that observed in either daily life or within dreams.\textsuperscript{192} He remarks: ‘Preternatural light and colour are common to all visionary experiences.’\textsuperscript{193} The following extract from an account quoted by Hardy, indicates that sound as well as vision is enhanced within psychic experience:

The meadow was a more vivid green, the pear tree glowed and the blackbird’s song was more loud and sweet.\textsuperscript{194}

It is obvious that when a person perceives or sees something that is not an external object and recognises whatever is seen as somehow being more enhanced than the content of either normal vision or dreams then, something other than the process described by Gregory must be taking place. When a person, who has experienced an out-of-body experience, advises that they ‘saw’ themself from a point outside of their own body, it is obvious that the eyes with which they ‘saw’ are not those situated in their physical body. Opinions differ as to how not only the out-of-body experience but other psychic phenomena such as clairvoyance, clairaudience and also clairsentience (clairsentience will be discussed in Chapter Two, Section Five) are cognised. Hardy, for example, identifies spirituality as a natural biological function and chooses to classify the range of religious experience that includes visionary and auditory experiences as

\textsuperscript{192} Huxley, \textit{Heaven And Hell}, 8-13.

\textsuperscript{193} Huxley, \textit{Heaven and Hell}, 11.

\textsuperscript{194} Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature of Man}, 39.
‘sensory or quasi sensory experiences.’ This useful nomenclature, whilst not providing any specific answer, may have served to deflect excessive criticism from both scientific and religious peers. A more detailed theory is posited by James, who more than half a century before Hardy’s study, suggested an answer could be found within the, then new, psychological theory of fields of consciousness. He writes:

> It [consciousness] lies around us like a “magnetic field,” inside of which our centre of energy turns like a compass needle, as the present phase of consciousness alters into its successor.

In discussing the existence of consciousness outside of the field, James suggests that the margins of consciousness fields are indeterminate, not only varying from individual to individual but having an ‘extra-marginal’ or ‘subliminal area’, the content of which also varies for each individual, existing outside of ‘the primary consciousness’. In the case of subjects who have a ‘strongly developed ultra-marginal life,’ consciousness fields can be subjected to incursions from beyond the ‘transmarginal region’. These incursions can, in some people, take the form of automatisms, such as: clairaudience, clairvoyance, ‘tongues’ and ‘ecstasies.’ Like Hardy, James adopts a non controversial position in suggesting that the existence of a ‘subliminal self’ does not necessarily mean the non

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195 Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 32.

196 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 232. See also Ken Wilber Online. Pragmatic history of consciousness. Sidebar G: States and Stages. Part1. The Relation of States of Consciousness and Stages of Consciousness: No Model Is complete without both. Available on line: [http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/books/boomeritis/sidebar_g/index/cfm/](http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/books/boomeritis/sidebar_g/index/cfm/); (Accessed 17 May 2005), 1-8. Here Wilber describes the concept, found in Vedanta and Vajrayana, of three great realms or worlds of being - gross, subtle and causal or waking, dreaming and sleeping. Various philosophies, for example: Buddhism, Kabbalah, and Vedanta, hold that these three states contain numerous of levels of consciousness. The capacity to enter these higher realms while awake or fully conscious can be achieved through meditation as noted in Section 2 and Section 3 of this Chapter.

existence of higher spiritual agencies which, if they exist, may choose to approach ‘us’ through the subliminal.198

James’ proposal in regard to the possibility of an ‘unseen region’ that ‘produces effects in this world’199 finds some reflection in spiritualist philosophy. This is not surprising since the terms *automatism* and *subliminal* are inventions of British spiritualist Frederic Myers and are acknowledged as such by James. Within spiritualist philosophy the concept exists that the world we inhabit after death interpenetrates the one we presently live in. Therefore, inhabitants of the spirit world are very real although we can neither see nor hear them and just as electrical equipment can receive signals that are beyond human capacity to receive, some people have a capacity to tune into the spirit world and receive messages. The concept that life after death consists of existence as a disembodied form of consciousness is supported by Grosso200 and Monroe.201 Reports of spontaneous visionary and auditory experiences that involve the deceased are to be found in out-of-body experiences, death-bed visions and in surveys conducted by Hardy, Hay, Pupynin and Brodbeck, and Nattress.

**Disturbing Visionary and Auditory Experiences**

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199 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 516.


Whilst James’ theory and the spiritualist position suggest that normal consciousness is subject to breaches or penetration from other fields, modern explorers including Lilly,\textsuperscript{202} Grol\textsuperscript{203} and Monroe\textsuperscript{204} have deliberately attempted to penetrate beyond known consciousness. In doing so they discovered that, as Huxley warns, the world of visionary experience is, like the antipodes, inhabited by strange and improbable creatures.\textsuperscript{205} The experience of confusing and sometimes troubling visions accompanied by voices or other sounds is not unusual and does not suggest that a vision with disturbing content is any less veridical than a vision of paradise. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, meditation master and teacher of Tibetan Buddhist studies, recognises the existence of differing worlds. He advises that the world is experienced through sense consciousness and caused by our current mind-set. Furthermore, after death the world into which we are reborn will be a new one dependent upon the purity of our minds. Numerous worlds exist such as, the world of hungry spirits, the world of animals and the world of Gods. Gyatso writes: ‘Of all impure worlds, hell is the worst. It is the world that appears to the very worst kind of mind.’\textsuperscript{206} Noting that hell is an unpopular topic in the West, Gyatso argues that there are many correct reasons that establish the existence of hell (and other worlds) but no methodology for realising its non-existence.


\textsuperscript{205} Huxley, \textit{Heaven and Hell}, 1-3.

\textsuperscript{206} Gyatso, \textit{Joyful Path of Good Fortune}, 179-80.
The *Bardo Thodol* instructs Buddhists to be prepared to encounter hellish visions and sounds culminating in rebirth if after death they fail to separate body and consciousness. The Bible (Ezekiel 1:1-28) and the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 11) also contain accounts of strange and not easily understood visionary experience.

Some scholars have been disconcerted by reports about the inhabitants of the world of inner consciousness and have adopted a value/judgement attitude. Robert Forman, for example, rejects Arjuna’s vision of Krishna as being a mystical vision, classifying it instead as being among ergotropic phenomena and therefore hallucinatory.²⁰⁷ He posits that when St. Teresa of Avila ‘speaks of her visions and auditions’ she was actually schizophrenic. A similar opinion is held by Evelyn Underhill who suggests that sometimes visions experienced by Julian of Norwich and St Teresa tended to reflect psychopathic experiences. Underhill believes that the clairvoyant episodes, which contained frightening visions of Satan, occurred as a result of stress generated by exhaustion.²⁰⁸

In *The Far Side of Madness* (1994), psychiatrist J.W. Perry argues that the so-called abnormal ideas and imagery of the schizophrenic actually reveals archetypal patterns common to all persons, merely made manifest in this altered state of consciousness.


Laing goes some way along Perry’s path in considering schizophrenia to be a moral judgement rather than medical diagnosis. He remarks,

Mystics and schizophrenics find themselves in the same ocean but the mystics swim, whereas the schizophrenics drown.\(^ {209}\)

Perry and Laing’s points of view are supported to some extent by Stanislav Grof’s position with regards to the content of holotropic states of consciousness. Grof contends that the result of modern psychiatry’s inability to ‘differentiate between spiritual and mystical states and psychotic episodes’ often leads to the wrongful hospitalisation and treatment of people who report these states. He suggests, that for many people, these holotropic states involving psychic phenomena are really ‘psychospiritual crises’ and if properly understood can lead to a range of positive outcomes.\(^ {210}\)

On the other hand, Hollenback is of the opinion that it is a mistake to consider the schizophrenic as ‘simply a failed mystic’ and the mystic as ‘just a successful schizophrenic’. He states that some of the key features of mystical experiences as opposed to schizophrenic episodes are that mystical experiences originate from some form of recollective effort; they are of relatively short duration; and that they neither ‘cripple’ nor impede the mystic’s normal thought processes.\(^ {211}\) Furthermore, a difference between mentally ill and healthy persons, who experience voices and visions, seems to


be that the healthy retain a discriminatory capacity which enables them to make judgment about the meaning of the experience.\textsuperscript{212} Forman and Underhill appear to have overlooked that all of these features and capacities are to be found within the lives of St Teresa and Mother Julian.

Both Teresa of Avila and Julian of Norwich were experienced contemplatives, their visionary experiences were transient, they neither impacted detrimentally upon their normal thought process nor disabled their ability to introspectively examine their experience of psychic phenomena. St Teresa in particular closely analysed her visionary experiences and, despite suggestions by associates that her visions were not veridical, was confident of their purpose.\textsuperscript{213} That the capacity of discrimination, evident in St Teresa’s own writings, was also possessed by Mother Julian is demonstrated by Young. In *Holy Women: Their Spiritual Influence in the Middle Ages* (1990), Young comments that the vision of Jesus dwelling in her own soul [the Christ within] which Julian received after her satanic vision was deemed by Julian to confirm that the grace of God had power to replace illness and fear with holy longing.\textsuperscript{214}

In providing an introduction to *Human Experience of God* (1983), Avery Dulles notes that ‘Unless we have been taught to interpret the signs we cannot discern God.’ and ‘The

\textsuperscript{212} Hollenback, *Mysticism – Experience, Response and Empowerment*, 123.


\textsuperscript{214} Robin Darling Young, ‘Holy Women: Their Spiritual Influence in the Middle Ages,’ in Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell (eds.), *Spiritual Traditions For the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 413.
experience of God is normally shaped in a community of religious faith. St Teresa of Avila and Julian of Norwich were part of a society that was vastly more religious than the present one and it is probable that their experience of God may have been shaped by the communities in which they lived. The possible affect which community influences and guidance may have upon interpretation of psukhikos experience is also illustrated by the story of Samuel in the Temple. As discussed in Chapter One, Section Two, this Bible Story relates how the Lord called out Samuel’s name three times and on each occasion the child thought that Eli was calling him because ‘…Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord, yet revealed unto him.’ (Sam 3:7). However, because Samuel was living in a community of religious faith and had a spiritual teacher (Eli) who explained the source of the auditory experience to the boy and taught him how to respond appropriately, Samuel received the Lord’s message. And, in time, as related in I Sam 3:20: ‘… all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.’

However, things have changed somewhat since Biblical days. Within postmodern society, which generally appears to lean more towards secularity than spirituality, it is possible that many people may reach adulthood without access to a vocabulary through which to express an occurrence of spiritual experience. A tendency for philosophers to dwell more upon the supposedly ‘higher’ and more numinous aspects of mystical

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216 See, David Hay and Rebecca Nye, The Spirit of the Child (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006); also (in Australia) Western Impact Vol. 26, No. 8, September 2006, lead article: Changing world brings key challenges for the church – ‘…once the majority of people went to church and had at least a basic understanding of scripture, this is no longer the case.’ 1.
experience at the expense of other more corporeal experiences may also be a factor in preventing recognition of psukhikos experience. Consequently, people do not necessarily equate visions or auditions with religious experience. Their response to such experiences is more likely to be similar to that of John Nash Jnr. mathematician, Nobel Prize winner and diagnosed schizophrenic, who in discussing hearing voices, says ‘It’s really my subconscious talking, it was really that … I know that now.’ Nevertheless, Nash’s comment on his own partial recovery and the development of mental illness within his son — ‘It’s almost as if a demon might have passed from one host to another,’ does indicate the possible remnant of a traditional belief.

Western Attitudes Towards Contemporary Visionary and Auditory Experience

Conflicting views about visionary experience and its relation to schizophrenia and other medical conditions, such as epilepsy, often reflect western viewpoints and attitudes. Christina Grof, like Hollenback, does not deny the existence of mental illness. However, she is also supportive of Stanislav Grof’s opinion that in many people ‘spiritual emergencies’ are incorrectly diagnosed as psychotic episodes. She asserts that the unusual experiences occurring in a spiritual emergency are the result of what would be


described within Hindu tradition as the *kundilini’s* (or in her unequivocal opinion the Holy Spirit’s) efforts to displace the ego and allow the Self to emerge.221

The Grofs’ concept (also shared by Perry and Laing) that the imagery revealed through visionary experience is present in everyone but only manifested during altered states of consciousness, is reflective of eastern philosophies which strongly emphasise meditation. B. Alan Wallace, keynote speaker at the *Sydney 2000, First International Conference on Mind and Its Potential*, in supporting contemplative mystic traditions, argues that the examination of mental phenomena can only be achieved by introspection which, in his opinion, has become marginalised in the West because researchers are unable to appreciate that all mental events cannot be reduced to their neural correlativity.222

However, Tart commenting on the unwillingness of some westerners to introspect suggests, that introspection can be a difficult process. According to Tart, the difficulty arises because, for many people, introspection means engaging with the superego’s constant monitoring and censure. The end result being that people, who would rather do anything else than engage in introspection, turn to outward distractions.223 This

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discomfort with self observation and preference for the external processes is possibly representative of western traditions, where the imperative perspective on subjective phenomena relates to observation and through observation verification. Visser is critical of this western approach towards the study of subjective phenomena. He argues that scientific observation is an external and extroverted process, which since it can ‘only come across material phenomena’, is unlikely to reveal what it is actually like to experience a psukhikos phenomenon. He remarks:

The whole of Western culture places its faith in the reality of the external world and does not trust in the reality of the internal world.

The dominance of the above mind-set in western society, may make it difficult for individuals who have experienced voices or visions to accept the actuality of their own experience.

Hay is of the opinion that there are some people who not only refuse to accept the reality of such an experience but actually take steps to ignore it. From the context it is unclear whether Hay is referring to people who have experienced psychic phenomena or people in general. In either case he is right. His opinion is supported by Nattress’ example of a survey participant, who having provided a detailed description of seeing her dead


225 Visser, Ken Wilber, 246.

226 Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 188.
grandmother on numerous occasions, added the rider — ‘But this probably can’t happen.’

Two examples of the manner in which psychic phenomena are ignored are provided by Agostini. The first being when Andrew Denton, host of *Enough Rope* (an ABC TV popular affairs program) in the course of an interview with singer Olivia Newton-John ‘… suddenly moved on without further explanation or comment.’ when Newton-John talked of having been in touch with her deceased mother. The second example again concerns a Denton interview, during another edition of *Enough Rope*, this time with Australian icon, Dawn Fraser. Agostini states that Denton completely ignored Frazer’s comment that she had heard her deceased father’s voice. Currently, in Australia, a strange situation seems to exist whereby

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227 Nattress, *The First One Hundred*.


discussion about visionary or auditory phenomena as fictional entertainment, either on
television, in cinemas or in popular literature is acceptable but discussion of such
phenomena as personal experience is somewhat of a social embarrassment.

SECTION 5: CLAIRSENTIENT EXPERIENCES

Within this study sentience is defined as ‘the state or quality of being sentient;
awareness’ and by extrapolation clairsentience is defined as that form of awareness
that is activated or occurs as a result of stimulation from a source that is undiscernible to
the physical senses. It can involve any or all of the following:

- awareness of an unseen presence;
- the feeling that one is actually being touched by someone or something; and
- experiencing the smell of something such as tobacco or perfume that may relate to
  someone or something that has a particular meaning (olfactory phenomenon).

Sensing an Unseen Presence

The following description (not quoted in full) by St Teresa of Avila gives some
indication of what it might be like to experience an unseen presence:

One day when I was at prayer – it was the feastday of the glorious St Peter – I
saw Christ at my side - or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for I saw
nothing with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul. He seemed quite close
to me, and I saw that it was He. As I thought, He was speaking to me. Being
completely ignorant that such visions were possible, I was very much afraid at

first, and could do nothing but weep, though as soon as He spoke His first word of assurance to me, I regained my usual calm, and became cheerful and free from fear. All the time Jesus Christ seemed to be at my side, but this was not an imaginary vision. I could not see it in that form. But I most clearly felt that He was all the time on my right, and was a witness of everything that I was doing. Each time I became a little recollected, or was not entirely distracted, I could not but be aware that He was beside me.231

This vision has been identified by Edwards as an interior intellectual one, qualifying as a mystic experience and therefore difficult to distinguish from the act of pure contemplation during which such intellectual experiences often occur. He writes that it is this closeness to dark contemplation that causes the great mystic writers, such as St John Of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila, to esteem this variety of nonsensory experience as being more valuable than corporeal or imaginative visionary experiences232 (as discussed Section 4 of this chapter).

Forman accounts as schizophrenic —‘… St Teresa of Avila (when she speaks of her visions and auditions),…’ but is of the opinion that St Teresa’s descriptions of nonsensory union exemplify mysticism.233 This point of view is disputed by Mavrodes who argues that, despite St Teresa’s conviction of the actuality of her experience of Jesus, it is not possible to distinguish between real and deceptive mystical experiences.234


234 Mavrodes, ‘Real v. Deceptive Mystical Experiences,’ Katz Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, 238-239.
In considering St Teresa of Avila’s vision, Edwards, Forman and Mavrodes do not appear to appreciate that it is not the phenomena itself or its content, which cause the experiencer to recognise a vision as being mystical, but the interpretation and value which the experiencer places on it.235 In describing the trans-sensory nature of mystic experiences, Hollenback notes the that the content of mystical states of consciousness is variable. For example, some mystics experience out-of-body experiences while others do not; some mystical experiences involve auditory or visionary phenomena and others do not. He emphasises that the affect of mystical experience is mediated by ‘cultural and historical conditioning.’ Consequently, unless the experiencer has some concept of God, a mystical experience may not be interpreted soteriologically.236 Hollenback’s hypothesis appears to suggest that for some people experiences of psychic phenomena are very meaningful and recognisable as psukhikos phenomena but are less meaningful (in a religious sense) for others who may not have a capacity to place importance or value on the same experience.

The need for an understanding of such experiences is demonstrated by Robert Forman’s account of an occasion when a pure consciousness experience took him by surprise (a pure consciousness experience occurs when awareness exists without content and has


similarities with the no-mind state of *samadhi*. Forman recounts that, several months into an extended meditation retreat, whilst meditating alone in his room, a knock at his door alerted him to the fact that although he was awake he had ‘not been thinking or perceiving.’ Forman writes that, had he not been disturbed, he would have been unaware that he was experiencing pure consciousness. It seems unlikely that the disturbance in itself would have resulted in Forman’s recognition of his pure consciousness experience. Possibly if he had not possessed considerable contemplative skills (the incident happened during a nine month meditation retreat), the experience would not have been identified.

Hay remarks on the need for those engaged in meditation to have access to an adviser or “…at the very least a textbook, to help them to fit their practical experience into context.” Within eastern traditions, Gyatso and Yogananda emphasise the importance of an experienced teacher or guru to guide the student of consciousness. However, not everyone chooses to seek guidance. Vinod writes that, when he first experienced *samadhi*, as a 20 year old medical student, because he was not familiar with the experience, he was unable to decide whether it was a true experience or a ‘flight of [his] imagination.’ Since his father (a distinguished yogi) was already deceased and he

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didn’t think that he could find another yogi capable enough to guide him, he tested his experience by trying out a number of other meditation techniques and discovered that they all led him to the same experience. In this manner he was able to verify that his first experience of samadhi and all those that followed were genuine. He notes that although, ultimately worthwhile, confirming his first experience involved considerable effort.²⁴² Vinod’s experience demonstrates that, although it is not impossible to recognise certain spiritual or psychic experiences without the direct assistance of a guru, understanding such experiences may require substantial personal effort.

Within western religious traditions, need of guidance to make sense of psukhikos experience is noted by Dulles²⁴³ and also by Edwards who writes of the need for a ‘Theology of God’ to enable people to understand personal religious experiences.²⁴⁴ The benefit of guidance to make sense of psychic or mystical experiences is supported by research undertaken by Hay and Morisy, through National Opinion Polls Ltd in Britain, which found that the pushikikos phenomenon most frequently reported by regular churchgoers was the presence of God.²⁴⁵ However, this is not to say that some experiences may not be outside of any context, for example, within the same survey a fairly large quartile consisted of those who were unable to put a name to the presence which they experienced.²⁴⁶

²⁴² Vinod, Nine Secrets Of Successful Meditation, x-xii.
²⁴⁵ Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 155.
²⁴⁶ Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 150.
Hardy’s study of varieties of spiritual experience produced 607 examples of awareness of a presence that was not human. For some people awareness of an unseen and unknown presence may give rise to positive mystical experience, providing identification with nature or a sense of transcendental unity.\textsuperscript{247} For others the experience may be quite frightening. In discussing ‘the reality of the unseen’, James’ inclusion of reports relating to both positive and negative encounters,\textsuperscript{248} together with his suggestion the world seen through mystical vision has ‘its celestial and its infernal regions’,\textsuperscript{249} provides support for Huxley’s opinion of the variety of creatures to be found in ‘Mind at Large.’

Examples of varieties of clairsentience can be seen in the following summarised extract of 1987 British Gallop Poll results reported by Hay and Heald.\textsuperscript{250}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unseen Presence Identified as</th>
<th>% Reporting This</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The presence of God</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sacred presence in nature</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity (the experience that all things are one)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An evil presence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of someone who has died</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{247} Hay, \textit{Exploring Inner Space}, 136 –139.

\textsuperscript{248} James, \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, 59-72.

\textsuperscript{249} James, \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, 428.

The Presence of Someone Who Has Died

Hay notes that almost one fifth of the British population are confident they have experienced ‘the presence of the dead’.\(^{251}\) The extent of such experience is supported by the findings of surveys undertaken by Hardy (239 instances),\(^{252}\) Hay and Morisy (23 instances)\(^ {253}\) and by Hay and Heald (as seen above). Unfortunately, unlike later surveys undertaken by Pupynin and Brodbeck and by Nattress, none of these survey findings clearly indicate whether the presence of someone who had died was an experience of clairsentience as opposed to an incident of clairvoyance or clairaudience.

It has been suggested that the influence of western theology inhibits consideration of experiences involving contact with the dead.\(^{254}\) Some scholarly writers of religious experience do appear to display a certain ambivalence towards reports of awareness of the dead. This ambivalence is seen in the work of Sir Alister Hardy\(^ {255}\) and also in that of a number of researchers associated with him who, without denying the value of such experiences as forms of religious experience, suggest that they are of a ‘lower order’\(^ {256}\) and more commonly to be found amongst the socially and economically


\(^{252}\) Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 47.

\(^{253}\) Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 139.

\(^{254}\) Hay, Religious Experience, 10.

\(^{255}\) Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 44.

\(^{256}\) Argyle, The Psychological Perspective on Religious Experience, 7.
disadvantaged. The concept that interest in psychic phenomena arises as a result of social disadvantage has been debated for some time and may, for some researchers, be an inhibiting factor in unbiased study of the field. However, it is possible that such marginalisation may be representative of social mores belonging to earlier era and, for Hay in particular, a more recent and wider area of interest, is the total marginalisation of spiritual experience in modern Britain.

Nevertheless, irrespective of any possible correlation between psychic experience and socio-economic disadvantage or theological taboos, there exists in Britain, a belief that the unseen presence may actually be a recently deceased close relative who has returned to comfort the bereaved. This belief finds corroboration in Australia where Barry Long, who has argued that visions and other psychic experiences are products of the imagination, is confident that for a brief period after death the presence of a loved one ‘may be perceived psychically within or without’. Furthermore, according to Long, shortly afterwards ‘all communication as that presence will cease, except for love.’

The following account of the sense of a deceased near relative is provided by Pupynin and Brodbeck:

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257 Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 155.


260 Hay, Religious Experience, 10.


262 Long, The Way In, 175.
‘…I felt like someone was looking after me and I felt it was my grandmother who had died when I was 4 years old. I only knew her for 2 months. What didn’t make sense to me is ‘Why do I feel that it was my grandmother all the time and not my grandfather, after all I knew my grandfather for longer and loved him very much.’

The above report supports Long’s hypothesis that a sense of love may be felt by the experiencer. However, as the presence sensed was a near relative, almost unknown and not mourned, it also challenges the belief that the role of the unseen presence is to comfort the bereaved.

**Awareness of being touched by an unseen presence**

The perception of being touched by an unseen presence is noted as sometimes being part of a visionary experience. It can also be part of a non-visionary experience. For example: experiments carried out by Libet and Roland on the somatosensory cortex indicate that the apprehension of touch is as much a cognitive process as a response to tactile stimuli. The results of these experiments appear to reflect St Teresa of Avila’s conviction of inner awareness without sensory input.

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Moreover, Eccles\textsuperscript{267} considers that Roland’s findings on the action of silent thinking on the cerebral cortex provide supporting evidence for the existence of consciousness, or the Self, being separate from the body and in particular from the brain.\textsuperscript{268} Eccles’ conviction is supported by fellow dualist Popper\textsuperscript{269} and to some extent by Penrose (who strongly believes that consciousness is not restricted to human beings)\textsuperscript{270} but is dismissed by Blackmore, who, after extensive research, has come to believe that consciousness does not exist.\textsuperscript{271} The observation must be made that Blackmore’s inability to find evidence of consciousness, after twenty years of searching for consciousness in the areas of ESP (extra sensory perception), PK (psychokinesis) and Ganzfeld experimentation,\textsuperscript{272} does not prove that consciousness is a delusion. It may merely be indicative of where consciousness is not to be found.

Whether or not one accepts Eccles’ hypothesis or sides with Blackmore, the following report provided to Pupynin and Brodbeck, by a 43 year old teacher, indicates that ordinary people continue to experience not only awareness of unseen touches but also recognition of the source of the touches:

\textsuperscript{267} Sir John Eccles (1903-1997) Australian neurophysiologist, Nobel Prize winner and close associate of Sir Karl Popper.

\textsuperscript{268} John C. Eccles, \textit{How the Self Controls Its Brain} (Heidelberg: Springer Valley, 1994).

\textsuperscript{269} Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, \textit{The Self and Its Brain} (Heidelberg: Springer, 1977).


\textsuperscript{271} Blackmore, \textit{Consciousness, A Very Short Introduction}, 129. Throughout this publication Blackmore uses the terms: consciousness, self and soul interchangeably.

\textsuperscript{272} Blackmore, \textit{Consciousness, An Introduction}, 2.
After the death – of my father, I felt him holding my fingers for many days and
talking to me.273

Olfactory Phenomena

The concept that some forms of psychic phenomena emit a particular smell or ‘an odour
of sanctity’ is based on the medieval theory that holiness has a sweet smell and sin
stinks.274 It is recorded that after death St Teresa of Avila’s body not only remained
uncorrupted but was surrounded by perfume.275 The concept of holiness remaining
untouched by the stink of corruption is also significant within yogic traditions and is
reflected by the Self-Realisation Fellowship’s wide dissemination of the fact that the
body of Paramahansa Yogananda remained incorruptible for several weeks after his
death. This phenomena was confirmed by a legally attested document stating that during
the twenty day period between death and internment, ‘No odor of decay emanated from
his [Yogananda’s] body at any time…’.276

The experience of ‘smell’ is listed as a variety of religious experience within the
fourteenth century chronicles of the South German Dominican convents.277 Also, in the

274 Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology, 950.
277 Richard Woods, Mediaeval and Modern Women Mystics: The Evidential Character Of Religious
twentieth century, the ability of living saints using psychic abilities to manifest perfume has been reported within Indian religious tradition.²⁷⁸

Another variety of olfactory experience is described by Hardy. Although Hardy notes only 33 examples of smell, as a psychic phenomenon, within the first 3,000 reports received, he suggests that this phenomenon is more common than his research suggests and draws attention to another study which records 58 ‘modern examples’ of olfactory phenomena.²⁷⁹ More recently, surveys of ordinary Australians, conducted by Nattress in 2001 and 2003 found that 14% and 13%, respectively, of respondents had experienced some form of olfactory phenomena.

**Clairsentience as a Core Experience**

In the sixteenth century, when religious experience began to be categorised by Christian scholars, the terms ‘intellectual’ and ‘imaginary’ were developed to differentiate between two types of mystic/psychic experience. Accordingly, the term ‘intellectual’ is used to describe a non-corporeal experience (experienced in the mind’s eye) and term ‘imaginary’ describes experiences which are perceived as external visionary or auditory experiences. As already noted, a number of scholarly writers including Underhill, Edwards and Forman promote the superiority of intellectual visionary experience (clairsentience) deeming it as superior to clairvoyant and clairaudient experiences. These opinions are largely based on the writings of medieval mystics such as St Teresa


²⁷⁹ Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 43.
of Avila, St John of the Cross and Henry Suso. Hollenback, however, challenges this position, by suggesting that St Teresa of Avila was actually ‘… quite skeptical of the supposed superiority of intellectual visions over imaginary ones…’. He states that although St Teresa acknowledged that the value of intellectual visions she also maintained, that because of human weaknesses, imaginary visions were more effective in stimulating a religious response. Hollenback finds evidence for this in St Teresa’s Life, particularly in Chapter 22, where he notes St Teresa considered that contemplation on the ‘Sacred Humanity of Christ’ was more important than focusing on ‘His Formless Divinity’.²⁸⁰

The importance of clairsentience is seen in quite a different and more holistic way by Hardy and Beardsworth who exhaustively studied numerous reports of twentieth century religious experience, many of which contained examples of psychic phenomenon. Based on these reports, Beardsworth concludes that awareness of an unseen presence (a sense of something that is not one’s self and not material) accompanies or is sensed as a precursor to not only the psychic experiences of touch and smell, but also to clairvoyant and clairaudient experiences. And, importantly, the reaction to that awareness is always a personal matter and one which creates a significant relationship between the experiencer and the experience.²⁸¹ The significance of clairsentience and its sense of otherness together with the personal is recognised as core element of spiritual experience by Beardsworth and Hardy.

²⁸⁰ Hollenback, Mysticism – Experience, Response and Empowerment, 564-565.

SECTION 6: AURA SIGHTING

Within Collins English Dictionary, the aura is defined as an invisible emanation produced by and surrounding a person or object: alleged to be discernible by individuals of supernormal sensibility. The restriction to only ‘individuals of supernormal sensitivity’ is challenged by Eason,\textsuperscript{282} Goldberg\textsuperscript{283} and Webster\textsuperscript{284} who assert that with a little practice anyone can see an aura.

The Multicoloured Aura

In the early 1900s, Dr Walter Kilner discovered that by looking through a glass stained with dicyanin dye\textsuperscript{285} he could see three zones around a human body. His findings, published in \textit{The Human Atmosphere} (1911), described three zones or radiations, which all fell within the ultraviolet range of the spectrum. The first zone being a quarter inch dark layer, closest to the skin, was surrounded by a second more vaporous layer, an inch wide streaming perpendicularly from the body, with the third zone, which was approximately six inches wide, appearing further out as a delicate exterior luminosity.

\textsuperscript{282} Cassandra Eason, \textit{Aura Reading} (London: Paitkus Ltd., 2000).

\textsuperscript{283} Bruce Goldberg, \textit{Astral Voyages, Mastering The Art Of Interdimensional Travel} (St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2003).

\textsuperscript{284} Richard Webster, \textit{Aura Reading for Beginners} (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Books, 2005).

\textsuperscript{285} A blue dye used to extend the sensitivity of photographic emulsions to colours other than blue and ultraviolet.
with indefinite contours. Additional work carried out in Russia (by Semyon Kirlian in the 1930s and Dr Mikhail Gaikin in 1953) revealed a wide range of other colours in the human aura. The main force of interest in the aura, as evinced from television programs and popular publications, appears to lie within the areas of synaesthesia and colour therapy.

Colour is a part of the electromagnetic spectrum and as such may be considered to be a form of radiation or energy able to permeate other substances such as the body. Colour therapist, Wills writes that each person has their own electromagnetic field or aura and although we speak of a person being surrounded by an aura it is probably more accurate to describe the aura as emanating from the body. Within theosophy the concept exists that the spiritual self functions through three bodies – the physical, the emotional (or astral) and the mental. These three bodies all interpenetrate each other and beginning with the etheric double are classified within a complex seven layer system, each layer having a specific purpose and corresponding to the seven colours of the spectrum. This auric body is faintly luminous and postulated to indicate a person’s physical, mental or spiritual condition. For example, when theosophist C.W.  

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286 Eason, *Aura Reading*, 3.

287 ‘Synaesthesia,’ *Catalyst* (television series) ABC-TV, viewed 11.4.2002. This science program demonstrated the faculty of synaesthesia (the subjective sensation of a sense other than the one being stimulated) within twin sisters who saw people and objects as colours. Brain scans show that the brains of those with this ability are used differently – many of these people are artists. Also noted was the faculty of identifying musical notes with differing colours.


Leadbeater first saw the young Krishnamurti playing he saw that the boy had a very special aura — it was clear as crystal. Vinod states because of this Leadbeater recognised Krishnamurti’s capacity to become a great spiritual leader.291

American healer and psychic Edgar Cayce, who read auras to assess patients’ physical conditions, states that the majority of us see auras surrounding others but fail to realise it. He writes, ‘We are patterns, and we project colours, which are there for those who can see them’.292 Cayce’s essay on auras, containing an auric colour chart which identifies specific colours with emotions and afflictions remains popular. The Association For Research and Enlightenment (ARE),293 maintains records relating to readings given to over eight thousand people, who consulted Cayce on health issues, and actively promotes Cayce’s work by authorising specific authors to include extracts within their own work. The colours listed within Cayce’s chart, recognisable as the colours of the rainbow, are visible to the naked eye when presented within the rainbow. They can also be seen when white light is refracted by a prism. If a prism is placed on the nose and squinted through, the effect seen is as though objects and people are surrounded by these colours. Therefore, it does not seem unlikely that some people can observe this effect without the aid of a prism.

291 Vinod, Nine Secrets Of Successful Meditation, 113.


293 Formerly The Edward Cayce Foundation.
On the other hand, in discussing auras, Hollenback argues aura sighting, in common with other psychic phenomena, ‘presupposes’ a suspension of the normal thought processes and the entering of a recollective or meditative state. Furthermore, the recollective state, which is effective in inducing experience of psychic phenomena, merely involves adopting a passive and relaxed attitude rather than one of focused concentration.

The Other Aura

Four different varieties of aura are distinguished within medieval Christianity. These are: the Halo; the Nimbus; the Aureola; and the Glory. The Halo and Nimbus stream from the head and the Aureola from the body. The Glory incorporates light from the head and the body. It has been suggested that two auras exist. One, as depicted historically within religious paintings, emitting a white or golden light, and another which is multicoloured and purported to be indicative of a person’s physical and mental state. Walther hypothesises that the multicoloured aura originates from the ego centre whilst the spiritual aura, which emits a ‘more or less intense white light’, originates from that part of each human being which makes contact with God. Furthermore, she differentiates between sacred and human auras noting that ‘the divine light of the [Holy]


Spirit has a golden tinge’ and is richer than the ‘white light’ of the human spiritual aura.\textsuperscript{297}

Hollenback interprets Walther’s concept of ‘geistiges Grundwesen’ as the ‘supra-individual spiritual essence’ which is hypothesised to exist at the centre of the ‘deepest self.’\textsuperscript{298} Grounds for this concept may possibly be found within John 14:16-26 and Romans 8:22-27 which relate to the Holy Spirit, dwelling within humans and communicating with God. The spiritual aura features prominently in the Old and New Testament. For example, when Moses returned from Mount Sinai the Israelites observed that his ‘face shone’ (Exod 34:29-30), and as observed by Peter, James and John, Jesus’ face also shone like the sun as a consequence of the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-2). More recently Tolle describes this inner centre as being ‘…the unmanifested Source out of which all manifestation flows,’\textsuperscript{299} An alternate view is posited by Zohar, who, theorising from the position of quantum physics, conceives this vital centre within human beings to be a force field linked ‘… with the force fields that hold the universe together.’\textsuperscript{300}

\section*{The Aura as Photism}

Hollenback asserts that supernatural illumination or photism is a psychic phenomena often experienced in conjunction with mystical states. Furthermore, he notes that the


\textsuperscript{298} Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism – Experience, Response and Empowerment}, 68.


phenomena of supernatural illumination may assume a number of forms including that of a ‘brilliant aura’ that seems to emanate from or surround a particular person or object. On other occasions the illumination may appear to suffuse a particular locality, sometimes incorporating individuals within that same luminance.301

Although the aura, as such, is not noted within any of the surveys of religious experience examined within this study, Hollenback’s assertion appears to be supported by James who also refers to such phenomena as ‘photisms’ and remarks on their frequency within religious experience.\textsuperscript{302} The phenomena of light is reported as a religious experience, under the headings of Illuminations and A Particular Light, within Hardy’s study, The Spiritual Nature of Man.\textsuperscript{303}

Hardy’s study contains 135 instances of illuminations or instances where participants reported feeling themselves ‘bathed in a general glowing light.’ For example:

\begin{quote}
On the first night I knelt to say my prayers, which I had now made a constant practice. I was aware of a glowing light which seemed to envelope me and which was accompanied by a sense of warmth all around me.\textsuperscript{304}
\end{quote}

Although the above description indicates that the light was ‘glowing and provided a feeling of ‘warmth’ it does not precisely mention a specific colour. Beardsworth, who termed this variety of phenomena as ‘illumination of surroundings’, notes that the light is often described as ‘golden’, ‘intense’ and ‘whitish, nonetheless warm’.\textsuperscript{305} These terms are comparable to those used by Walther to describe divine light as associated with God and the spiritual aura emanating from within human beings.\textsuperscript{306}

\textsuperscript{302} James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 251.

\textsuperscript{303} Hardy The Spiritual Nature of Man, 34-39.

\textsuperscript{304} Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 34.

\textsuperscript{305} Beardsworth, A Sense of Presence, 23.

In *A Sense of Presence*, Beardsworth provides a number of examples of Hardy’s second form of illumination (*A Particular Light*) which upon occasion appeared as a pattern or a symbolic shape that, as in the following example, had meaning for the observer.

…I was in Scotland and had been in the cubicle in my hut and was walking back to the Mess when suddenly a light shone on the wall of the passage with a cross clearly displayed, as though intense sunlight was coming through a window with the cross casting an intense shadow. There was in fact no window or source of light to account for what I saw. The curious factor to me was that although in those days I was nervous of the dark and very impressionable, I had a curious feeling of comfort and a deep feeling of intense emotion.307

The above extract illustrates the point made by Beardsworth that in general, seeing a light or lights in such a manner aroused feelings of comfort and even joy within the experiencer.

However, he also draws attention to three reports which, rather than providing evidence of an affective relationship between the phenomena and the experiencers, contained remarks that were, in his opinion, observational and dispassionate. Remarks such as, ‘What a strange sight! How unexpected! This was my first psychic experience…’; ‘…saw this huge bright light over the house. Again it was repeated and left me mystified…’; and, from the third contributor — ‘About 3 or 4 weeks later I had the same experience under the same conditions but this time the ball of light was surrounded by an equally intense line of light around the circumference just a short distance from

These remarks appear to indicate that the observers were neither overawed nor emotionally affected by the phenomena of supernatural illumination or photism. And, although these responses might appear to be more appropriate within a survey of psychic phenomenon, it is significant to note that they were provided as responses to a study about religious experience. There may be an indication here that it is possible for ordinary people to have a spiritual experience and still maintain observational and critical faculties during the experience. These observational capacities are also demonstrated in the writings of mystics who constructed ‘ladders of prayer’ as discussed by Heiler and noted in more detail in Section Two of this chapter.

In Nattress 1 and Nattress 2, 19 per cent and 22 per cent of participants respectively reported that they had sighted an aura. As it was Nattress’ intent that the inclusion of discriptors would assist identification of the specific phenomena, the inclusion of a description of what an aura might look like may have facilitated these responses. Therefore, within these findings, there may be some support for Cayce’s opinion that many people see auras but are unable to recognise them. The appropriateness of guidance to enable recognition of psychic and or mystical phenomena, as demonstrated in Sam. 3:7, (see Section Four of this Chapter) is also noted by Edwards.

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308 Beardsworth, A Sense of Presence, 40-44.
309 Heiler, Prayer, 193-197.
310 Cayce, Auras, 7.
311 Edwards, Human Experience of God, 5. See also Teresa of Avila, The Life, 191.
Conclusion

Consideration of the literature reviewed within this chapter suggested that *psukhikos* phenomena are not fully understood. They are neither fully understood by those who experience them nor by those who study them. Because psychic and mystic experiences do not meet the scientific criterion of repeatability, their actuality is largely doubted by postmodern society. Western societal attitudes also appear to discriminate against discussion of psychic phenomena. Consequently, many people have no context, theological or otherwise, in which to place or even recognise personal incidents of psychic phenomena. The situation is vastly different within eastern religious and philosophical traditions. Here an abundance of profound phenomenological accounts provides guidance and techniques for dealing with psychic phenomena, and a need for scientific testing of altered states of consciousness is deemed as unnecessary.

As noted in Chapter One, Kokoszka is of the opinion that, in the study of consciousness, theoretical conceptions are more prevalent than empirical studies. Examination of the literature examined supports his assertion. For example, authorities including James, Huxley, Monroe, Lilly, Goldberg, and Grosso have hypothesised that psychic phenomena arise as a result of the existence of alternate worlds or levels of consciousness, which access or are themselves accessed by the human mind. Another theory, also expounded by Monroe, Goldberg, and Grosso, is that deep meditation and out-of-body experiences provide an indication of what it may be like to exist in a bodiless form, either in one of these alternate worlds or after death. But, as noted by

Gyatso, the actuality of other worlds as recognised within Buddhist philosophy, has not been embraced warmly by western thinkers.

Whilst these theories, in common with a number of scientific theories are impossible to confirm or refute, they are generally regarded as being less credible than scientific hypotheses, although much that modern physics is based on has never actually been proven. 313 This form of top-down thinking is intrinsically faulty in that it puts theory before the facts. In the field of psychic research this can lead to possibly faulty assumptions such as value judgements with regard to certain psychic and mystical experiences. 314

Studies examined in this chapter indicate that tangible results have emerged through empirical research. For example:

- Hardy’s detailed classification of experiences that gave rise to religious feeling;
- the validation of the invarience of the near-death experience (as a consequence of qualitative research undertaken by Moody and Kübler Ross, supported by Ring’s qualitative and quantitative methodology); and

313 Morris notes that Einstein’s Theory of Relativity was accepted and acted upon by scientists for over 50 years before tests were performed; also, although it has never been questioned, there is no empirical evidence to support Hawkins’ theory that spontaneous loss of mass can lead to the explosion of a mini blackhole. Richard Morris, ‘Inventing the Universe,’ in John Brockman, (ed.), Creativity, (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 134-135.

314 See Forman, ‘Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting,’ in his The Problem of Pure Consciousness, 7, also Peter Moore, ‘Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique,’ Katz, Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, 118-119.
• statistical information relating to the number of people within communities who have reported experiencing psychic phenomena that resulted in a religious or spiritual experience (as collated through Hay and Morisy’s involvement in British National Opinion Polls and in Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones’ study of the out-of-body experience).

The above findings, together with the suggestion that commonality of psychic and sublime or mystical experiences, as reported within surveys conducted by Nattress and by Pupynin and Brodbeck, hinted at a possible blurring of perceived boundaries between these experiences. They also lent support to the conviction that qualitative and quantitative research would provide the best tool for validation of this thesis’ contention that: despite the denial of psukhikos phenomena by postmodernists, such experiences are still evident with Australian society, and that it is possible to demonstrate the frequency of a range of specific psychic phenomena with a given group of ordinary Australians.

The results of this review set a direction for the following three tasks:

1. to invite a randomly selected group of Australians\textsuperscript{315} (not known to have any particular bias) to participate in a study of specific psychic phenomena. The purpose of the study being to test for the scientific requirement of repeatability and thereby reason to believe in the actuality or otherwise of these phenomena;

\textsuperscript{315} The term ‘Australians’ as used here does not indicate that all Australians had the same probability of receiving an invitation, it is merely used to distinguish participants in this study from those who participated in overseas studies.
2. to compare the findings of this survey with the more religiously orientated overseas studies discussed in this chapter; and

3. from the findings of this survey, to determine whether or not participation in meditation has any impact upon the propensity of individuals, within the group, to experience these phenomena.

The next chapter (Chapter Three) details the philosophical approach adopted towards this research project and the research design developed as a consequence of that approach to conduct the stated tasks.
CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

It has been suggested by a number of authorities including Huxley,\(^1\) James\(^2\) and Argyle\(^3\) that one way of studying reports of visionary or other psychic experiences is to focus on the experiences as purely subjective phenomena irrespective of whether they are true or not. In this study that approach is not favoured, as it appears to indicate a lack of respect for those who share perceptions of personal experiences. The approach here is respectful of other people’s perceptions and rejects, as Houston Smith describes it ‘…the temptation - sorely reinforced by modern materialistic attitudes – to only regard the visible as the real.’\(^4\) As Gyatso contends, everyone has experiences that others are unable to confirm by means of their own perception but, since the experiences are real in someone’s mind, they do exist.\(^5\)

\(^1\) Huxley, *Heaven And Hell*, 4.
\(^2\) James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 506.
\(^3\) Michael Argyle, *The Psychological Perspective on Religious Experience*, 1.
SECTION 1: PSYCHIC PHENOMENA AND THE SCIENTIFIC CRITERION OF REPEATABILITY

In the West, a stumbling block to belief in the existence of psychic and or mystical experiences has been the inability of the experiencers to repeat their experience. Rather than attempting to solve the problem there are those who have attempted to make a virtue out of the failure of replication. For example, in March 2004, an article in *The New Scientist* stated that many parapsychologists believe that their discipline has reached an impasse. The belief that such a stalemate has been reached apparently stems from a conviction held by parapsychologists that the failure of replication confirms (for the parapsychologists) that the inherent elusiveness of paranormal phenomena prohibits the expectation that they can be examined within the confines of a laboratory. *The New Scientist* does not appear to be supportive of this position and (within the same article) comments that ‘The ability to repeat an experiment would seem to be a reasonable thing to demand of a field that aspires to scientific respectability.’

However, Wassermann, in studying psychic or paranormal phenomena from the perspective of quantum mechanics, argues that it is not necessary for such phenomena to be repeatable, on demand, in specially designed and controlled experiments, in order to

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‘conform to the canons of science.’ In his opinion, the kind of repeatability that scientists ask for is repeatability of class characteristics of phenomena. He believes that case reports of spontaneously occurring psychic phenomena of a specific class resemble, and can be considered as valid a research tool as medical case histories. In support of his argument, he asserts that the study of genetically predisposed disorders is not dismissed as unscientific because these disorders turn up sporadically in populations. Wassermann advises that this comparison is not to suggest that the experience of psychic phenomena is an illness, but merely to confirm that, as in physics research, many observations may be required until a sought after result can be determined. He also provides an example of such circumstances by relating that in the proton-antiproton collider experiments at CERN (Geneva), designed to discover the hypothetically predicted W and Z intermediate vector bosons of electro-weak interaction theory, a vast number of (automated) observations were required to discover evidence for the expected, very rarely occurring appearance of W and Z bosons. Furthermore, Rubbia and Van der Meer received Nobel Prizes not only for techniques but for their patience in persisting with experiments to discover these bosons. 7

In support of his hypothesis on Shadow Matter, 8 Wassermann examined eighty-one case histories of recorded incidents of psychic phenomena and concluded that because of the similarity of the reports that there were grounds to believe in the actuality of the

7 Wassermann, Shadow Matter And Psychic Phenomena, 59-61.

8 Wassermann hypothesises that human beings consist of an ordinary matter body and, in addition also a Shadow Matter Body which includes a Shadow Matter Brain. And, that after the death of the ordinary matter body the Shadow Matter Body and its Shadow Matter Brain could live on – possibly indefinitely. The persistence of Shadow Matter could account for a number of psychic phenomena such as, out-of-body experiences, the appearance of ghosts and doppelgangers.
experiences. He then used his premise regarding the actuality of specific psychic phenomena as a platform from which to launch his theory of *Shadow Matter*. It should be noted that the existence or otherwise of *Shadow Matter* is in no way relevant to this study and will not be discussed further. What is significant for our argument is the concept of class characteristics.

**SECTION 2: THE CURRENT APPROACH**

The research design for this study builds upon methodologies employed by Wassermann, in his thesis on *Shadow Matter* and by biologist Alister Hardy in his study *The Spiritual Nature of Man*. However, instead of relying on a comparison of recorded case histories as Wassermann did, or inviting the public at large to provide personal reports on religious experience, it is of a more primary nature and focuses on specific psychic phenomena. This study is an empiric study of reported psychic phenomena with an approach that involves the matching of perceptions with specific class characteristics, rather than an examination of psychic phenomena as such. It presents Nattress’ original questionnaire and is based on a medical diagnostic model.

Diagnostic Models have been developed by medical authorities in an effort to promote ‘best practice’ diagnostic standards. For example, illnesses may initially appear as a range of symptoms or signs that are observed and noted by medical practitioners prior to the pronouncement that a condition exists. Consider an illness such as chronic fatigue
syndrome (CFS), which has much in common with psychic phenomena, in that it has many symptoms that can be confused with a range of other conditions and there is no single specific laboratory test which can identify it. To deal with CFS doctors have observed a range of signs that are repeatable characteristics of the condition and from these observations have developed diagnostic models that involve certain guidelines and criteria. The confirmation that the patient’s experience replicates these signs or class characteristics enables the medical practitioner to make an accurate diagnosis.9

Similarly, the Western Australian Department of Health has developed and disseminated via fridge magnets, pamphlets and the Internet a description of symptoms that are characteristic to Amoebic Meningitis. If untreated, Amoebic Meningitis can kill within twenty-four hours. The purpose of the Health Department’s initiative is to draw attention to particular signs or characteristics which if replicated within the patient allow for speedy identification of the disease.10

The above two example of medical diagnostic strategy indicate ways in which the medical profession utilises comparisons of perceptions to confirm the existence of certain conditions. A model of class characteristics for specific psychic phenomena will be used in this study. Although it might be critiqued that a framework has been imposed on the reports elicited through this survey, telephone contact with the Meningitis Centre


(28 February 2007) confirms that distribution of Amoebic Meningitis Information Packages doesn’t necessarily increase false reporting. Furthermore, the use of class characteristics imposes a structure within which specific psychic phenomena may be recognised and by narrowing the field may avoid complexities encountered by other researchers who used less specific criteria.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{SECTION 3: THE QUESTIONNAIRE}

Nattress’ original survey, as used in this study, presented an anonymous five page questionnaire, together with a one page document detailing seven specific class characteristics generally recognised as being psychic phenomena. The descriptions were as follows:

\textbf{The Out-of-the-body Experience}

An out-of-the body experience occurs when a person is able to observe their body and its surrounds from an external viewpoint; literally, as it were, to step outside their own body. It has been reported to occur spontaneously, as a result of meditation or to be deliberately induced for other purposes.

The Near-Death Experience

A near-death experience may be considered to be an out-of-the-body experience plus! The near-death experience occurs as a result of a life threatening experience eg. serious illness, accident etc. People who have had near-death experiences report that after observing their own body and its surrounds (including other persons who were in the vicinity at that time) they have the a feeling of peace, the sensation of travelling very quickly through a dark tunnel, a review of the life just lived and a movement towards, or entrance into, all embracing light.

Clairvoyance

For the purposes of this survey Clairvoyance can be considered to be the perception of things beyond the natural range of the senses. It may involve:

- seeing something seen within the inner eye (in the mind’s eye); or
- the perception of an actual external vision.

Clairaudience

Clairaudience can be considered to be the ability to hear things beyond the normal range of the senses. It may involve:

- hearing a voice internally;
- hearing an actual voice; and sometimes
- recognition of the voice.
Clairsentience

Clairsentience is a form of psychic smelling or feeling something or someone. It may take the form of:

- sensing the presence of an unseen person;
- feeling that one is actually being touched physically by someone or something; or
- experiencing the smell of something such as tobacco or perfume which may relate to something or someone that has or had a particular meaning to you.

Experience of Seeing an Aura

The aura has been historically pictured in religious paintings as a halo. In the early 1900s Dr Walter Kilner discovered that by looking through a glass stained with dicyanin dye he could see the aura around a human body. He described 3 zones around the body: (1) a quarter inch dark layer closest to the skin, surrounded by (2) a more vaporous layer an inch wide streaming perpendicularly from the body and (3) further out a delicate exterior luminosity with indefinite contours about six inches across. Additional work carried out in Russia (by Semyon Kirlian in the 1930s and Dr Mikhail Gaikin in 1953) revealed a wide range of other colours in the human aura.

It is acknowledged that such basic descriptors may bias the informants but there are valid reasons for believing that without their inclusion possibly some participants might not recognise past experiences of psychic phenomena. The failure to recognise
psukhikos phenomena is noted by a number of scholarly writers. For example, in the *Human Experience of God*, Edwards suggests that it is possible to have some experience of a spiritual and mystic nature without recognising it as such. This view is supported by Forman, who cites three examples of spontaneous psukhikos experience, which were not appreciated as such until ‘…months and years after the experiences.’¹² Vinod’s admission that he spent many years attempting to confirm that his experience of samadhi was genuine¹³ and Cayce’s suggestion that many people see auras without recognising what it is that they are actually seeing¹⁴ also indicate that experiences of psychic phenomena are not always immediately recognisable. It was hoped that the inclusion of these very basic descriptors would not only be helpful in assisting participants to recognise past experiences but, as previously discussed in Section Two of this chapter, would facilitate continuity of the responses.

A question on meditation was also included within the survey, its chief purpose being to test the hypothesis that meditation increases one’s propensity to experience mystical and psychic phenomena. A blank space was provided after each question and participants were invited to share additional information or alternately make contact by e-mail. This added a qualitative element to the survey’s mainly quantitative nature. The questionnaire was designed to be as simple as possible. It was trialled by being circulated amongst a

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pilot group of eight people for comment and input. On the advice of this group questions relating to ‘smell’ and ‘touch’ were included.

Although it was recognised that there is room for further refinement within the questionnaire, in view of the possibility that any alterations made might be seen to impact on the validity of the original study (Nattress 1) as a benchmark, no changes were made. A copy of the questionnaire\textsuperscript{15} can be found in Appendix C.

**SECTION 4: SAMPLE SELECTION**

Nattress’ earlier studies (Nattress 1 and Nattress 2) appeared to validate Wasserman's methodology in that the commonality of experiences reported by participants provided ground to believe in the actuality of those experiences. Additionally, a number of findings, within the two Australian surveys, were found to have similarities with those listed in Pupynin and Brodbeck’s study of *Religious Experience in London*. However, as noted in Chapter One, a critique of these three surveys was that different results might have been achieved if participants had been selected by means of a random selection process.

The purpose of utilising random sampling procedures is, in so far as possible, to remove bias by ensuring that each proposed participant within a survey sample group has an

\textsuperscript{15} Survey approved by Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on 29 April 2005. Permit Number: 2005/69.
equal probability of being selected. To meet this requirement a random sample of four-hundred, currently enrolled, postgraduate students was selected from the Human Resource database of Murdoch University Western Australia. A copy of the questionnaire together with a letter, explaining the purpose of the study and inviting participation, was sent to the selected students. The address labels were affixed to the outgoing envelopes by Murdoch staff. Provision, by way of a tear-off form, (to be returned in a separate envelope to ensure anonymity) was made for those interested in the outcome of the survey to request an extract of the final report’s findings.

In recognition of the private and sensitive nature of the study, participants were assured that, unless they provided personal details, there was no way in which the researcher would be aware of their identity or be able to contact them personally. Further contact with possible participants consisted of a general e-mail sent to all postgraduate students at Murdoch by Murdoch University Postgraduate Student Association (MUPSA). The purpose of the e-mail being to extend response time and encourage return of completed questionnaires. All returned questionnaires were given a number and code which identified them as having been completed by Murdoch postgraduates and indicated the sex and age of the respondent. For example, the code M#81F37/48 identifies Murdoch response number eighty-one which was provided by a female aged between of thirty-seven and forty-eight years old.

Conclusion
The primary purpose of Nattress’ original study had been to test methodology used by Wasserman in support of his thesis on Shadow Matter. However, as detailed in the previous chapter, Chapter Two, this study’s aims are broader and involve examination of other empirical and theoretical studies relating to psychic/mystical phenomena.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, presents this survey’s findings; comparison of these findings with other studies of psychic and or mystical phenomena; and a final summary of these results.
CHAPTER 4 - PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND Comparison with Overseas Studies

Introduction

This Chapter contains the survey’s quantitative and qualitative results together with, where applicable, comparison with results from studies\(^1\) of similar phenomena conducted in countries deemed to have a greater religious history than Australia. The results detailed in this Chapter relate to experiences of psychic phenomena as reported by a group of postgraduate students, enrolled at Murdoch University, Western Australia in 2006.

Because meditation, although it may involve psychic experience, is not in itself a psychic phenomenon, findings, relating to Question 1: (How Often do you meditate?) are presented following those relative to psychic phenomena.

SECTION 1: THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

One hundred and thirty-five postgraduates (41 men and 94 women) returned completed questionnaires. This low response rate was disappointing in that percentage results could

\(^1\) Note: All comparative studies noted in this Chapter have been discussed in Chapter 2.
only be based on the number of respondents rather than on the total survey population. However, as noted by Brown and Sheldrake\(^2\) reluctance to participate in surveys is not uncommon. Moreover, as observed by Hay,\(^3\) it may be that research into such sensitive issues is best achieved through unhurried one to one interviews where trust and empathy is developed between enquirer and participant.

**Age and Gender**

Participants ages ranged from between 18-24 years of age to 70 plus with the greatest number of participants falling within the ranges of 25-36 (38%) and 37-48 (31%) years of age respectively. Participants who reported experiencing one or more incidents of psychic phenomena (as defined by the questionnaire) were designated the letter \(P\), indicating psychic experience. Participants, who did not report any experience of the described phenomena, were designated with the letter \(Z\), signifying zero psychic experience. The \(P\) Group, consisting of those who reported having experienced one or more incidents of psychic phenomena, comprised 69 females and 18 males. The breakdown of gender within the \(Z\) Group, those who reported no experience of psychic phenomena, was 25 females and 23 males.


Of the one hundred and thirty-five participants who returned completed questionnaires, eighty-seven (64%) indicated they had personally experienced one or more of the listed class characteristics (see Table 1):

Table 1: Experience of psychic phenomena

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>87 (64%)</td>
<td>48 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>18 (44%)</td>
<td>23 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>69 (73%)</td>
<td>25 (27%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of respondents, who reported experiencing one or more of the designated class characteristics is comparable with Nattress 1 in which 62% of participants reported they had experienced one or more of the selected psychic phenomena.

SECTION 2: LEAVING THE BODY

The number of respondents who reported an out-of-body experience is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Experience of having ‘left the body’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

131
Of the 32 participants who had left their body, 25 reported that they had done so on one occasion only; 5 advised that they had left their bodies fairly often and the remaining 2 participants advised that they often experienced leaving the body. Twenty-seven participants classified their experience an out-of-body experience. Three considered that they had experienced a near-death experience and two declined to classify the experience.

Nineteen participants reported that their out-of-body experience had been a spontaneous occurrence; 7 participants advised that their experience had occurred during meditation and 3 participants, who identified their experience as being a near-death experience, advised the experience had occurred as a result of a life threatening incident. As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 3, these pre-existing conditions are to be found in qualitative studies conducted by researchers such as, Hardy, Pupynin and Brodbeck; and also in Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones’ quantitative study ‘The Out of Body Experience: Phenomenology’.

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4 Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man.

5 Pupynin and Brodbeck, Religious Experience in London.
‘The Out-of-Body Experience: Phenomenology’, an American study of 399 reports of out-of-body-experiences, notes that a commonality among reports of such experiences is that they contain ordinary and even mundane accounts of subjective experiences in which there is an awareness of the Self as being separate from the physical body ‘which can be clearly seen.’ Examples of this commonality, which is to be found in surveys conducted by Hardy, Hay and Pupynin and Brodbeck, are also apparent in the short reports provided by respondents who accepted the present survey’s invitation to provide additional information. For example:

M#74F25/36: Looked down upon myself in bed.

M#67M25/36: I could hear it (phone) but I could not get up to answer it even though I wanted to. At this point I felt “myself” floating downwards as soon as I entered my body on the bed I could get up and go to the phone. I definitely know that something was missing from my body cause I could feel it when coming down. Weird hey!

M#76F37/48: Having cuppa early in morning and then experienced myself as above my body.

M#103F49/58: This was “imposed” by a car accident or directly caused by the accident. I was not badly hurt but “saw” myself trapped in the car in a yellow glowing light.

The first three experiences may have been conditioned by pre or after sleep conditions or may (and particularly in the case of ‘the early morning cuppa’) represent an incident of psychic phenomena experienced when the life-force or Self observes the physical body prior to the mind (gradually) resuming control of the body at cessation of the deep

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7 Hay, Exploring Inner Space.
dreamless stage.⁸ The fourth report provides an example of a out-of-body experience as a result of a car accident — a pre-existing condition again noted in Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones’ study.

Of the seven participants who reported they had found themselves outside their own body as a result of the pre-existing condition of meditation, three provided additional information. The first report is comparable with the phenomenology of out-of-body experiences as observed in Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones’ study in which twenty-seven per cent of respondents reported the pre-existing condition of meditation:

M#55F15/36: When I meditate I have an out of body experience. I always seem to be above myself near the ceiling looking down on myself.

The second report is somewhat less pragmatic and although it does appear to reflect a possibly higher form of consciousness, is completely secular.

M#94F59/69: This experience was beautiful — it was as if part of me was shooting thro’ [sic] the stars. Nothing I had heard or thought of before prepared me for this.

I was doing a humming meditation going up thro’ the chakras. At one point around my heart/sternum I felt as tho’ (visualised unintentionally) a brick wall was pushing into me. I stayed with this feeling [,] then suddenly I was thro’ the wall and out into space. I was tingling all over and each small “tingle” was a star. I could see myself sitting in the chaise [sic] part of my mind was aware that I could stay in space or come back to my body.

⁸ Brunton, The Wisdom of the Overself.
The above report might be considered as merely descriptive, however, the following additional information provides details of an affect which experiencing an out-of-body experience had upon a participant.

M#13F53/48: Was not a nice experience I got scared and never did it again. Had been studying how to do it, or reading about it anyway in a book.

This third report, as shown above, is one of only two negative experiences noted within the survey and may reflect Badham’s opinion that, such experiences are less common in contemporary psukhikos experience.⁹

**The Near-Death Experience**

All 3 participants, who reported experiencing a near-death experience, indicated that their near-death experiences had occurred as a result of a life threatening experience. Two near-death experiences occurred during childbirth. Participant M66F37/48 qualified the affirmative for her near-death experience by reporting:

During child birth so not a NDE – but resulting from unusual physical stress. PS – Natural childbirth ie no drugs

M119F37/48 made no such qualification:

During childbirth, blood pressure etc to nothing, hovering above baby watching medics rushing around trying to bring me back. Saw tunnel, started moving towards it, but wanted to stay (for the baby) and returned to body.

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⁹ Badham, *Religion and Near Death Experience.*
Twemlow, Gabbard and Fowler note 14 incidents of out-of-body experiences occurring during childbirth. Hardy also includes ‘childbirth’ as a possible trigger for spiritual experience.

The following interesting comments, which seem to mirror an example of a childbirth near-death experience, provided by Beardsworth, during which the experiencer ‘…prayed God would not let me go up there…’, 10 were provided by another respondent:

M#92F25/36: I have had 2 severe near-death experiences as a result of anaphylaxis and birth complications. Both times I required intense care. I did not feel at peace/dark tunnels. I fought hard to stay alive and kept repeating “don’t let me die, don’t let me die.” If I had decided not to fight and had relaxed I believe I would have died.

As a health professional and experienced A&E nurse I have seen a great deal of trauma and serious illness. Some people would describe a NDE as something insignificant in real terms of its potentiality of real death. I have seen people convinced they are dying after a normal birth just because it hurts like hell and there is blood. Others boast about NDE with minor ailments that are being medically treated and monitored for eg an IV is inserted or intercostal catheter is inserted. They have no experience of these and assume it means that they are close to death – but in reality they are far from it.

The above report is also supportive of Rogo’s position that the near-death experience may result from a belief that one’s life is threatened rather than a life threatening incident. Moreover that, some people may consciously reject a near-death experience.11

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10 Beardsworth, A Sense Of Presence, 69-70.

11 Rogo, The Return From Silence.
In Brief

- 24% of respondents reported that they had left their body on at least one occasion.

- 27 respondents reported the experience as having an out-of-body experience and 3 reported the experience as being a near-death experience.

- Experience of having left the body was reported by 37% of the P Group and ranked overall as the fourth most commonly reported psychic phenomena.

- Qualitative and quantitative information provided by the participants confirmed similarity between their out-of-body and near-death experiences and those discussed in overseas studies.

- Contrary to findings within the examined overseas studies, and responses to other questions within this thesis, no respondent within the Australian study signified that affect of their experience was an attitudinal change towards belief in life after death or an arousal of spiritual or religious feeling.

SECTION 3: VISIONS AND VOICES

The number of respondents who reported clairvoyant (visionary) experience is shown in Table 3 below.
### Table 3: Experience of a clairvoyant phenomenon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Results based on responses submitted by 92 women (133 respondents).

Of the 42 participants (32% of the sample or 48% of the P Group), who reported that they had experienced one or more incidents of clairvoyant experience, 20 reported that the experience had been ‘an actual external vision’; 17 described the experience as having been seen in the ‘mind’s eye’; the remaining 2 reported that they could not be sure whether the experience had been external or internal. Frequency of visionary experience as reported by all respondents is shown below:

- On one occasion: 10 (8%)
- Fairly often: 28 (21%)
- Often: 4 (3%)

Thirty respondents reported having seen a person; the remainder reported having seen a combination of persons and objects within a scene or tableau. Fifty per cent of those who reported seeing a person, identified the person as being deceased with 73% of deceased persons being recognised as a near relative.
Although the proportion of female participants, who reported having seen a deceased near relative, greatly exceeds that of male participants, reporting a similar experience, these experiences reported by postgraduates refute the marginality hypothesis and argue that such experiences are not primarily limited to women and or members of lower socio-economic groups.\textsuperscript{12}

Hardy notes ‘239 [records of contact with the deceased] among the first 3,000 records which contain a religious element.’ However, within the present study, experience of seeing a deceased relative was not reported as having generated religious or spiritual feeling. Four participants reported seeing a figure of spiritual significance and one participant provided the following example of clairvoyance which generated religious feeling:

\begin{quote}
M\#80F25/36: During a very difficult time in my marriage I saw a picture/scene of my husband and I many years in the future, which came to me after praying and I understood it to be God’s answer to my questions in prayer.
\end{quote}

Twenty participants indicated they had seen ‘an actual external vision’; 17 had seen in ‘their mind’s eye,’ and 2 were unsure whether the experience had been external or internal. Six participants reported that the visionary experience had been shared with another person or persons; 34 participants reported that the experience had been a solitary one and 2 participants did not respond to this question. A number of participants provided additional information.

M#103F49/58: It is not so much a person but a “presence” engulfed in a white light or yellow light many times the presence came as a warning before some event. [noted as a deceased family member.]

The above example of ‘white light or yellow light’ surrounding a figure perceived within visionary experience is comparable to two examples provided by Beardsworth which describe, in the first example, a deceased parent surrounded by ‘bright golden light’ and, in the second example, a ‘beautiful figure shrouded in a tremendous light.’

Hardy notes visionary experience, on many occasions, may be accompanied with the phenomenon of hearing a voice. One Murdoch participant advised that her visionary experience involved seeing and speaking with her deceased father. This experience was, as indicated by the participant, recorded within the survey’s findings as a clairvoyance phenomenon. It was not also included within results relating to clairaudience. The survey’s findings in relation to auditory experiences are detailed below.

**Clairaudience**

The number of respondents who reported having ‘heard a voice’ is shown in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages ) of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents 23 (17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with visionary experience, the above table indicates that the number of women who reported having ‘heard a voice’ greatly exceeds the number of men who reported experience of either of these phenomena.

The 23 participants who reported having heard a voice comprise 17% of all respondents and 26% of the P Group. Frequency of clairaudient experience as reported by all respondents is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On one occasion</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly often</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slightly over half of those who had heard a voice indicated that they had heard it internally, the remainder advised that the experience had heard ‘an actual voice’. The majority of participants (39%) recognised the voice as belonging to a deceased person and 22% reported the voice as emanating from ‘a figure of spiritual significance’.

Examples of additional information provided by participants include:

M#130F59/69: This was my father, a few days after he died…

M#80F25/36: I understand the voice as an internal prompting by the Holy Spirit. I hear the voice internally and recognise it as different from other inner prompting. It comes during times of prayer, when I am reading the Bible and
asking God to reveal its meaning to me, and just doing everyday, ordinary things.

M#116F49/58: I heard the voice of Kwan Yin, Bodhisattva of Compassion, call my name quite clearly. It was extremely refined and gentle.

M#94F59/69: This was in a group meditation – I had a terrible migraine and decided just to sit with my head bent and stay unfocused. Suddenly a small child’s voice said “Mummy why don’t you love me?” I can tell you that ‘blew me away’. I am profoundly deaf – can hear with a hearing aid but at that time I had it turned off and so couldn't hear any external sounds.

In *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Hardy records 431 reports which ‘described the hearing of voices’ and 544 ‘accompanied by visions. A number of these auditory experiences involved a figure of spiritual significance and others involved ‘somebody recently dead’ whose purpose was to comfort the experiencer. In all instances these experiences are reported to have given rise to religious feeling.\(^\text{14}\)

**In Brief (for Both Clairvoyant and Clairaudient Experience)**

- 42 participants reported that they had experienced a clairvoyant experience and 23 reported that they had experienced an incident of clairaudience

- 48% of those who reported visionary experience advised that the experience had taken the form of ‘an actual external vision’; 40% described the experience as having been seen in the ‘mind’s eye’; the remaining participants were unsure as to whether the experience had been internal or external.

- 52% of those who reported hearing a voice advised that the experience had been internal and 48% indicated that they had heard ‘an actual voice’.

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The experience of seeing or hearing the voice of a deceased person was not reported as having generated religious or spiritual feeling.

Quantitative and qualitative information indicated that for a number of participants clairvoyant or clairaudient experience, which involved awareness of a ‘figure of spiritual significance’, generated spiritual and or religious feeling.

SECTION 4: SENSING THE UNSEEN

As with Nattress 1, the sensing of an unseen presence was the most widely reported psychic experience noted within the survey. It was recorded by 56 participants (41% of participants or 64% of the P Group). These findings are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Awareness of an invisible presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of Respondents</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>56 (41%)</td>
<td>79 (59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
<td>33 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>48 (51%)</td>
<td>46 (49%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequencies of occurrence varied: 22 participants reported a once only occurrence; 26 reported that they experienced the phenomenon ‘fairly often’; and eight reported that the phenomena was experienced ‘often’.

One participant didn’t tick any of the boxes but described experiencing a tragic and melancholic atmosphere (rather than an individual presence) in an area where a number of suicides had occurred.

A number of participants (28) identified the unseen presence as a deceased person or persons, with 16 advising that the presence/presences were that of a near relatives. Other participants reported the presence to be ‘not deceased’ (5) and, in some cases, ‘a stranger’ (16). Again, as discussed in Chapter Two, Section Five, and noted in a number of British studies, it is apparent that for many people psukhikos experience involves sensing the presence of someone who has died. Examples of experiencing the presence of a deceased person include:

M#127F49/58: My deceased brother in the back of my car one night, at a time when my dad was dying and I was coming home from the hospital.

M#1116F49/58: I was driving a long distance on a motorway at night in thick fog. For the whole journey I felt my [deceased] mother was in the passenger seat.

M121F49/58: The presence of my [deceased] mother in the kitchen of the family home.

The above examples do not provide information regarding the recentness of the bereavement. However, they are open to the interpretation that the role of the deceased is to comfort or support the bereaved as discussed by Hay\textsuperscript{16} and Long.\textsuperscript{17}

Fourteen participants (over 10\% of the sample or 16\% of the \(P\) Group) identified the phenomenon as relating to a figure of spiritual significance. The question relating to the experience of an invisible presence provided the greatest number of qualitative accounts (volunteered by respondents) about an experience that resulted in religious or spiritual feeling, for example:

M\#90F25/36: God, Holy Spirit.

M\#97F48/58: A feeling of God’s presence.

M\#70F25/36: I did a guided meditation course, when meditating I felt as though angels or spiritual healers were with me and assisting me to heal.

M\#71M25/36: Being fairly religious my faith in God always makes me feel that I’m never alone.

M\#80F25/36: I feel the presence as being the Holy Spirit, and the feeling varies from a sense of comfort, or extreme peace or joy when it is near.

M\#126F37/48: That was the equivalent of “God.”

The above examples of spiritual perceptivity are reflected in overseas studies; historically, in the experiences of St. Teresa of Avila, as discussed by Hollenback,\textsuperscript{18} and in Pupyinin and Brodbeck’s contemporary study of \textit{Religious Experience in London}


\textsuperscript{17} Long, \textit{The Way In}, 175.
where over 10% of respondents wrote of an awareness of God. Hay, also, in his study of Nottingham householders writes:

The largest group of experiences was those referring simply to as an awareness of the presence of God. About a quarter of all descriptions fell into this category.\(^{19}\)

The above results, obtained in 1975, are again comparable with findings within Hay and Heald’s 1987 British Gallop Poll in which 27 per cent of participants reported ‘Awareness of the Presence of God’.\(^{20}\)

**Touch**

For a number of participants the experience of clairsentience involved the sensation of being touched by someone or something invisible (see Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages ) of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{19}\) Hay, *Exploring Inner Space*, 133.

Thirty-three participants (24% of all respondents or 38% of the P Group) reported that they had been physically touched in some inexplicable way. The sensation of being touched by an unseen presence ranked as the survey’s third most commonly reported psychic phenomena.

Participants were not asked whether or not this was a frequent experience or to conjecture the source of the sensation as it was felt that the questionnaire was sufficiently lengthy. The experience of being touched by something unseen elicited the following response from one participant:

M#81F37/48: 30 yrs ago – A long time ago in Melbourne I heard my dog barking outside my window. I got up and went to pull the curtain aside to see what she was barking at. Before I was able to do that, something grabbed my arm. I reacted immediately, by pulling my arm away and screaming. There was no-one else in the room.

The antithesis of the above experience was reported in the following description which appears to have some meaningfulness for the writer:

M#95F49/58: I felt someone touching my shoulders. … [someone] close to me who had died.

Some participants’ descriptions of being touched by the unseen are comparable with overseas accounts, where the phenomenon of touch is described as ‘…strong and not at all ghost like.’\(^{21}\) and ‘…it made me feel – still makes me feel special.’\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 47.

Awareness of an Aroma

The number of participants who reported awareness of an aroma which had no apparent source but had some connection with someone deceased is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Awareness of scent that has no apparent source but is associated with someone who has passed on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>23 (17%)</td>
<td>112 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>37 (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>19 (20%)</td>
<td>75 (80%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, 23 participants (17% of all respondents or 26% of the P Group) reported that they felt that they had sensed a sourceless aroma.

In *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Hardy records 33 reports of olfactory phenomena and classifies the experience as being ‘sensory or quasi-sensory’. The aptness of Hardy’s classification was demonstrated by the following qualitative information:

M#110F25/36: A few days after the death of my father. Not sure if it was the grieving process, however could smell his scent and a feeling not so much of being cold but a freshness on my skin.

---

23 Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 42.
The above report appears as a completely secular account. Nevertheless, the core experience revealed in the above report appears as conceptual awareness of not only scent but a sense of something other. This recognition of the something other might be considered as the basis of all clairsentient experience. It reflects, however faintly, and is comparable to experiences of mystics who recognise a sacred presence but see’… nothing with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul.’ 24 This variety of ‘intellectual vision’ is detailed at length in overseas studies by scholarly writers including, Forman, Mavrodes and Hollenback.

**In Brief**

- 41% of respondents reported awareness of an unseen presence.

- 64% of the P Group reported that they had felt the presence of an unseen presence on at least one occasion.

- The sensing of an unseen person was the most commonly reported class characteristic within the survey.

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- 16% of those who reported an unseen presence identified the presence as a figure of spiritual significance.

- The experience of being touched by an unseen presence was reported by 33 participants and ranked as overall third most commonly reported class characteristic.

- 17% of participants reported awareness of a scent which had no apparent source but had some association with someone who had passed on.

- Awareness of a scent, which had no apparent source but had some association with someone who had passed on, ranked as equal fifth and penultimate reported class characteristic.

- The content of clairsentient experiences as described within the survey is comparable to experiences described in overseas studies as being either psychic or mystical.

- Not all clairsentient experiences were described by participants as generating religious or spiritual feeling.

**SECTION 5: LIGHT**

The number of participants who reported having seen an aura is shown in Table 8.
Table 8: Experience of seeing an aura

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 participants (12% of all respondents or 18% of the P Group) reported that they had observed another person’s aura on at least one occasion. Aura sighting was the least commonly reported class characteristic within the study, with 119 (88%) respondents indicating that they had never observed an aura.

The above findings suggest that aura viewing may be less common than many modern writers suggest. However, it is comparable with Hardy’s findings, in relation to 3,000 written accounts of spiritual experience, which record 135 (5%) occurrences of ‘illumination’ and 264 (9%) of ‘a particular light’.\(^{28}\) In *A Sense of Presence*, Beardsworth’s discussion of ‘Illumination of Surroundings’ (Hardy’s category of ‘illumination’) and ‘A Light or Lights’ (Hardy’s category of ‘a particular light’) suggests that aura viewing, although it is open to many interpretations, falls within the category of ‘illumination’.\(^{29}\) Frequency of aura sighting as reported by all respondents is shown below:

| On one occasion | 5 (4%) |

\(^{28}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 34.

One participant provided the following qualitative information:

M#134F37/48: It was after my sister-in-law gave birth to her baby. I went to see her in the hospital. She was glowing golden. I couldn’t stop looking at her. Her body glowed as well as the area around her body.

The above example with its description of golden light is comparable to examples of aura sighting as detailed by Walther.\(^{30}\) It also appears to provide confirmation of the role which childbirth plays in the experiences of spiritual feeling and psychic phenomena as discussed by Hardy and Grof. However, it does not support Hollenback’s conviction that the observation of another person’s aura presupposes a meditative or recollective state.\(^{31}\)

Finally, although the participant couldn’t stop looking at her sister-in-law, there is no indication that experience generated spiritual feeling within the observer. The experience described here is comparative with Beardsworth’s ‘Three exceptions [that] stand out…’\(^{32}\) (cf Chapter Two, Section Five), and again lends support the premise that it is possible to experience psychic phenomena without losing one’s observational capacities.

Further support for the position that it may be possible to observe a psychic phenomenon without becoming overawed or even attaching any particular importance to


\(^{32}\) Beardsworth, *A Sense Of Presence*, 40-44.
the experience was provided by Murdoch participant (M#94F59/69), who reported that when she told her son that a friend could see auras — ‘colours around people’s bodies,’ he replied that he did too but thought that everyone did!

In Brief

- 16 participants (12% of all respondents or 18% of the P Group) reported that they had sighted another person’s aura on at least one occasion.

The ability to see another person’s aura was the least commonly reported class characteristic.

SECTION 6: HOW OFTEN DID PARTICIPANTS MEDITATE?

Responses to Question 1: How often do you meditate? are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Meditation Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of respondents</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>79 (59%)</td>
<td>56 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>23 (56%)</td>
<td>18 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>56 (60%)</td>
<td>38 (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In total, 79 (59%) participants reported that they had meditated and 56 (41%) advised that they had never meditated. The meditation group comprised 23 men (56% of all male participants) and 56 women (60% of all female participants). However, although the majority of participants reported that they meditated, their meditation practice or praxis varied greatly (see Table 10).

Table 10: Frequency of meditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of Respondents</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>Not often</th>
<th>Fairly often</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>7 (9%)</td>
<td>47 (59%)</td>
<td>16 (20%)</td>
<td>9 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men*</td>
<td>3 (13%)</td>
<td>10 (44%)</td>
<td>6 (26%)</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women**</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
<td>37 (66%)</td>
<td>10 (18%)</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages based on the number of male meditators.
** Percentages based on number of female meditators.

As shown in Table 10, the majority of participants fell within the ‘Not often’ category. Three of those who fell within the ‘Often’ category were members of the Z Group.

Table 11 provides a breakdown of the number of meditators and non-meditators within the P and Z Groups.

Table 11: Meditation within the P and Z Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers (and percentages) of Respondents</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non meditators</td>
<td>32 (37%)</td>
<td>24 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of respondents (55) who meditated reported personal experience of psychic phenomena and accounted for 63% of the P Group. The P Group also psychic phenomena and accounted for 63% of the P Group. The P Group also included 32 non-meditators who comprised 37% of those who reported experience of psychic phenomena. The Z Group was composed of an equal number of meditators and non-meditators.

Additional comments provided by participants revealed a diversity of experience and practice, for example:

M#12F25/36: I haven’t meditated as such, but I have practiced self hypnosis which seems to be very similar. (Z Group member)

M#57F59/69: I have experimented, only once, an occasion when another person in my thoughts, plus God or goodness whichever, myself and my care for humans generally became one whole sense of being. Religions have a term for this. It seems to be to have been that for me. All is love? Maybe a brain chemical reaction. (P Group member)

M94F59/69: I do not meditate these days. Altho [sic] if I could make the time I would. Go to the gym and exercise instead! Haven’t meditated for approx 10 years. When I did I did so for approx 10 years on a daily basis. (P Group member)

M#25F25/36: It depends on how you define meditate. If in the Buddist sense, then “never”, if, in the sense of thinking carefully on the things of God as described in the Bible, then “often.”(Z Group member)
This latter example, the only one which provides a detailed methodology, presents comparison with the practice of ‘recollection’ which, Hollenback argues, best describes meditative practice as historically conducted within cenobite communities.\textsuperscript{33}

Reported psychic experiences, identified by some respondents as occurring during meditation, included out-of-body experiences, clairaudient experiences and experiencing an unseen presence.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{In Brief}

- The majority of participants (59\%) had meditated on at least one occasion but not all meditators reported an experience of psychic phenomenon.

- 32 non meditators (37\% of the \textit{P} Group) reported that they had experienced one or more incidents of psychic phenomena.

- Qualitative information provided by participants revealed a diversity of attitude towards the praxis of meditation.

\textbf{SECTION 7: SUMMARY OF RESULTS}

\textsuperscript{33} Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism - Experience, Response and Empowerment}, 94-96.
In summary, it was found that:

- Eighty-seven participants (64%) indicated that they recognised and had experienced one or more of the specifically described class characteristics.

- Some participants reported having experienced only one of the named class characteristics, others as many as 7. The mean number of class characteristics experienced by members of the *P* Group was 3.

- The distribution of class characteristics as experienced by respondents within the present study and Nattress 1 is very comparable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Murdoch Study</th>
<th>Nattress 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rank 1 Phenomena</td>
<td>Rank 1 Phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 An unseen presence</td>
<td>1 An unseen presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Clairvoyance</td>
<td>2 Clairvoyance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Recognition of having been physically touched by an unseen presence</td>
<td>3 Recognition of having been physically touched by an unseen presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Recognition of having left the body</td>
<td>4 Recognition of having left the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Clairaudience</td>
<td>5 Clairaudience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of an aroma which has no apparent source but is connected with someone deceased *</td>
<td>6 Awareness of an aroma which has no apparent source but is connected with someone deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Sighting an aura</td>
<td>7 Sighting an aura</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 As the provision of additional information was voluntary, this information was not quantifiable.
Note: phenomena are ranked in descending order of frequency.
* Equal fifth (cf Chapter Four, Section Four)

- 41% of participants advised that they had sensed an unseen presence. As with the much larger studies undertaken by Hardy and Hay and Hearld, this was the most frequently reported psukhikos phenomena.

- 25% of those who reported an unseen presence (16% of the P Group) identified the presence as a ‘figure of spiritual significance’.

- 32% of respondents (48% of the P Group) reported that they had experienced a clairvoyant experience. For a number of participants, clairvoyant experience, which involved seeing a ‘figure of spiritual significance’, generated spiritual and or religious feeling. The experience of seeing ‘a deceased person’ was not reported as having generated religious or spiritual feeling.

- 24% of respondents reported that they had left their body on at least one occasion.

- The ranking of the out-of-body experience as the fourth most frequently experienced phenomena is in keeping with larger studies of religious experience involving generic psukhikos phenomena.
• No Murdoch participant signified that an out-of-body experience had resulted in an attitudinal change towards belief in life after death or an arousal of spiritual or religious feeling.

• 17% of participants reported that they had experienced an incident of clairaudience. The experience of hearing the voice of ‘a spiritual figure’ was reported as generating spiritual or religious feeling. The experience of hearing the voice of ‘a deceased person’ was not reported as generating these responses.

• 17% participants reported awareness of a scent which had no apparent source but had some associated with someone who had passed on.

• 12% of participants reported that they had sighted another person’s aura on at least one occasion.

• 59% of participants reported that they had meditated. However, frequency of practice varied greatly.

• Meditators accounted for 63% of the P Group (those who reported experience of the designated class characteristics) and 50% of the Z Group (those who reported no experience of psukhikos phenomena).
Qualitative and quantitative information provided by participants indicated commonalities between the inherent nature of the psukhikos phenomena, as such, experienced by Murdoch participants and similar experiences discussed in overseas studies.

**Conclusion**

The comparability of this study with Nattress’ original study (Nattress 1), together with the percentages of respondents who described and experienced each psychic phenomenon or designated class characteristic, again confirms the commonality of each experience and in addressing the scientific requirement of repeatability clearly validates Wassermann’s original hypothesis that: because of the similarity of the reports, there is ground to believe in the actuality of the experiences.\(^{35}\)

This hypothesis and other findings relative to psychic phenomena, as experienced by ordinary Australians and as reported on in more religiously orientated overseas studies, together with the possible impact of meditation upon the propensity of individuals to experience psychic phenomenon will be the focus of the next (final) chapter.

\(^{35}\) Note: The rationale used to support this conclusion is detailed in Chapter Three, Research Design (Sections One and Two).
CHAPTER 5 – RECAPITULATION, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction
As stated in Chapter 1, this study had the following three aims:

4. to provide insight into the Australian experience by examining a number of reports of altered states of consciousness, generally recognised as being of a paranormal or supernatural nature, in order to test for the scientific requirement of repeatability and thereby reason to believe in the actuality or otherwise of these phenomena;

5. to consider the Australian experience, generally recognised as being secular, in the light of more directly religious investigations undertaken overseas; and

6. to determine whether or not participation in meditation has any impact upon a subject’s propensity to experience these phenomena.

Strategy developed to meet the above aims depended on the completion of two tasks. The first task involved, in so far as was possible, given the immensity of the field and constraints of time and length (as dictated by the present study) a examination of literature relative to psukhikos phenomena. The literature review required consideration of Australian texts and texts of scholarly writers from overseas countries that have an older religious history than Australia. This initial task, although extremely necessary,
might be considered as being overly focussed on theoretical hypotheses. Therefore, in an
effort to achieve balance, within this study, particular effort was made to include
findings from a number of empirical studies within the review of scholarly writers who
have contributed to the field of psukhikos studies.

The second task was an empirical one that involved qualitative and quantitative
research. It consisted of a survey which involved the matching of perceptions with a
range of class characteristics as opposed to an examination of psychic phenomena as
such. The extent to which both these tasks met the study’s immediate aims, as outlined
on the previous page, is discussed sequentially within this chapter (Chapter Five).

The first aim is considered within Section One. This Section works through the
participants’ reported experiences of psychic phenomena and considers the extent to
which these responses, supported by other empirical and theoretical studies, address the
scientific requirement of repeatability. The second aim is discussed in Section Two and
considers Australian attitudes towards personal experience of contemporary psukhikos
experiences. Participants’ reported commitment to the praxis of meditation and the
possible impact of this practice in engendering altered states of consciousness that
involve psukhikos and or mystical phenomena are discussed in Section Three. Section
Four draws attention to topics possibly suitable for further research. Conclusions
relevant to each aim are presented in the appropriate section.
SECTION 1: DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE PSYCHIC PHENOMENA?

The People
At the centre of the research project was the need to know: do people experience psychic phenomena? To answer, it was as important to hear from people who had never experienced psychic phenomena as it was from those who had. People were very important to the study. The choice of postgraduate rather than undergraduate students was deliberate because it provided access to a group of individuals whose maturity, together with a range of proven academic and research skills, had a capacity to facilitate a logical and demonstrable study of something which many people believe to be nonexistent. The result of inviting researchers to become involved yielded a rich reward of useful comment and perceptive criticism from both those who experienced psychic phenomena and those who did not. It also challenged some prejudicial misconceptions commonly held about those who experience psychic phenomena.

Firstly, although the number of women participants exceeded men, the education and social level of all participants indicates the futility of the concept that interest in psychic phenomena arises as a result of social disadvantage and is primarily to be found among the unemployed and or working class women.¹ This socio-economic hypothesis, which attempts to devalue the opinion of women and or the socially disadvantaged, is also challenged by Pupynin and Brodbeck’s study, Religious Experience in London, where

¹ Hay, Exploring Inner Space, 155, also Wooffitt, ‘Some Properties of Interjectional Organisation of Displays of Paranormal Cognition,’ 458. It was not an aim of this thesis to study the marginality hypothesis; however, having undertaken the present study within a university environment, the survey’s findings appear to indicate that psychic experiences are not confined to the under educated.
personal experiences of *psukhikos* phenomenon are cited by a number of professional people, including, a male academic, a Priest and a Company Director.²

Secondly, and as already discussed throughout this thesis, psychic and or mystical experiences are rarely validated by present day western society (see Chapters One and Two). It is not uncommon for people, who experience such altered states of consciousness, to be regarded as hysterical or delusional or even schizophrenic. The effect of this devaluation of personal experience is that many people are unwilling to confide personal experience of *psukhikos* experience. For example, despite this study’s guarantee of anonymity, one participant, who reported visionary experiences, declined the opportunity to receive an extract of the survey’s findings:

M#85F25/36: No thank you, I don’t like any of this and am uncomfortable with it. I prefer to remain anonymous. 
Thank you.

Nevertheless, eighty-seven Murdoch postgrads indicated that they recognised and had experienced one or more of the specifically described class characteristics. Some respondents reported having experienced only one variety of psychic phenomenon and others as many as seven. The mean number of class characteristics experienced by each member of the *P* Group was three. These statistics challenge the concept that

contemporary psychic experience should be undifferentially labelled as delusional or schizophrenic (cf Chapter One, Section Two and Chapter Two, Section Four).³

The Experiences

Firstly, as noted in the previous chapter (Chapter Four, Section Seven), the survey’s results are very comparable with the results of Nattress’ first study in that many participants recognised and confirmed repeatability of the designated class characteristics. Repeatability of class characteristics was further supported by comparison of this survey’s qualitative reports with those from overseas studies. These comparisons are noted in the relevant sections in the previous chapter. However, some findings within the current study were unlooked for. The almost parallel ranking of class characteristics, as reported by participants within this study and by participants within Nattress 1, was one such finding. A comparison of these results is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank*</th>
<th>Phenomena</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Phenomena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An unseen presence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>An unseen presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Clairvoyance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Clairvoyance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recognition of having been physically touched by an unseen presence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recognition of having been physically touched by an unseen presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recognition of having left the body</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recognition of having left the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clairaudience</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clairaudience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ 10 Key Facts about Schizophrenia (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 2003). This pamphlet advises that the incidence of schizophrenia is about 1 in 100.

⁴ Sourced from Nattress, The First One Hundred.
The discussion now considers the Murdoch Results in descending order of frequency (as shown above).

*An unseen presence.* As can be seen, in the Murdoch survey and in Nattress 1, the most commonly reported experience was that of ‘sensing an unseen presence’. The prevalence of this form of awareness was not surprising, despite various opinions as to the identity of the unseen presence, since the importance of this experience is noted in a number of overseas studies. For example, Hay records that in his study of Nottingham householders the ‘Largest group of experiences was those referring simply to an awareness of the presence of God.’5 Both Hardy and Beardsworth contend that, whatever the identity of the ‘unseen presence’ as postulated by the experiencer, it is this awareness of something other than the Self that expresses the transcendental.

*Clairvoyance.* The ranking of clairvoyance as the second most commonly experienced phenomena was interesting but, again, not unexpected. Repeatability of visionary experiences was quantitatively confirmed by 32% of participants. A number of participants described the experience of seeing a spiritually significant figure. Others indicated that they had seen a recently deceased near relative. The content of these

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clairvoyant experiences is replicated in studies of contemporary religious experience conducted by Hardy, Hay and Pupynin and Brodbeck.\textsuperscript{6} Furthermore, six participants reported that confirmation of their visionary experience was provided by another person who had shared the experience.

\textit{Recognition of having been physically touched by an unseen presence.} Although 33 respondents (24\% of all participants) confirmed ‘awareness of having been physically touched by an unseen presence’ as a repeatable class characteristic, repeatability of tactile sensation as the third most commonly reported class characteristic was completely unsought. (The researcher was unaware of this experience as a psychic phenomenon and it was included in the questionnaire at the request of the pilot group.) Nevertheless, the commonality of the experience of touch was further confirmed through the comparison of qualitative information provided by postgraduates with that contained in other studies (see Chapter Four, Section Four). Given the argument that the apprehension of touch is a cognitive process (as much as a response to tactile stimuli) and may provide evidence for the existence of consciousness or Self, this finding may possibly be considered as a subject for further research.

\textit{Leaving the Body.} Experience of having left the body ranked as the fourth most commonly reported experience. Confirmation of the repeatability of this class characteristic was provided by 32 respondents (slightly less than 24\% of all participants). This confirmation was qualitatively supported by voluntary additional information provided by the Australian participants and drew attention to the replicated

\textsuperscript{6} See also James, \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}. 
class characteristic of awareness of the Self as being separate from the body during an out-of-body experience. The experience of the Self observing the body as a key characteristic of out-of-body experiences is reported in overseas studies including generic surveys conducted by Hardy, Hay, and Pupynin and Brodbeck and in Tremlow, Gabbard and Jones’ specific study ‘The Out-of-Body Experience: Phenomenology’.7 Similarly within reports of the near-death experience, participants’ experience of the dark tunnel and figure of light were quantitatively and qualitatively confirmed.

The ranking of ‘recognition of having left the body’ as the fourth most frequently experienced phenomena is in keeping with studies of religious experiences which contain accounts of a variety of psychic phenomena and where the study of out-of-body and or near-death experiences are not the primary focus of research. Consequently, it is suggested that possibly concepts with regard to the number of out-of-body and near-death experiences may be derived from studies8 which are particularly focussed on these experiences rather than from generic studies.

Clairaudience. The experience of ‘having heard a voice’ tied with the experience of awareness of olfactory phenomena as the fifth most commonly reported phenomena. Confirmation of the repeatability of this class characteristic was provided by 17% of participants and further demonstrated by a number of participants who advised frequency of this experience:

7 See also Moody, Life After Life, and Blackmore, Beyond the Body.
On one occasion  8 (6%)  
Fairly often    11 (8%)  
Often        4 (3%)  

The majority of participants (39%) indicated that the experience involved hearing the voice of a deceased relative. Other participants (22%) recognised the voice as originating from a figure of spiritual significance. These quantitative findings were qualitatively confirmed through comparison of the experience of hearing a voice or voices as detailed in this study with experiences reported in overseas studies of religious experience.9

The commonality of the experience of awareness of someone who has died, either through hearing their voice, visionary experience, or recognition of the unseen presence as someone known to be deceased, were quantitatively and qualitatively reported within the Murdoch study and also noted by a number of scholarly authors. This phenomenon, which may have been overlooked in the past because of particular societal attitudes, might possibly be re-considered as an appropriate subject for detailed empiric study.

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9 Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man; Hay, Exploring Inner Space; Pupynin and Broadbeck, Religious Experience in London.
Awareness of an aroma which has no apparent source but is connected with someone deceased. As with clairvoyance the repeatability of olfactory phenomena was quantitatively confirmed by 17% of all participants. The replication of this phenomenon was further demonstrated by findings in Nattress 1 and Nattress 2 which showed that 21% and 13%, respectively, of all participants reported the class characteristic of awareness of a scent that had no material source. Confirmation by Hardy of 33 examples of ‘smell’, in addition to the ‘58 modern examples of scenting’ provided by Case and cited by Hardy, also served to validate the replication of this class characteristic.¹⁰

Qualitatively, Hardy’s one example of ‘smell’ shares a commonality with information provided by a Murdoch participant, in that, in both instances awareness of scent is associated with someone who has passed on. However, where Hardy’s example is associated with religious experience, the Murdoch participant refers to the ‘grieving process’ (see Chapter Four, Section Four - Sensing The Unseen: Awareness of an Aroma). This attitudinal or affective difference will be discussed within Section Two of this chapter.

Despite the experience of smell being listed in the chronicles of medieval Dominican convents as an illuminative and mystical experience¹¹ (or possibly on account of this listing), the reported experience of this phenomena by 23 individuals seemed almost as surprising as the results relating to tactile phenomena. It has already been noted that the

¹⁰ Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 43.

class characteristics of smell and touch (touch ranked as the third most commonly reported class characteristic) were included within the survey on the advice of the pilot group. Before completion of the pilot study, the researcher was unaware of the significance of touch and smell as psychic phenomena.

However, findings within this study appear to suggest that contemporary occurrence of both tactile and olfactory phenomena may be underestimated.\textsuperscript{12} It has been argued that philosophical analysis of ‘higher’ forms of mystical experience, at the expense of lesser forms, wrongly forms a lop-sided picture of mystical experience, and prevents appreciation of the ‘tactile, substantial and corporal dimensions’ of the experience.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, it is not unlikely that modern concentration upon more obvious forms of psychic phenomena, such as out-of-body experiences or auditory experiences, at the expense of lesser known or possibly lesser valued experiences such as clairsentient awareness of touch and smell, may have resulted or assisted in the construction of a ‘knowledge gap’ with respect to these seemingly minor forms of psukhikos phenomena.

It is possible that empiric study of ‘lower’ mystical experiences such as touch (previously noted within this chapter) and smell may prove to be of use in understanding the affect and phenomenological nature of contemporary psukhikos phenomena.

\textit{Sighting an Aura}. Experience of sighting an aura was ranked, in this study and also in Nattress 1, as the least commonly reported experience, despite assurance fostered by

\textsuperscript{12} For example, in \textit{The Spiritual Nature of Man}, 43. Hardy observes that the phenomenon of smell may be more common than the number of responses within his study suggests.
popular New Age publications, that almost anyone can be taught to see an aura. Repeatability of this class characteristic was confirmed by 12% of Murdoch participants. Confirmation of repeatability was confirmed by findings in Nattress 1 where 19% of participants reported having sighted an aura and as shown below, further demonstrated by Murdoch participants who advised frequency of this experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On one occasion</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly often</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commonality of the experience of sighting an aura was also demonstrated by Hardy, who within the first 3,000 examples of experiences that gave rise to religious feeling, recorded 135 (5%) reports of aura sighting.

Within the Murdoch study, the aura is reported as ‘glowing golden’ with both the body and its surrounding area ‘glowing’ (as discussed in Chapter Two, Section Six). Comparison of these descriptions with accounts of aura sightings as discussed by scholarly writers such as Beardsworth and Hollenbeck and consideration of the role which childbirth plays in spiritual experience as postulated by other authorities\(^\text{14}\) also provides qualitative support for the replication of this class characteristic.

\(^{13}\) Moore, ‘Mystical Experience Mystical Techniques,’ Katz, Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, 120-121.

\(^{14}\) See for example Grof, The Cosmic Game, also Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man.
Of the 135 Murdoch postgraduates who took part in this study, 87 (64%) reported that they had recognised and experienced one or more of the delineated class characteristics. Some participants reported having experienced only one class characteristic and others as many as seven. The mean number of class characteristics experienced by each member of the $P$ Group (comprised of those participants who reported experience of psychic phenomena) was 3. An overview of the survey’s key quantifiable findings is shown in Table 12, on the following page.
Table 12: Phenomena reported by all participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Phenomena Reported</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>% of P Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Awareness of an invisible presence</td>
<td>56 (41%)</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Clairvoyance</td>
<td>42 (32%)</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recognition of having been touched by an unseen presence</td>
<td>33 (24%)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recognition of having left the body</td>
<td>32 (24%)</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clairaudience</td>
<td>23 (17%)</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of an aroma which has no apparent source but is connected with someone deceased</td>
<td>23 (17%)</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sighting an aura</td>
<td>16 (12%)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consideration of the seven class characteristics, as discussed within this section and the percentages of respondents (see Table 12), who reported recognition and personal experience of these psychic phenomena, demonstrates the commonality of each experience and supports Nattress’s earlier validation of Wasermann’s hypothesis that, because of the similarity of the reports relating to the various class characteristics, there is ground to believe in the actuality of the experiences. Compliance with the scientific criterion of repeatability is further confirmed by comparison of the specific psychic phenomena, within the Australian secular survey, with those reported in the predominantly religious overseas studies and, in a like manner, supports this thesis’ contention: that despite the denial of psychic phenomena by postmodernists, such experiences are still evident within Australian society.
It could be argued, and was by one participant (M#12F25/36), that this study was ‘more an inquiry into people’s perceptions [sic] of the actuality of specific psychic phenomena’ rather than an enquiry into the actuality of ‘specific psychic phenomena.’

The best response to this constructivist point of view is provided by Huston Smith. Smith argues that if a number of pictures are taken of a room from the view of each person in the room, all of these pictures would be different. ‘But they would be photographs of the same room.’  

Natural disasters and historical events lend support to Smith’s opinion with regards to the existence of multiple views but not multiple realities. For example, it is probable Australian tourists at Bali and Phuket may have had varied perspectives when 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami swept towards them but the total commonality of the experience confirmed its actuality; and in the case of 9/11, although many multiple perspectives must also have been held, that event’s actuality is also undeniable.

It is also possible to argue that the Murdoch survey’s low response rate challenges the above hypothesis. The Murdoch survey was flawed in that, despite employing a random sampling methodology to avoid bias, out of a possible 400 responses only 135 postgraduates accepted the invitation to assist with the study. This low response rate meant that conclusions could only be based on answers provided by actual participants and precluded the possibility of making a probability statement based on the total survey population. Nattress’ original survey (Nattress 1), which had a 100% response rate,

might also be considered as being flawed because random sampling methodology was not used to select the sample group. Both surveys were flawed, but flawed in a different way, but with similar results. It is this similarity of results that supports confirmation of the hypothesis. This confirmation is further strengthened by the finding of commonalities between many experiences reported within the secular Australian surveys and findings within, the predominantly religious, overseas studies. This further evidence of fulfilment of the scientific requirement of repeatability having been met, within this study, indicates that people do experience psychic phenomena.

SECTION 2: THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

A number of authorities are of the opinion that geography and landscape influence consciousness. Jung explains:

Imagine a large section of some European nation transplanted to a strange soil and another climate. We can confidently expect this human group to undergo certain psychic and perhaps also physical changes in the course of a few generations, even without the admixture of foreign blood.

‘Many people…[in describing ecstasy] confirm each other’s honesty by giving answers similar to those of other people.

16 In the same manner as students ‘prove’ mathematical results by using differing methodologies. See also, Vinod, The Nine Secrets Of Successful Meditation, x-xii. Here, as noted in Chapter 2, Section 5, Vinod relates that confirmation of the reality of samadhi was confirmed (for him) through comparing the results of differing of meditative techniques and finding out that they all led to the same result.

If, as the above quotation (which refers to both America and Australia) suggests, geography together with societal and political influences affect consciousness, then the modern Australian experience of psychic phenomena may not be the same as that shown in more directly religious investigations undertaken overseas in older countries that have a longer monotheistic history.

Established, as a penal colony, in 1788, Australia has not, as yet, had time to develop the deep cultural and religious traditions which have developed over the centuries in older overseas countries. 18 Postmodern Australia is a pluralist nation with ‘no shared ethnicity and no deep historical traditions.’19 With twenty-five per cent of its citizens having been born overseas and Buddhism as the fastest growing religion, Placid Spearritt, Abbott of New Norcia Benedictine Community,20 considers that twentieth century migration patterns argue against Australia being identified as a western Christian country.21 A matter for current debate is the accommodation of Moslems within our secular society.22 Nevertheless, the majority of Australians are still descended from Anglo-Celtic and European stock and, despite dwindling church attendance, to a greater or lesser extent, retain an awareness of western religious traditions — if only through public institutions.

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18 It is acknowledged that historically the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia have extensive cultural and religious traditions.


20 New Norcia is Australia’s only monastery town.


It is within this context that Australian experience of psukhikos phenomena might be considered.

**Interpretation and Affect**

As shown in Section One of this chapter, the phenomenological nature of the seven varieties of psychic phenomena, perceived and reported by Murdoch participants, differs little from the same phenomena discussed in a number of more directly religious investigations undertaken overseas. Where, however, differences are to be found, in all studies is in affect and intellectual interpretation of psychic phenomena as reported by individual participants. Directly religious interpretation of psychic phenomena is to be found in studies which posed the Alister Hardy Question:

> Do you feel that you have been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God, or not, which is different from your everyday self?\(^{23}\)

Within studies, which presented the above question (cf Chapter 2, Section 1), researchers noted that certain phenomena, recognised by participants to have aroused religious or spiritual feelings, might be considered [by others] as being ‘paranormal’\(^ {24}\) or ‘purely psychic’ rather than religious.\(^ {25}\) A prerequisite for recognition (to know again) depends on access to previous knowledge about the thing to be recognised. Therefore, although the purpose of the above question was to attract reports of religious experience,

\(^{23}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 126.

\(^{24}\) Hay, *Exploring Inner Space*, 147.

\(^{25}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 44.
it also serves to demonstrate the role which learned content and previous contact with religious tradition plays in identifying an experience as being religious or mystical.

Generally speaking, recognition of psukhikos phenomena appears to be less common in studies conducted in modern western influenced cultures, where spirituality and religious tradition must compete with concepts such as naturalism\textsuperscript{26} and hyperreality.\textsuperscript{27} Inhabitants of countries, having a greater religious history than Australia, are surrounded by religious tradition in an almost subliminal manner which familiarises them with religious concepts. In these countries art, architecture and history all combine to raise awareness of religion — without a similar religious framework, it is possible that Australians may fail to recognise psychic and or mystical experiences.

In considering the above, the question arises: into what frame of reference might an ordinary person living in Australia, a highly technical country which is part of the global village but less influenced by religious tradition than other western countries, place a psukhikos experience? As discussed in Chapter Four, some Murdoch participants directly identified their psychic experience within a Christian paradigm, for example:

\begin{quote}
M\#52F18/24: I am a Christian and I occasionally feel the presence of God.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} Rao notes that ‘The paradox of naturalizing the supernatural is born out of Western intellectual tradition, which assumes a sharp dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural.’ K. Ramakrishna Rao, ‘Scholars’ paradox: Naturalize the supernatural,’ \textit{Science and Theology News}, Online Edition Available \url{http://www.stnews.org}, Accessed 8.05.2007.

\textsuperscript{27} The term, ‘hyperreality’ refers to the concept that because the western world is dominated by mass media it is difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction.
M#80F25/36: I feel the presence as being the Holy Spirit, and the feeling varies from a sense of comfort, or extreme peace or joy when it is near.

M#71M25/36: Being fairly religious my faith in God always makes me feel that I’m never alone.

Others defined their experience from within the paradigm of eastern traditions reporting ‘going through the chakras’; observing ‘the kundalini’ and:

M#116F49/58: I heard the voice of Kwan Yin, Bodhisattva of Compassion, call my name quite clearly. It was extremely refined and gentle.

For the majority, however, the experience of psychic phenomena appeared to arouse a state of secular interested awareness and or excitement and surprise. This response, seen as neurotypical by Grof, gave rise to comments such as ‘that blew me away’, ‘Weird hey.’ and ‘its amazing how many people have seen ghosts.’ Interested awareness was also discernible amongst Z Group members who had no personal experience of psychic phenomena but indicated interest in the study.

**Mapping the Australian Experience of Contemporary Psychic Experience**

Psukhikos phenomena range from being as attention gripping as the near-death experience to the subtlety of a gentle recognition of something or someone other than one’s self. Without identification they cannot be considered as being either religious or spiritual yet they give rise to religious and spiritual feeling. Although this may seem to

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28 Grof, *The Cosmic Game*.

29 Nancy Ault notes that within early Christian context the word *mystikos*, as used by St. Paul, was the equivalent of ‘the Aussie “awesome” or the American “wow,”’ Nancy Ault, ‘Envisioning a Systems-based Spirituality for Lifelong and Sustainable Christian Education,’ *Creating Lifelong Christian Education*, August 12-14, 2003.
be somewhat of an enigma, David Ranson, in *Across The Great Divide*, presents a useful model (see page 168) which may accommodate *psukhikos* phenomena as reported in this study.  

The purpose of Ranson’s diagram is to demonstrate, through a cycle of consciousness, that spirituality and religion are complementary. It is beyond the scope of this research project to properly define either spirituality or religion.

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30 David Ranson, *Across the Great Divide*, 19.
Therefore, for the purposes of this study, both religion and spirituality are considered in the sense that they are ‘something one does’ whereas a psukhikos experience is ‘something that happens or is done to one’. Psukhikos experiences are experiential rather than cognitive.

Ranson, identifies four stages of spiritual development: attending, inquiring, interpreting and acting. He explains that the first stage, which involves a recognition that something is beckoning us, consists of a ‘spiritual moment’ which occurs independently of the experiencer. If one considers the first ‘spiritual moment’ of attending, as representing, amongst other things, experiences of a psukikhos phenomenon, those Murdoch participants who displayed an attitude of surprised interest towards personal experience of such phenomenon might be considered to be in the attending stage. This attending stage would also be applicable to members of the Z Group who showed an interest in psychic phenomena. Participants, reporting interest in New Age practices such as tarot card reading or transcendental meditation, might fall within the second stage of inquiring. Others, who clearly recognised their experience as being of the Holy Spirit, would fall within the third and fourth stages of interpreting and or acting which involve development of a religious paradigm.

31 As Rolheiser explains we all ‘…have a fire that burns within us. What we do with that fire, how we channel it is our spirituality.’ Ronald Rolheiser, The Holy Longing: a Search for a Christian Spirituality (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 7.
It is important to appreciate that the stages within the cycle represent a rational rather than temporal process so that it would be possible for someone (in the manner of St. Paul) to experience all four stages as one illuminating moment. For others, each phase might be apprehended over a lengthier period of time. Furthermore, because Ranson's schema is a continuum, it would be possible for a person, at any phase of the cycle, to experience a ‘spiritual moment’ or psukhikos phenomenon. Therefore, as the cycle continues, further experiences of psukhikos phenomena would come to be understood from within a context influenced by the interpretation of earlier experiences. Although interpreting is not shown to take place before the third phase in Ranson’s schema, since recognition always assumes prior knowledge, interpretation is more likely, as Ault suggests, to have commenced in the first phase.

Given that psukhikos phenomena, are representative of ‘spiritual moments’, whether initially recognised as such or not, the four phases of attending, inquiring, interpreting and acting, mapped within the Murdoch study, are also recognisable within other studies. These four phases or stages are most clearly observable in Religious Experience in London, which provides an exact transcript of all participants’ responses.

In answering Pupynin and Brodbeck’s question: ‘Have you ever had an experience that you would call religious, spiritual, ecstatic, sacred, paranormal or mystical?’ some participants clearly identified psychic phenomena from a variety of religious paradigms

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32 Ranson, Across the Great Divide, 20-23.

33 Ault, ‘Envisioning a Systems-based Spirituality,’ 3.
commensurate with interpreting and or acting; others indicated surprise and curiosity comparable with phases three and four — attending and inquiring. The four stages: attending, inquiring, interpreting and acting, identified by Ranson as being central to spiritual development, are also discernible, although to a lesser degree in Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones' survey of out-of-body experiences and in Beardsworth’s study, A Sense of Presence. The initial stage of attending might be seen to resolve the anomaly of Beardsworth’s ‘three exceptions that stand out’ which he identified as being purely observational with ‘…no question of an affective relation between self and light’, in that the participants were reflecting upon their experiences from an observational and pre-credal stance (attention is drawn to Beardsworth’s comments on these three reports in Chapter Two, Section Six: Aura Sighting).

**Why are there so many Similarities?**

Despite differences in geography and culture, similarities in affect or response to psychic phenomena, as reported by participants in all of the above studies, should not seem to be that unusual since the same Spirit is indwelling in everyone. Spiritual moments that give rise to ‘attending’, whether they take the form of psukhikos phenomena or some other experience that is meaningful for the individual concerned, all arise from the same ground. This point was emphasised in a paper presented to the Ninth Assembly of the Uniting Church meeting in Adelaide in 2002, by Australian theologian, Keith Rowe. Rowe remarks:

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The Spirit is the presence of God active in every area of life and in every person. No part of creation, no people, no person is without the presence of the Spirit. Awareness of the Spirit within is often less apparent in a secular society which has an epistemology that only the material has actuality. For many people, the competing dichotomy of work and leisure activities leaves little time for any form of reflection. This situation is recognised by Spearritt, who explains:

God is giving himself all the time and our problem is that we don’t listen to that, we don’t observe it, we don’t take space, time away to see what actually is happening around us.

Spearritt’s comment, again, draws attention to Ranson’s Cycle of Spirituality, in which the first ‘spiritual moment’ consists of recognition that ‘something is beckoning us’. Interpretation of this beckoning, is subject to ontological biases, that have been shaped by historical, cultural and social factors. Consequently, findings within the present study, together with an appreciation of the Australian context suggest that ordinary people, in Australia, who experience or have an awareness of psychic phenomena, are more likely to be attending or inquiring than interpreting and acting.

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36 Keith Rowe, Living with the Neighbour who is Different, Christian faith in a multi religious world, (Collingwood, Australia: Uniting Education, 2002) 44. See also Edwards, Human Experience of God, 58. Here Edwards refers to ‘moments of grace’ which are similar to Ranson’s ‘spiritual moments’ and also confirms the universality of experience of the Holy Spirit.

37 Smith, Beyond the Postmodern Mind; the place of meaning in a global civilization. See also Stanislav Grof, Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science (Albany: State University of New York), 1984.

38 Spearritt, ‘God,’ interview with Pria Viswalingham in Decadence - the Meaningless of Modern Life, SBS Television 2007. It should be noted that Spearritt, who includes himself amongst those who are not fully aware of God’s presence, also believes that a longing for the ineffable is present in everyone.
Furthermore, experiences of psychic phenomena, as reported throughout this study, indicate that there are many similarities between psychic phenomena as experienced in Australia and in other western countries that have a greater religious history. This tends to suggest any differences, which may exist between the Australian experience of contemporary psukhikos phenomena and that apprehended by inhabitants of older countries that have a greater religious history, lie not in the phenomena as such; but may possibly reflect individual involvement in attending, inquiring, interpreting and acting, as mediated by personal ontology.

SECTION 3: THE PRAXIS OF MEDITATION AND PSUKHKIKOS PHENOMENA

Consideration of the literature reviewed indicates major differences between contemporary western and eastern attitudes towards meditation. Within eastern philosophical and religious traditions, it is generally accepted that the practice of meditation will sooner or later lead to mystical experiences that may or may not contain examples of psychic phenomena. These experiences are regarded as natural stages on the road towards various religious and or spiritual goals.39

39See for example, Muktananda, Meditate; Gyatso, Joyful Path of Good Fortune; and Gimello, ‘Mysticism and Meditation,’ Katz, Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis.
In the West, things are very different. Despite the existence of extensive literature both religious and secular, which provides personal accounts of psukhikos experiences that occurred during periods of meditation, and the conviction by authorities, as varied as Brunton, North and Hollenback that meditation most definitely impacts upon a subject’s propensity to experience psychic phenomena, the current attitude towards the existence of psychic phenomena, outside of films and literature, is one of general unease and scepticism if not fear. There are suggestions that perhaps meditation may not only have a potential to harm people with existing psychological problems but can also lead to frightening and uncontrollable experiences.

The possibility that altered states of consciousness, possibly involving experience of psychic phenomena, might be generated by meditation appears to provide opportunity

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40 Teresa of Avila, *The Life*. See also, Russell Targe and Jane Katra, ‘The Scientific And Spiritual Implications Of Psychic Abilities,’ *Alternate Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 7, 3, (May/June 2001) 143-149. Targe and Katra write: ‘These meditative paths include the mystic branches of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity; Kabalistic Judaism; Sufism; and many others. What is hinted at in the subtext of these teachings is that as one learns to quiet his or her mind, one is likely to encounter psychic seeming experiences or perceptions.’

41 See for example, Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body*, 208-209. Monroe describes meditative techniques which he personally used to triggered out-of-body experiences.

42 Brunton, *The Wisdom Of the Overself*, here, Brunton (like Monroe) describes techniques, which if followed faithfully, he is confident will lead to psukhikos experience.

43 North, *The Paranormal*.

44 Hollenback, *Mysticism. – Experience, Response and Empowerment*.

45 Blackmore, *Dying to Live*, Grof, *The Cosmic Game*.

for scientific validation or refutation. Meditators and scientists have cooperated in a number of tests and experiments using sophisticated electrical equipment.\(^{47}\)

EEG monitoring and single photon emission computed tomography of the human brain have provided evidence of physiological changes that occur in the brain and throughout the body during meditation. But it is argued that such evidence is inconclusive.\(^{48}\) Consequently a physiological link between altered states of consciousness and meditation has not been established. Moreover, scholarly writers such as Rao and Wilber assert that, since meditation occurs in the mind and not the brain, neurophysiological testing is inappropriate. Given the abundance of theory but little positive scientific evidence to confirm that psychic phenomena, although they might occur during meditation, are engendered by meditative practice, this study whilst not dismissing theoretical studies cannot ignore empirical data.

**The Murdoch Study**

Chapter Two, Section Two posed the question: *Is Meditation a Trigger for psukhikos phenomena?* It was anticipated that empiric research would go some way towards answering this question. Hopefully, input from Murdoch participants might indicate whether or not meditation had, for them, in some sense triggered, or possibly more appropriately, presented conditions conducive for the experience of a ‘spiritual moment’ that included some form of contemporary psychic phenomena.

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\(^{47}\) Fenwick, ‘Meditation and the EEG,’ also Tart, ‘A Psychophysiological Study of Out of Body Experiences’.
Qualitative information provided by participants revealed a diversity of attitudes towards engaging in meditation with only 11% reporting that it was a regular practice. The majority of respondents 59% reported irregular practice (the ‘not often’ category) and for the remainder practice fell within the ‘fairly often’(20%) and ‘once’ (9%) categories. Participants’ attitudes towards meditation and frequency of personal practice possibly reflect Spearritt’s opinion that people do not ‘take space, time away to see what is happening around [them]’. Ambivalence towards reflective practice may also confirm Tart’s belief that for most westerners, ‘self observation’ is a discomforting experience.

Correlation of reported psychic experience with meditative practice revealed a blend of meditators and non-meditators within the P and Z Groups. Of the 79 respondents who meditated, 55 reported personal experience of psychic phenomena and accounted for 63% of the P Group. The P Group also included 32 non-meditators comprising 37% of those who reported experience of psychic phenomena. On the other hand, the Z Group was composed of an equal number of meditators and non-meditators.

As the above findings show, the number of non-meditating respondents who reported experiencing one or more of the designated class characteristics, as opposed to those

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48 Blackmore, Consciousness, An Introduction; also Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis, Religion and the Individual.


50 Tart, ‘Self Observation,’ Thinking Allowed.
who reported meditation practice but did not experience any form of psychic experience, appears to suggest that such experiences are not dependent upon the praxis of meditation. This assumption is supported by Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones’ finding that out of 399 reported instances of out-of-body experiences only 88 (27%) participants reported meditation as a pre-existing condition.\(^{51}\) In other empiric studies conducted by Hardy (\textit{The Spiritual Nature Of Man}), Hay (\textit{Exploring Inner Space}), and Pupynin and Brodbeck (\textit{Religious Experience in London}) reports of spontaneous \textit{psukhikos} experiences also appear to predominate. However, since meditative practice was not a subject of inquiry in these religiously orientated studies, no quantifiable data are available.

Nevertheless, all of these findings whilst affirming that \textit{psukhikos} experiences may occur naturally within human beings, do not rule out the possibility that such experiences may not also be stimulated or enhanced through the praxis of meditation. It would seem that additional empiric and longitudinal research will be necessary if we are to make the casual attribution: Is meditation a trigger for \textit{psukhikos} phenomena?

\textbf{SECTION 4: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH}

Demonstration of the actuality of specific psychic phenomena by means of a medical diagnostic model, which satisfies the scientific requirement of repeatability, provides

\(^{51}\) Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones, \textit{The Out-Of-Body Experience: Phenomenology}, 287.
opportunities for validation of this study and further investigation of contemporary psychic experience. For example, the Murdoch survey’s contention, that people do experience psychic phenomena, could be validated by obtaining a random sample of possible participants either through the electoral roll or by approaching another academic institution. However, in view of the reluctance of people to disclose such personal experience, rather than using a postal questionnaire, it is suggested that a greater response might be elicited if interviews were conducted through personal one to one interviews.

By means of one to one interviews and an alternate questionnaire, focussing on a particular class characteristic, further insight might be obtained about particular phenomena such as ‘awareness of an unseen presence’. Awareness of an unseen presence, often referred to as ‘a sense of presence’\(^\text{52}\) was the most frequently reported phenomena within the Australian surveys and also studies conducted by Hardy\(^\text{53}\) and Hay.\(^\text{54}\) The data associated with this psukhikos experience indicates it is often the precursor to a ‘spiritual moment’\(^\text{55}\) or an ‘experience of grace.’\(^\text{56}\)

Other areas possibly worthy of specific investigation include tactile and olfactory phenomena. Awareness of tactile sensation has been a subject of neurological research,

\(^{52}\)Beardsworth, *A Sense Of Presence.*

\(^{53}\)Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man.*

\(^{54}\)Hay, *Exploring Inner Space.*

\(^{55}\)Ranson, *Across the Great Divide,* 19.

\(^{56}\)Edwards Human Experience of God, 58.
the results of which have stimulated considerable debate as to the actuality of consciousness. However, neither tactile nor olfactory phenomena, which possibly reflect inner awareness without sensory input, have been the subject of detailed qualitative and quantitative research.

Perception of deceased persons, within the Australian reports of clairvoyant, clairaudient and clairsentient experiences, was an unlooked for phenomena. However, since the empirical data show that is not an uncommon experience, formal research on this topic may also be appropriate.

With the exception of the out-of-body experience and, its often accompanying, near-death experience, the possible spiritual implications of contemporary psychic experience have generally not been acknowledged. Findings within this thesis suggest scientific empiricism has a potential to provide a window on altered states of consciousness and thereby possibly facilitate greater accommodation of the non-material in our secular society. Accordingly, there is potential for further exploration of the societal effect, religious or otherwise, of contemporary psychic phenomena.

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AN INQUIRY INTO THE ACTUALITY OF SPECIFIC PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

Dear Fellow Postgraduate

I am a MPhil candidate at Murdoch University, under the supervision of Dr Nancy Ault, investigating the nature and frequency of a range of altered states of consciousness, commonly recognised as psychic phenomena, among adults in Australia.

Please assist with this research by taking time to complete the following questionnaire. Even if you have never experienced any of the phenomena, your response is still very valid and vital to an unbiased analysis. If you are not familiar with some of the terms used in the questionnaire, you may find the included glossary of key terms helpful.

Please feel free to be as frank as you wish. The questionnaire will be completely anonymous and all personal details will remain confidential. I would be delighted to receive any additional information which you may care to submit. This may be submitted together with your response (attach extra paper if needed) or you may wish to contact me via clogherau@yahoo.com.au Please return the completed questionnaire, in the pre-paid envelope provided.

If you would like to receive a summary of the report’s findings, please complete the tear off form on the final page of the questionnaire and forward it in the second pre-paid envelope, labeled survey summary, which will be opened separately, to ensure your anonymity.

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on ☎️ 9360 6677.

Thank you for taking time to complete the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely
GLOSSARY

The following glossary is by no means exhaustive but hopefully it will assist in ‘comparing apples with apples’.

OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE (OBE): An OBE occurs when a person is able to observe their body and its surrounds from an external view point; literally, as it were, to step outside their own body. It has been reported to occur spontaneously, as a result of meditation or to be deliberately induced for other purposes.

NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE (NDE): A NDE may be considered to be an OBE plus! The NDE occurs as a result of a life threatening experience e.g. serious illness, accident etc. People who have had NDEs report that after observing their own body and its surrounds (including other persons who were in the vicinity at that time) they have the a feeling of peace, the sensation of travelling very quickly through a dark tunnel, a review of the life just lived and a movement towards, or entrance into, all embracing light.

CLAIRVOYANCE: For the purposes of this survey Clairvoyance can be considered to be the perception of things beyond the natural range of the senses. It may involve:

- seeing something seen within the inner eye (in the mind’s eye); or
- the perception of an actual external vision.

CLAIRAUDIENCE: Clairaudience can be considered to be the ability to hear things beyond the normal range of the senses. It may involve:

- hearing a voice internally;
- hearing an actual voice; and sometimes
- recognition of the voice.

CLAIRSENTIENCE: Clairsentience is a form of psychic smelling or feeling something or someone. It may take the form of:

- sensing the presence of an unseen person;
- feeling that one is actually being touched physically be someone or something; or
- experiencing the smell of something such as tobacco or perfume which may relate to something or someone that has or had a particular meaning to you

AURAS: The aura has been historically pictured in religious paintings as a halo. In the early 1900s Dr Walter Kilner discovered that by looking through a glass stained with dicyanin dye he could see the aura around a human body. He described 3 zones around the body: (1) a quarter inch dark layer closest to the skin, surrounded by (2) a more vaporous layer an inch wide streaming perpendicularly from the body and (3) further out a delicate exterior luminosity with indefinite contours about six inches across.
Additional work carried out in Russia (by Semyon Kirlian in the 1930s and Dr Mikhail Gaikin in 1953) revealed a wide range of other colours in the human aura.
Inquiry Into The Actuality Of Specific Psychic Phenomena

1. How often do you meditate? *(Please tick one box)*
   - Never ☐
   - Once only ☐
   - Not often ☐
   - Fairly Often ☐
   - Often ☐

2. Have you ever had an experience where you felt that you had left your body?
   - Never ☐ *(Go to Q5)*
   - On one occasion ☐
   - Fairly Often ☐
   - Often ☐

3. Taking one specific experience as an example, how would you describe that experience?
   - As an Out of Body Experience *(Please see glossary)* ☐
   - As a Near Death Experience *(Please see glossary)* ☐

   *The space below is provided for any other information you would like to share:*

4. Did the experience occur? *(Please tick one box)*
   - Spontaneously ☐
   - During meditation ☐
   - As the result of a life threatening situation ☐

   *The space below is provided for any other information you would like to share:*
5. Have you ever had a clairvoyant experience? *(Please see glossary)*

- Never □ *(Go to Q10)*
- On one occasion □
- Fairly Often □
- Often □

6. Taking **one** specific experience as an example, which best describes what you saw? *(Please tick one Box)*

- A person □ *(Go to Q7)*
- An object □ *(Go to Q8)*

*The space below is provided for any other information you would like to share:*

7. Which of the following best describes that person? *(Tick as many boxes as apply)*

- Deceased □
- Not deceased □
- Someone closely related to you □
- A stranger □
- A figure of spiritual significance □

*The space below is provided for any other information you would like to share:*

8. In what way did you experience the person/object /other? *(Please tick one box)*

- As an actual external vision □
- In your mind’s eye □
- Not sure □
9. Did anyone with you at that time, have the same experience ie see the same thing?

   Yes □
   No □

10. Have you ever had a clairaudient experience - heard a voice?
    (Please tick one box)

   Never □ (Go to Q13)
   On one occasion □
   Fairly Often □
   Often □

11. Taking one experience as an example of clairaudience, which of the following best describes the occurrence? (Please tick as many boxes as apply).

   A voice heard internally ‘in the mind’s eye’ □
   You heard an actual voice □

   The space below is provided for any other information you would like to share:

12. Which of the following best describes the voice? (Tick as many boxes as apply)

   A deceased person □
   A person not deceased □
   Someone closely related to you □
   A stranger □
   A figure of spiritual significance □

   The space below is provided for any other information you would like to share:
13. Have you ever experienced a strong feeling that an invisible presence was near you?

Never ☐ (Go to Q15)
On one occasion ☐
Fairly Often ☐
Often ☐

14. Taking **one** specific experience of the above occurrence as an example, which of the following best describes this presence? *(Tick as many boxes as apply)*

A deceased person ☐
A person not deceased ☐
Someone closely related to you ☐
A stranger ☐
A figure of spiritual significance ☐

*The space below is provided for any other information you would like to share:*

15. Which of the following phenomena have you experienced? *(Tick as many boxes as apply)*

The feeling of being touched physically by someone or something? ☐
Smelt a scent such as a favourite perfume or tobacco that you associate with someone who had ‘passed on’? ☐

16. Have you ever observed another person’s aura? *(Please see glossary)*

Never ☐
On one occasion ☐
Fairly Often ☐
Often ☐
17. The following personal information is required to assist analysis.

Your Gender: Female ☐ Male ☐

Which age bracket best describes you?

18-24 ☐ 25-36 ☒ 37-48 ☐ 49-58 ☐ 59-69 ☐ 70+ ☐

Please Remember to return the completed questionnaire, in the reply-paid envelope by

________________________________________________________________________

If you would like to receive a summary of the survey’s findings, please complete the following

Name:______________________________________________________________
Address:_____________________________________________________________
Post Code: __________________________________________________________

clogherau@yahoo.com.au

or

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