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## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**A revised epistemology for an understanding of spirit release therapy developed in accordance with the conceptual framework of F. W. H. Myers**

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**A REVISED EPISTEMOLOGY FOR AN UNDERSTANDING  
OF SPIRIT RELEASE THERAPY DEVELOPED IN  
ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK  
OF F.W.H. MYERS**

By

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

In this thesis I argue the case for a revised epistemology that will enable medical practice to understand more fully the relevance and validity of *Spirit Release Therapy* (SRT), as a clinical approach to releasing alleged discarnate spirits from the living, in its application for the treatment of a wide range of psychological and physiological disorders.

SRT is a modern clinical alternative to religious exorcism for the release of spirit entities from patients that has been emerging in psychiatry and clinical psychology since the early part of the twentieth century, especially in North and South America and in Western Europe. In contrast to positivist scientific assumptions that spirits are created in the minds of the superstitious or the mentally ill, SRT finds earthbound spirits of the deceased that are found to be *attached* in some way to the living. It treats these spirits with equal compassion to those presenting patients who are unwilling hosts to them. This compassionate approach of SRT contrasts with that of the Roman Catholic tradition which casts out spirits deemed to be 'evil' using its Rite of Exorcism. The general reaction from modern medicine to the proposition that spirits exist, is to reject it because there is no scientific framework that can accommodate it. Although there is no consensus within the Christian tradition that affirms the existence of autonomous spirits (with many believing in the reality of spirits and evil as symbolic and not metaphysical truths), the Catholic tradition relies on faith and non-rational beliefs in its justification for the eradication of what it consequently regards as inherently diabolical entities.

There is therefore a dichotomy between modern medicine and religious belief, but I shall argue that the gulf between these opposing positions can be bridged through an epistemological approach that is both grounded in subjective experience and validated by scientific enquiry. In this thesis I examine the relevance of this epistemological approach to the reality of spirit possession (and the practical procedures adopted in SRT for the possible dispossession of spirits) through an analysis of the conceptual framework and scientific methods of Frederic Myers (1843-1901), the 19<sup>th</sup> century researcher and co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research.

In Part I of this thesis I place spirit possession in a Western social and cultural context where I discuss the contemporary attitudes to spirit possession, which are themselves expressed and reinforced by an epistemology that is grounded in the empiricism of the

social sciences, anthropology, psychiatry and the scientific study of beliefs. Part II explains Myers' 19<sup>th</sup> century methods and theories that challenge positivistic empiricism and Part III seeks to update these methods and theories within a 21<sup>st</sup> century context where they are applied to various enigmatic case studies that challenge modern psychiatry and clinical psychology. I have adopted this structure in order first to highlight some of the deficiencies of current scientific methods in making sense of spirit possession and second to raise important questions that remain unanswered by mainstream psychology, thereby further illuminating the limitations of the epistemological grounding of this discipline.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Possession, Exorcism and Spirit Release Therapy**

#### ***Bridging the gap between religious experience and scientific enquiry and the need for a revised epistemology***

This thesis explores the contribution made by Frederic Myers to our understanding of one of the most profound of spiritual experiences, the possession of an individual by a spirit entity that can be perceived as benevolent or malign, creative or destructive, healthy or unhealthy. *Spirit Release Therapy* (SRT), which I explain more fully below, can be used as a method of intervention to relieve individuals of the influence of unhealthy spirit influences that are often attributed to the earthbound spirits of the deceased. It is comprised of an eclectic mix of secular and spiritual concepts and procedures that are not dependent on traditional psychiatric models of mental health care, or religious exorcism, but are complimentary to them. The experience of SRT therapists, together with the theoretical concepts and experimental methods of Frederic W.H. Myers, provide spirit possession and exorcism with a dimension that previous anthropological, theological and medical methods and theories lack.

In Part I of this thesis I will highlight the general problems that Western society has with the concept of spirit possession, and where sociological and observation-led ethnographic research reinforce society's tendency to perceive possession as a remnant of outmoded superstitious beliefs. I will examine the methodologies currently used by the social sciences and psychological research into beliefs in the paranormal to outline the epistemological foundations that underpin contemporary research methods, and to highlight some of their deficiencies.

In Part II, I introduce Myers' expanded conceptual framework and experimental methods that address those deficiencies identified in Part I. Part III applies the conceptualisations, methods and theories of Myers, together with the findings of contemporary science into the nature of consciousness and psi phenomena to the problem of spirit possession.

### **Perceptual Differences between Science and Religion**

Different scientific disciplines approach the study of the natural world from an epistemological foundation that is grounded in the empirical data presented to them. This gives rise to their respective perspectives, or world-views. Similarly, different religious

traditions and practices have their own epistemologies that are grounded more in a belief or faith, or very often in subjective experiences. Therefore, it may be concluded that the topics of possession and exorcism will elicit different responses that are dependent on epistemology and general perceptions. The positivistic sciences that study the physical world we inhabit are not able to acknowledge unseen determinants of human behaviour such as *volition* (that is deliberate *intention* or the exercising of *free will*), and yet there are people who believe in the existence of an alternate reality or a transcendent realm that is beyond the physical space-time continuum. There is a perceptual schism between the monism<sup>1</sup> of mechanistic science and the dualism<sup>2</sup> of religious faith that has fluctuated in its divergence and convergence since the emergence of the scientific enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Scientific enquiry claims to be objective, and yet, as individuals we have subjective experiences that are difficult to quantify objectively.

However, there are those individuals who have a religious faith in the transcendent and who are also scientists, and there are other scientists such as physicist Fritjof Capra (1992), professor of astrophysics Victor Mansfield (2002) and cellular biologist Bruce Lipton (2010) (to name but a few) who have had personal mystical, spiritual or religious experiences that have radically altered their beliefs and given them knowledge of the transcendent. Personal experience has its impact on the beliefs and perceptions of scientists just as much as non-scientists and a recurring theme that has emerged from my research is the importance of personal experience in explaining the concept of possession and how it is perceived.

In this thesis I will show that there is growing evidence that the chasm between scientific knowledge and religious belief is closing, and the proposition for a 'Science of Religions' put forward by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902, p. 489) seems to be coming to fruition.

Contemporary enquiry into the nature of consciousness has matured into a recognised science (Radin, 1997, 2006; Targ, 2004; Tart, 2000), but the general impression gained from its enquiry is that investigators believe they are discovering something new. What they are discovering is not new at all, but has its origins in a concept that is common to all religious and spiritual traditions throughout history. Religious mystics have been teaching us for

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<sup>1</sup> Monism is the idea that the universe is comprised only of matter.

<sup>2</sup> Dualism is the idea that mind and matter are different.

[http://www.philosophyonline.co.uk/pom/pom\\_monism\\_and\\_dualism.htm](http://www.philosophyonline.co.uk/pom/pom_monism_and_dualism.htm)

Accessed on 20/01/2012



centuries that there is a realm beyond the physical, and Mr Frederic W.H. Myers, together with his colleagues at the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), set out in the late nineteenth century to prove its existence by using those scientific methods that were available to them at that time. This thesis sets out to examine those theories and methods of Myers that have been lost, ignored, derided or forgotten by modern science, and resituate them in their proper place: in the scientific enquiry into the spiritual nature of man and the fundamental nature of the human mind.

Psychiatry historian Henri Ellenberger (1970) has argued that the fashions of scientific enquiry are dependent on the socio-political climate that prevails at the time that new discoveries are made. It could further be argued that there is a tension between the need for science to maintain its rigid epistemological foundations that are grounded in the consensus of materialistic positivism and the need for its assumptions and empirical methods to be challenged. Myers' research challenged the positivistic epistemology of 19<sup>th</sup> century science, but he was working against a tide that he was unable to overcome at that time. Whether the socio-political climate is conducive to paradigm shifts in scientific enquiry or not, should not in my view, detract from the objectivity of science. There is scientific evidence to support the hypothesis that consciousness survives the death of the body, that consciousness is fundamental, and that there is a constant interactive relationship between the two worlds of the conscious awareness and the spiritual. This thesis brings this scientific evidence into the controversial arena of spirit possession and mental health.

The pragmatic clinical approach and positive therapeutic outcomes of *Spirit Release Therapy* supported and reinforced by the conceptual framework of Frederic Myers can help us to understand more fully the difficult relationship between the spiritual and the physical domains of human experience.

It is with this understanding that the emergent spiritual psychiatry now being practised by an increasing number of psychiatrists (Cook, Powell & Sims, 2009; Fenwick, 2009; Powell & MacKenna, 2009; Sims & Cook, 2009; Clarke, 2008; 2010) can be validated and incorporated into a viable and acceptable scientific conceptual framework that can make better sense of spirit possession. I shall show how the concepts of SRT and Myers can be integrated into a scientific model that incorporates both the physical and the non-physical spiritual mind.

## What is Possession and Exorcism?

In contrast to the monism of mechanistic science, every culture and religious belief system throughout history has its traditional beliefs of spirit possession in some form or other with corresponding rituals for the release or exorcism of spirit entities (Carus, 1900; Lewis, 2003). Christianity, for instance, has its angels, devils and demons (although the majority of modern so-called Christians probably do not believe they really exist), Islam has its *Jinns* and the Hindus have a variety of evil spirits.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see ‘possession’ is an imprecise term with a variety of definitions. It can mean being possessed by a spirit of either good or evil intent or being possessed by an idea that is particularly compelling or obsessive, as we find in the common expression: ‘What possessed him to do that?’ Where obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is the psychiatric term for irrational, ritualistic behaviour (APA, 2004, p. 456), *obsession* was the term adopted in Catholic theology to differentiate between the somnambulist form of possession, where the subject loses consciousness of his self, and the milder, lucid form of spirit influence where there is no such loss (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 14). Yet another form of possession is where one person has such a strong emotional attachment to another to the degree that they have no free will. See Crabtree (1985, pp.166-170) for an example of possession by family members, and for examples of possession by a group-mind (ibid, pp.171-179). A possessor need not be in close proximity to the possessed for their influence and spiritual presence to be no less powerful (Baldwin, 1995, p. 255).

The modern use of the word *possessed* within the context of a compelling, irrational motivation is a residual use left over from the medieval period when it was commonly thought that most, if not all, destructive behaviour was caused by possession or influence from the devil: ‘Possession was an idiom that was a part of the cultural vocabulary of early modern people’ (Sluhovsky, 2007, p.15).

A primary theme of this thesis is the difficulty in discernment<sup>4</sup> between autogenic (that is self-created) thought-forms, pseudo (imagined) possession, and authentic possession or spirit influence. Within the realm of abnormal psychology the *autogenic thought form* is a concept that Pierre Janet ascribed as the ‘fixed idea’ (Janet, 1976, p. 596), which is an essential component in his *dissociation theory* of hysteria. Thus Janet writes:

---

<sup>3</sup> There is a vast literature on the phenomenology of spirit possession in all its forms, and the prospect of a full review of all the literature is far beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Discernment is a term that originates in and is specifically applied to the differentiation between different kinds of spirits. See Sluhovsky (2007), Baglio (2009) and Caciola (2003).

Hypothetically we may say that such fixed ideas are dangerous because they are no longer under the control of the personality, because they belong to a group of phenomena which have passed beyond the dominion of the conscious will (ibid, p. 596).

It is unfortunate that there is no academic forum (yet) where modern practitioners of SRT can present their findings for peer review, but one of the most common forms of possession being experienced by individuals is that of the self-created thought form that can take on demonic characteristics. Pierre Janet's case of 'Achille' (1894) is one of those cases that can provide a model for understanding the concept of the self-created demon. Janet's case of Achille provides a foundation for those clinicians who specialise in the treatment of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), (which was formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder [MPD]), and reinforces the theory that all cases of possession are autogenic. Once we have understood the concept of possession within the scientific framework of Myers, we will be in a position to demonstrate that not all cases of possession are autogenic, and to assume that they are can result in the misdiagnoses of chronic mental illnesses that are resistant to traditional psychiatric interventions. Janet's case of Achille provides us with an excellent example of how to deal with the demon, whether it is autogenic or otherwise. Janet used hypnosis to cure his patient and rid him of his demon.<sup>5</sup> Hypnosis is at the very core of Myers' conceptual framework, and, as I shall elucidate in Chapter 7, hypnosis is a method of exploration, experimentation and clinical intervention that bridges scientific, psychological and religious interpretations of spirit phenomenology.

The dangers of misdiagnosis are important considerations from opposite directions. In Chapter 1, I cite extreme examples where care-givers who believed that children were possessed were found guilty of child-abuse and murder. From 2002 to 2009 questions arising from cases of serious child abuse became topical in the UK news media (La Fontaine, 2009). The failings of Social Services were in the spotlight as cases of children being murdered by their primary caregivers were brought to trial. Eight-year-old Victoria Climbié was murdered in 2000 and eight-year-old Child-B suffered serious abuse in 2005 (Barker, 2009, p. 2). Although not specifically reported in the news media as cases of suspected spirit possession, these two cases were the consequence of beliefs that children can be possessed by evil spirits and subsequently have the power to inflict harm and misfortune

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<sup>5</sup> It may be contested that Achille's demon could have been either autogenic or a real possessing entity, and although this case would be of interest for discussion by itself, it is representative of the dilemma facing clinicians and exorcists that I explore in Chapter 12.

on others. Exorcism was seen by caregivers as the *cure* to expel the offending spirits, often by violent means (La Fontaine, 2009, p. 117).

There is a danger that the news media are inclined towards pointing the finger of blame at Social Services for their failure to protect children and criminalizing the abusive caregivers - thereby taking any focus away from the possibility that there is something that needs to be addressed within the social and religious belief systems of the perpetrators. La Fontaine's book, *The Devil's Children*, brings these issues into sharp focus and it is for this same reason that this thesis looks at possession and exorcism in Chapter 1 from a social science and Western cultural perspective. The approach I have adopted is, I believe, an essential precursor to examining the work of Myers and its significance in understanding *Spirit Release Therapy* as a more effective social and therapeutic tool for mental health.

Where misguided beliefs in possession and exorcism on the part of both caregivers and public services could continue to result in inappropriate methods of intervention, an alternative understanding of the concept of spirit possession according to the scientific framework of F.W.H. Myers will enable more appropriate methods of intervention to be applied.

A sudden increase in reported cases of possession in the United States during the 1970s and 80s was deemed the result of William Blatty's film *The Exorcist* (1973) and his book of the same name (1971). Cultural anthropologist Michael Cuneo (2001) explored the impact on North American society of Blatty's work and witnessed more than fifty exorcisms in his investigation. Cuneo's findings, which are also examined in Chapter 1, offer a socio/cultural perspective on possession and exorcism, and make an important contribution to our understanding of the impact of the entertainment industry and news media reporting on such controversial and misunderstood topics.

## **Treatment Approaches to Spirit Possession**

Broadly speaking, there are three basic methods that have been traditionally used for treatment of the possessed. The first consists of trying to expel the spirit physically, by such means as bleeding, beating, or whipping the patient (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 13). It is this first method that was adopted by the caregivers in those cases cited by La Fontaine *et al* (2009). The second method is to transfer the offending spirit to another body, usually an animal.<sup>6</sup> The third form, and arguably the 'most frequently applied' (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 13) is

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<sup>6</sup> As we see in the biblical example of Christ transferring devils to a herd of swine (Mathew, 8:32).

religious *exorcism*, which is driving the spirit out by conjurations, prayer and ritual. It was this third method that Cuneo sought to examine.

'Exorcism'<sup>7</sup> is no less an imprecise term than 'possession'. It has been used for any prayerful act by a priest with the intention of releasing a demonic entity from a person or place (Baglio, 2009, p. 35). The same word has been used for a procedure lasting minutes and for one lasting weeks in which priests and others are involved in intense interaction with a person or place thought to be possessed or harassed by evil spirits.<sup>8</sup>

Modern Christian ministry recognises the problems created by inappropriate beliefs in possession or suspicions that someone is experiencing some kind of paranormal activity and in England there is a national information infrastructure in place that is administered at diocesan level (Perry, 1987). According to Perry, the term 'deliverance' is adopted by the Anglican Church in preference to exorcism, and those who are experiencing disturbing psychic or spiritual phenomena are advised by Perry to contact their local parish priest, who will present their case to the specialist spiritual investigation team, which comprises deliverance ministers, psychiatrists and psychic investigators who will be able to advise a course of action depending on whether the disturbance is deemed to be caused by mental illness, paranormal activity or genuine spirit manifestation.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the above mentioned church initiatives, SRT is emerging as a collection of methods and techniques used by an increasing number of practitioners in a variety of professional therapeutic disciplines.

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<sup>7</sup> Derived from the Greek imperative *exo* to 'get out'.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of the first type can be found in eye witness accounts of the exorcisms performed by highly successful exorcists such as Father Johann Gassner in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany (Midelfort, 2005), and in *The Rite* (Baglio, 2009, p. 222) where the daily prayers of contemporary exorcists are applied in modern Rome. References to accounts of prolonged exorcisms may be found, amongst others, in *Possession and Exorcism* (Naegeli-Osjord, 1988), in *Multiple Man* (Crabtree, 1985), and *Glimpses of the Devil* (Peck, 2005). Detailed eye-witness accounts of these types of exorcism in modern times are cited in Chapter 3 in order to highlight the extraordinary physical phenomena that challenge the known laws of physics, and to place them into context with modern SRT methods of dealing with less dramatic forms of spirit possession.

<sup>9</sup> Advice may be found on the website Deliverance Ministry run by Bishop Dominic Walker of the Guild of St. Raphael: <http://www.guild-of-st-raphael.org.uk/Deliverance%20Ministry.htm> (accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2010).

## What is Spirit Release Therapy (SRT)?<sup>10</sup>

*Spirit Release Therapy* is a term that is used by some practitioners, but not all, to describe a treatment modality that has evolved from the pioneering clinical experience of medical practitioners, psychiatrists and clinical psychologists who have encountered patients with illnesses that have not responded to traditional psychotherapy or psychiatric methods. Such pioneers have treated them successfully using their own *intuition* (described below) and by responding to the expressed needs of the patient and those spirit entities that are encountered in dialogue, rather than treating them according to predetermined theories and the beliefs and assumptions of the therapist. SRT could therefore be described as a person centred, or perhaps a 'soul' centred therapy (Zinser, 2010).

Each practitioner of SRT has his or her own definition of their practice, but in order to introduce Spirit Release Therapy here I shall quote the definition offered by William Baldwin who writes:

Spirit Releasement Therapy comes under the broad category of Transpersonal Psychology methods, and is so named because it aims to *release* from the client / patient / host, any disembodied consciousness of any sort (Baldwin, 1995, p. 207).

Baldwin coined the term 'releasement' instead of 'release' to differentiate the releasing of spirits from other forms of release, but the term has not generally been adopted by other practitioners because it is seen as an unnecessary complication in the meaning of the term.

Baldwin's definition is a simple one, but it incorporates a very wide diversity of spirit entities with the term 'disembodied consciousness of any sort', and it is part of the SRT practitioner's art and skill to uncover the type of spirit (or spirits) that are affecting the patient.<sup>11</sup> In Baldwin's definition he uses the word 'consciousness' that implies a direct relationship between spirit and consciousness. A spirit can therefore be referred to as a 'disembodied consciousness'. It is within the conceptual framework of Myers that the relationship between consciousness and spirit is explored in more detail in Parts II and III of this thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to Spirit Release Therapy, SRT is also used as an abbreviation for 'Spirit Response Therapy', which was developed by Robert Detzler (1999) as a means of healing in the spiritual domain by use of a dowsing pendulum. In this thesis the abbreviation 'SRT' is used primarily for Spirit Release *Therapy*, although it can be taken to refer to either interpretation because they are both used to release spirits from patients/clients. For a history of *Spirit Response Therapy* see [http://www.spiritualresponse.com/?page\\_id=148](http://www.spiritualresponse.com/?page_id=148). (Accessed on 2/7/11).

<sup>11</sup> The term 'patient' is more likely to be used by medical practitioners whereas the term 'client' may be preferred by non-medical therapists.

## ***Definitions of Autonomous Spirit Entities***

SRT practitioners who define spirit entities according to their orientation can be divided loosely into three main groups: those practitioners who release spirit entities from places, such as Archie Lawrie (2003; 2005) of the Scottish Society for Psychical Research (SSPR), and Linda Williamson (2006), and those who release spirits from people such as Carl Wickland (1924), Hans Naegeli-Osjord (1988) and William Baldwin (1995). Others, represented by the man-and-wife team of T & N O'Sullivan (1999), refer to themselves as 'soul rescuers' who have learned to tread the path of the shaman where they 'communicate with the spirits and understand the rules of co-existence with the other world' (O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 1999, xix). Archie Lawrie could be regarded by many as a 'ghost' hunter, but in contrast to other investigators of the 'paranormal' he enlists the aid of a medium to locate and communicate with those restless spirits that may be referred to as ghosts. Linda Williamson, in her book *Ghosts and Earthbound Spirits* (2006) remarks that mediums who are either aware of, or communicate with spirits are not able to arrive at a consensus on how ghosts or spirits are defined. Ghosts are generally deemed to be those spirits that inhabit houses, whilst others prefer to call them 'earthbound spirits' (Williamson, 2006, 11), and Spiritualists<sup>12</sup> refer to those they communicate with as 'spirits' (ibid). Williamson makes the distinction between spirits that exist in a spiritual domain, or spirit-world such as 'guides' and the spirits of the deceased and those who remain 'earthbound' for a variety of reasons. Williamson asserts that 'evil' spirits do exist, but in her own experience poltergeists are not evil but 'lost and frustrated' earthbound souls that are trying to attract attention to themselves (ibid. p.11).

The term 'disembodied consciousness of any sort', used by Baldwin, can include the spirits of deceased persons, non-human destructive entities that may commonly be referred to in religious language as 'demons' (often referred to as Dark Force Entities or 'DFE's), negative thought forms created by the host or other living persons, intergenerational curses, elementals, alien life forms and others less clearly defined (Baldwin 1995). Even the discarnate spirits of foetuses that have been terminated can be encountered, and Winafred Lucas (2000) describes techniques for communicating with the spirit of the unborn child and negotiating its return to the spirit world in preference to being forced out with physical abortion, which is traumatic for the spirit of the foetus and may cause it to remain earthbound and attached to the mother (ibid, pp.257-316).

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<sup>12</sup>I use the term 'Spiritualists,' with a capital S, in connection with those who regard Spiritualism as a religion.

Whether these disembodied conscious forms actually exist in material or metaphysical form or whether they are created from the imagination is a subject of debate even between SRT practitioners (Hunter 2005, pp.156-157). However, the aim of this thesis is to encourage the academic study SRT and its contribution as a therapeutic modality in the alleviation of psychological or physiological distress and to situate it within transpersonal psychology according to the conceptual framework of Frederic Myers. It is from the scientific methods and framework of Myers that the ontological status of discarnate spirit entities may ultimately be determined.

Having gained an idea of some of the different uses and definitions of the word 'spirit', it remains for me to determine how the word is applied to clinical interventions.

### ***The Use of 'Spirit' in Therapy***

There are many different definitions of spirit and spirituality and its relationship with religion, but with specific reference to psychiatry, Sims and Cook (2009) offer the following definition of 'spirituality' as a starting point:

Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as relationship with that which is intimately 'inner', immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as relationship with that which is wholly 'other', transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is this concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values (Sims and Cook, 2009, p.4).

In Spirit Release Therapy the term 'spirit' may be applied to the *spiritual* aspect of a person, in sympathy with the above, and may otherwise be used to refer to the 'soul' (Zinser, 2010). It is also used in the context of those 'spirits' that are interacting in some way with the subject of therapy that could alternatively be named as either earthbound spirits, discarnate spirits, spirit entities or lost souls. In this respect it is distinctly different from the limited definition offered above by psychiatrists who do recognise the importance of spirituality and religious beliefs in psychiatry. Although there is an increasingly strong movement in psychiatry to recognise the spiritual dimension of human experience (Clarke et al., 2001; Cook et al., 2009; Clarke, 2010) there is still some way to go before psychiatry does openly acknowledge that the 'other' is not limited to notions of the transcendent or God, but to other autonomous spirit entities.



Baldwin places SRT as a therapy within the domain of *transpersonal psychology*, which is defined by the Transpersonal Section of the British Psychological Association (BPA):

Transpersonal Psychology might loosely be called the psychology of spirituality and of those areas of the human mind which search for higher meanings in life, and which move beyond the limited boundaries of the ego to access an enhanced capacity for wisdom, creativity, unconditional love and compassion. It honours the existence of transpersonal experiences, and is concerned with their meaning for the individual and with their effect upon behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

Although identified by Baldwin as a therapy that comes within the domain of transpersonal psychology SRT has not yet entered into the academic study of transpersonal experiences, but I hope that this thesis may contribute to a remedy for its omission in the past.

### ***Differences between SRT and Exorcism***

Spirits, whether they be earthbound or co-existing in another dimension or 'spirit-realm' are often referred to as 'attachments' if they are interacting in some way with a person rather than referring to them as 'possessing' spirits. According to Williamson, earthbound spirits are in a confused mental state and many of them do not even realise that they are dead (Williamson, 2006, xi). Possessing spirits on the other hand tend to be deliberate in their intentions and may enter into the subject's physical and spiritual *space* and take control over the thoughts and behaviours of the unwilling host, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

SRT can, depending on the belief system or world-view of the patient, be applied in a purely secular, spiritual or religious therapeutic context. *Spirit Release Therapy* does not impose any theory, concept, philosophy or belief system onto the patient, or try to shoe-horn the patient into a theoretical model of health or sickness. SRT aims to facilitate the healthy well-being of the patient and the 'attached' entities through the patient's and the 'attachment's' own understanding of their experiences and perceptual world-views. This is achieved by allowing the therapist to enter into the integrated world of the patient and the attached spirits through the gateway that we shall identify as a state of consciousness that is different from what is commonly acknowledged as the normal waking state or 'normal conscious awareness'. The process of accessing mental phenomena that exist beyond the limitations of normal conscious awareness is fundamental in linking SRT practice with the concepts and methods of Myers who identified the *Subliminal Self* as the greater part of

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.transpersonalpsychology.org.uk/>. Accessed on 22/4/2011.

the total mind, and the *Supraliminal* as the much limited normal waking state (see Chapter 6).

SRT is fundamentally different from religious exorcism where spirits are assumed to be 'evil' and cast out. William Baldwin's approach is sympathetic and therapeutic, and in complete contrast to the popular conception of exorcism. Baldwin writes:

The widely accepted method of exorcism seemed violent and without compassion, thus I rejected the traditional religious approach (Baldwin, 1995, p. xviii).

Baldwin is one of many professionals including Fiore (1987), Modi (2000) and Naegeli-Osjord (1988), who have had their own belief systems challenged, and have discovered hidden entities of various forms with their patients. A careful examination of all the literature on SRT reveals that all practitioners have had both their scientific and religious beliefs challenged and are essentially guided by their own clients; and depending on the nature of the intrusive spirit, it is dealt with appropriately, and not as a form of exorcism.

As a diagnostic system, SRT has been found to be a far more efficient method of identifying the aetiology of a very wide range of illnesses, including mental, emotional and psychosomatic, than traditional medical diagnostics (Modi 1997; 2000), and these claims need to be substantiated by rigorous empirical studies.

### ***Methods of Consultation and Intervention***

Consultations with clients or patients in most psychiatric or other therapeutic situations are usually conducted in a face to face interview when the normal waking cognitive abilities of both therapist and client are engaged in mutual dialogue. Apart from the initial consultation where base-line data is collected, SRT consultations and therapeutic interventions are very rarely conducted in this way, but may comprise of one or more of the methods listed below:

1. With the *Intuitive* therapist method, the therapist listens with intuition to information that is given to him / her from a source that is beyond the threshold of normal waking consciousness. The therapist may be accessing information from the subliminal mind of the client, from the client's *Higher Self*,<sup>14</sup> from a *spirit guide*<sup>15</sup> that has volunteered to assist, or from a

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<sup>14</sup> See below for a discussion on the 'higher self'.

<sup>15</sup> Help from benevolent spirit guides is referred to below in the work of Carl Wickland and Tom Zinser.

discarnate entity (or entities) that are the cause of the client's distress. Although the therapist is using his / her abilities to communicate at frequencies beyond the threshold of normal waking consciousness it is not always necessary to artificially induce an altered state of consciousness. The fact that communication with discarnate entities takes place and information is received from any of the above sources is an indication that an altered state, or at the very least a change in mental frequency has been achieved. Where the term *intuitive* may be a little weak or misleading this method is often referred to as *channelling* (Neate, 1997). Using this method the therapist will be using acquired natural skills in telepathy (mind to mind), clairvoyance (clear seeing), clairaudience (clear hearing), or clairsentience (clear physical sensation).

2. The *Interactive* method enables the therapist to engage with discarnate entities with the client acting as intermediary. In this method it is the client who will be using abilities in telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience and clairsentience. It is common for clients to be unaware that they have these abilities to *interact* consciously, and there is a tendency for them to believe that what they are experiencing are the effects of an over-active imagination or a form of mental illness. Whilst using this form of communication it is important to be able to encourage the client to trust their own intuition and to permit the expression of thoughts and feelings that are not their own without allowing their own conscious analytical mind to interfere.
3. *The Direct Interactive method* is where the client and therapist are in a face to face situation and where a communication with the attached entity is effected through the client acting as communication medium whilst in an altered state of consciousness. Using this method enables the entity to speak through the client using the client's voice box and neurological infrastructure. This method is a form of *positive possession*<sup>16</sup> where the

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2 for a full description with examples of *positive possession*.

client voluntarily permits the discarnate entity to take control of the speech centres.

4. *The Remote Method*. This method is where a remote scanner is not in direct contact with the client, and is used as an instrument of communication between the facilitator (therapist) the client's *higher self*, the disruptive entity(s), and any *spirit guides* that may be present to offer guidance and advice.
5. *Group soul rescue*. This method involves a group of spirit release practitioners who collectively are more able to deal with the case. This is a method in common practice with the Brazilian Spiritist movement.<sup>17</sup>

A session with a client may progress through any one, or a combination of all of the above methods depending on the simplicity or complexity of the aetiology and phenomenology of the case.

## **Historical Development of SRT**

As noted earlier, the notion that mental illness was caused by possessing spirits was a common belief prior to the emergence of scientific thought and medical practice during the scientific enlightenment, and the traditional method of dealing with them was religious exorcism (Ellenberger 1970; Crabtree 1993). With the emergence of scientific rationalism psychiatrists replaced exorcists and secular scientific thought replaced religious belief. Ideas of demons and possession had been relegated to the realms of superstition until Carl Wickland, a modern medical practitioner, published a comprehensive account in 1924 of his experiences with his own patients who were negatively influenced by invading spirits of the deceased. In the historical development of SRT, the early pioneers, such as Wickland and Crabtree brought to our attention those dramatic cases where serious mental illness such as psychosis and multiple personality were successfully treated with SRT. As time has passed SRT has been successfully applied to much less dramatic presenting symptoms including unexplained anger, depression and anxiety (Sanderson, 1997; 1998). SRT techniques are becoming more finely tuned and therefore more able to treat what may appear to be less serious mental health problems (Allen, 2007).

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<sup>17</sup> Spiritism is a term introduced by Hippolyte Rivail (1804-1869) under the pen-name of Allan Kardec (1857; 1874) in order to distinguish its philosophy and practices as divergent from Spiritualism and Christian Science which share the same origins (Ellenberger, 1970).

## ***Discovering an Earthbound***

Wickland describes his experience of discovering his first discarnate earthbound soul when he was a medical student practising dissection on the corpse of a sixty year old man. On his return home, his wife spontaneously entered into a state of somnambulism, and as Wickland reached out to assist her into a chair a commanding voice issued from her voice box and demanded to know, 'What do you mean by cutting me?' (ibid, p.18).

It transpired that the earthbound spirit of the man to whom the body had belonged had followed him home and had taken advantage of Mrs. Wickland's gift of mediumship<sup>18</sup> to communicate his displeasure at being molested without realising that he was dead. Following this incident Wickland and his wife, aided with the guidance of discarnate beings who, Wickland claims, were of a superior intelligence from other realms in our universe, proceeded on a career lasting thirty years to help earthbound spirits of deceased individuals move on to where they were supposed to be on their path of spiritual development. The result of Wickland's experience is an archive of documented cases of spirit possession and his method of removing them, supported by stenographically recorded sessions of psychical research with his wife acting as the medium of communication between the two worlds of the living and the deceased (ibid, p.21).

## ***Psychosis or Spirit Attachment?***

Among Wickland's recorded cases are several where a patient who had been diagnosed with psychosis was cured following a successful spirit release session. These cases are of particular interest because they represent a group of patients whose suffering is at the extreme end of the scale of diagnosed mental illnesses and are the most difficult to treat using traditional medical and psychotherapeutic methods. They are therefore essential examples to illustrate the efficacy of SRT in treating illness that is automatically assumed to be mental illness by medical science. As an example, Wickland cites his case of 'Mrs. M':

One summer evening we were called to the home of 'Mrs. M', a lady of culture and refinement; she was a musician of high rank and when the social demands made upon her proved too great she suffered a nervous breakdown. She had become intractable and for six weeks had been in such a raving condition that her physicians had been unable to relieve her, and day and night nurses were in constant attendance.

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<sup>18</sup> The gift of mediumship is the spontaneous ability to enter into an altered state of consciousness and what Myers often referred to as 'spontaneous somnambulism' (Myers, 1903, 197).

We found the patient sitting up in bed, crying one minute like a forlorn child, and again screaming in fear: “Matilla! Matilla!” Then suddenly fighting and struggling, she would talk a wild gibberish of English and Spanish, (the latter a language of which she had no knowledge).

Mr.s Wickland immediately gave her psychic diagnosis, saying the case was unquestionably one of obsession,<sup>19</sup> and this was unexpectedly confirmed when Mrs. Wickland, who was standing at the foot of the bed, with wraps on ready to leave, was found to be suddenly entranced. We placed her on a davenport in the music room, where for two hours I talked in turn with several spirits who had just been attracted from the patient.

There were three spirits – a girl named Mary, her suitor, an American, and his Mexican rival, Matilla. Both of the men had vehemently loved the girl and just as fiercely hated each other. In a jealous rage one had killed the girl, and then in a desperate fight the two rivals had killed each other.

All were unaware of being ‘dead’, although Mary said, weeping wretchedly, “I thought they were going to kill each other, but here they are, still fighting.”

This tragedy of love hatred and jealousy had not ended with physical death; the group had unconsciously been drawn into the psychic atmosphere of the patient, and the violent fighting had continued within her aura.<sup>20</sup> Since her nervous resistance was exceedingly low at this time, one after the other had usurped her physical body, with a resulting disturbance that was unexplainable by her attendants (Wickland, 1924, 25-26).

## ***Dissociative Disorders and SRT***

On the arguments put forward by psychologists with regard to *dissociative disorders*

Wickland writes:

In the study of cases of multiple personalities, dissociated personalities or disintegrated states of consciousness, modern psychologists disclaim the possibility of foreign intelligences on the ground that these personalities give neither evidence of supernormal knowledge, nor of being of spiritistic origin.

Our experience, to the contrary, has proven that the majority of these intelligences are oblivious of their transition and hence it does not enter their minds that they are spirits, and they are loathe to recognise the fact (ibid, p. 29).

Carl Wickland’s records from his thirty years of clinical experience and organised psychical research are a valuable contribution to scientific knowledge and testimony to the reality of non-corporeal existence. Together with the documented scientific evidence provided by

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<sup>19</sup> Obsession is the term used by Wickland to denote spirit attachment. It is also a term used by the Roman Catholic Church as one of the categories of demonic influence (Baglio 2009).

<sup>20</sup> The ‘aura’ could be described as the spiritual energy field. See Chapter 10.

earlier mystics and scientists such as Emmanuel Swedenborg (1758), Allan Kardec (1857), Edgar Cayce (1970), William James (1902), Frederick Myers (1903) and James Hyslop (1919), Wickland provides validated scientific evidence to support the hypothesis of spirit attachment as a reality to modern medicine that is difficult to ignore or refute. More recent research into the validity of the hypothesis that there is an afterlife has the valuable resource of Wickland's records to provide a foundation for exploring this avenue of human experience (Fontana 2005). It is to Wickland, therefore, as a pioneer in Spirit Release Therapy that we turn to in the first instance for medical descriptions of the phenomenology of spirit attachment and methods of releasing them from their unwilling hosts.

### ***Dissociation and Paranoia***

In support and validation of his own experiences of dealing with cases of dissociation and paranoia, Wickland quotes James Hyslop, professor of logic and ethics at Columbia University from 1889 to 1902, and editor of the *American Journal of Psychical Research*:

The term obsession is employed by psychic researchers to denote the abnormal influence of spirits on the living.... The cures affected have required much time and patience, the use of psychotherapeutics of an unusual kind, and the employment of psychics to get into contact with the obsessing agents and thus to release the hold which such agents have, or to educate them to voluntary abandonment of their persecutions.... Every single case of dissociation and paranoia to which I have applied cross-reference has yielded to the method and proved the existence of foreign agencies complicated with the symptoms of mental or physical deterioration. It is high time to prosecute experiments on a large scale in a field that promises to have as much practical value as any application of the scalpel or the microscope (Wickland 1924:8-9).

The observation by Hyslop that 'every single case of dissociation and paranoia ... are complicated by the presence of foreign agencies' provides initial support for the hypothesis that dissociative disorders can be confused with spirit interference. Furthermore, Hyslop's reference to 'the use of psychotherapeutics of a very unusual kind, and the employment of psychics to get into contact with the possessing agents' is arguably the first mention of a treatment method that has subsequently become known as *Spirit Release Therapy*.

Carl Wickland was one of the earliest in a series of twentieth century professionals who discovered discarnate entities affecting their own patients and published their findings. These professionals include (in chronological order of publishing) Adam Crabtree (1985), Edith Fiore (1987), Hans Naegeli-Osjord (1988), Irene Hickman (1994), William Baldwin (1995), Shakuntala Modi (1997), and others since. It is impractical to examine the wealth of

individual contributions of all of these authors due to the need for brevity. However, I shall present below some of the contributions of Adam Crabtree, Edith Fiore and Irene Hickman.

### ***Multiple Personality or Spirit Possession?***

Adam Crabtree has taken the time to research the development of psychotherapy in the treatment of those who are diagnosed either correctly or incorrectly as mentally ill from his own clinical experiences with patients (Crabtree 1985). Crabtree's work is important for two reasons. Firstly, because he has developed an interest in these anomalous phenomena from a scientific research perspective, and secondly from a personal one where, as a psychotherapist, he has experienced the phenomena that are relevant to the practice of SRT. Crabtree was a Benedictine monk and ordained in the Catholic Church as a priest in 1964. As a serious student of the human psyche he became a psychotherapist. He has also been a lecturer in philosophy and the psychology of religion. In the introduction to Crabtree's first book *Multiple Man* (1985), Colin Wilson has this to say:

...he is first and foremost a scientist, and his first response to the mystery of multiple personality was to study its medical history in detail. The first part of the present book is as balanced an introduction to this bewildering topic as I have ever come across. But the most important section of the book is the one that begins with chapter 10, describing Crabtree's own experiences of such cases. It was, I think, just as well for Crabtree to offer his credentials as a scientific historian in the first part of the book, otherwise some of these cases – and I draw particular attention to those of 'The Confused Father' and 'The Complaining Mother' – would give rise to the suspicion that he is stretching the facts. While some psychologists will, no doubt, prefer to ignore Crabtree's findings, those who are open-minded enough to consider them without bias will find that they open strange and exciting perspectives (Wilson 1985).

The first part of Crabtree's book provides an in-depth overview of the conceptual frameworks that accommodate multiple personality and spirit possession phenomena; the same concepts that Wickland identified regarding the spirit world and life after death, but with the addition of the collective phenomena of *altered states of consciousness*, which is a significant component of Myers' work, and therefore of prime importance in my argument to support Myers' framework in this thesis.

### ***SRT, Hypnosis and Secondary Selves***

On a foundation of the discoveries of the early mesmerists from Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) to the present day, Crabtree identifies various methods of inducing magnetic sleep (hypnotic trance, or the dissociated state) and the observable phenomena of the



induced trance state. According to Crabtree, it became apparent to the early magnetisers that the subject entered into a trance-like state that facilitated at least two distinct groupings of phenomena that were different from the normal waking state. One group of characteristics are described as 'lower phenomena' and the other are described as 'higher phenomena' (Crabtree 1985, pp.2-20).

Characteristics of the lower consciousness included:

- a) A sleepwalking kind of consciousness
- b) Double consciousness and double memory
- c) Loss of sense of identity
- d) Suggestibility
- e) Heightened memory
- f) Deadening of the senses
- g) Insensibility to pain
- h) Intense rapport with the magnetiser

The higher consciousness characteristics included four special groupings:

1. Physical or sensorial rapport [perceptions of the physical senses of the other]
2. Mental rapport [mind reading - telepathy]
3. Clairvoyance [clear seeing in spirit realms]
4. Ecstasy [mystical experience]

Crabtree reports that the early magnetisers attributed these phenomena to a second self, or double-consciousness, and this discovery was accepted as an observable scientific fact. In 1842, the English surgeon James Braid, introduced the term 'hypnosis' and took the scientific investigation into trance phenomena into a new direction. He discovered that the hypnotic state had a number of different stages or depth. A subject could move through different stages from light trance to somnambulism to unconscious. Opinions differed between investigators as to how many distinct levels of consciousness could be accessed as the trance deepened.

Experiments conducted by Myers' colleague Edmund Gurney in the 1880's at the British Society for Psychical Research (Gurney 1884) revealed that each different level of consciousness produced a different memory chain. Each memory chain characterised a different personality that was separate from the others. Later researchers discovered as many as eight different memory chains in subjects which indicated that there may be no

limit to the number of distinctly separate sections of consciousness into which the hypnotised subject could divide or have access to.

Moving deeper into an altered state could be regarded as moving along a continuum of depth that is similar to moving down a series of steps where each step is a discrete state of consciousness or 'personality' with a discrete memory chain that differentiates one from another. Hence the concept of the *continuity* of dissociation and the concept of *discontinuity* can both be accommodated.

According to Crabtree, this on-going research was revealing what was referred to by the early magnetisers as the *second self* was more probably a much more divided or *multiple self* (ibid, p.21).

### ***The Hidden Observer or Higher Self***

A problem revealed itself in experiments to try to discover the nature of these separated personalities or discrete states of consciousness. According to Crabtree, it was known by early researchers into hypnotic phenomena that the somnambulist was highly suggestible and could be influenced to experience positive hallucinations, i.e. to see something that wasn't there, or negative hallucinations, i.e. to not see something that was there. Crabtree describes the experiment that confounded observers, (but in retrospect has significant meaning to SRT practitioners):

The hypnotised subject is at one end of the room and the hypnotists at the other. There is a table between them. The hypnotist gives the subject the post-hypnotic suggestion; on awakening he will perceive the room as devoid of furniture – a negative hallucination with regard to the table. When the subject is awakened, careful questioning reveals that he really believes there is no furniture in the room. The hypnotist then asks the subject to walk over to him and he does so, but instead of walking in a straight line, he moves in an arc to avoid the table. When the hypnotist asks why, the subject does not know why, or makes some weak excuse, but when asked whether he was trying to avoid something, he will reply, "Of course not." When further questioned about whether there is any furniture in the room, the subject will again answer no.

But in order that the subject *not see* something and act in the manner suggested by the hypnotist, something within him *had to see* the object and act upon that perception (Crabtree 1985, p.30).

Alfred Binet describes the problem:

...in order to cease to see an object – to have that alone excluded from sight – a person must begin by perceiving and recognising it, however that may be done,

and the rejection of the perception can only take place after it has been established ... Now, who does this supervising? What is the intelligence that always decides that the subject shall perceive this and not that? It is not the normal ego, for that is not conscious of anything. It only accepts what it gets. It must be therefore, a personality capable of *seeing the object* ... As to what this personality may be; I for one am completely in the dark... (Binet 1886, cited in Crabtree 1985, p.30).

To clarify the nature of the problem further; the waking consciousness is hallucinating and is not aware of the table but avoids it without knowing why. The hypnotised personality is hallucinating and is unaware of the table and is therefore unable to guide the waking consciousness around it. Who then is aware of the table?

This problem has been tackled by the contemporary researcher Ernest Hilgard (1977), who identified what he called 'the hidden observer'. This behind-the-scenes hidden observer is a part of consciousness that observes everything that is going on between all other parts of the personality or states of consciousness and the hypnotiser and all other persons that interact with the subject. According to Crabtree it was Hilgard's intention to use the term hidden-observer as a metaphor. He didn't intend for the hidden observer to be considered as a secondary personality with an autonomous consciousness of its own.

As we make use of the detailed literature reviews of Crabtree in gaining some understanding of the concepts surrounding the phenomenon of altered states of consciousness, multiple personality and spirit possession, we are obliged to take very special note of the scientific discovery of the *hidden observer*. One of Hilgard's subjects makes a clear statement of the phenomenology of her experience of her hidden observer:

The hidden observer is analytical, unemotional, and business-like. The part of me that was hypnotised was off on a tropical island. The hidden observer is a portion of ME. There's ME 1, ME 2 and ME 3. ME 1 is hypnotised, ME 2 is hypnotised and observing, and ME 3 is when I'm awake. The hidden observer is cognizant of everything that is going on; it's a little more narrow in its field of vision than ME 3, like being awake in a dream and fully aware of your actions. The hidden observer sees more, he questions more, he's aware of what's going on all the time but getting in touch is totally unnecessary. The first time [ice, water, pain] I thought it was an artefact of the situation, but after the second time, with hearing, I don't think that's the case. He's like a guardian angel that guards you from doing anything that will mess you up. The hidden observer is looking through the tunnel and sees everything in the tunnel. It's focused, doesn't pay attention to extraneous things. It's aware that the tones are coming through, aware that I was saying, "zero", that the ME 1 was also busy floating. ME 2 is watching all of this. Unless

someone tells me to get in touch with the hidden observer I'm not in contact. It's just there (Crabtree 1985, p.32).

The subject of the above quotation was involved in experiments to control pain using iced water and numbing suggestions. The context under which the experiment was conducted is not important with regard to SRT, but the importance of the concept of the *hidden observer* is realised when the techniques of SRT are applied and acknowledged. Hilgard, being a positivistic scientist is not considering the hypothesis that the hidden observer is anything other than psychogenic in the makeup of the multiple personality, and like the majority of researchers into the phenomena of hypnosis he disregards the possibility that the essential nature of the psyche is spiritual. In the practical application of *Spirit Release* techniques the *hidden observer* is of paramount importance. In SRT protocol there is a spiritual component of the individual that is regarded respectfully as the 'higher-self', and it is from the higher-self that permission to proceed with a therapeutic intervention is always sought.<sup>21</sup> In spiritual language, the higher-self is that part of the personality that is furthest away from the earth-plane and closest to God. It may be hypothesised that if Hilgard and other scientists' investigations into hypnotic phenomena were able to broaden their conceptual framework then they may find sympathy with the notion of the spiritual higher-self rather than trying to understand the hidden-observer as a purely psychogenic phenomenon.

If the assumptions made regarding the higher-self by SRT are true then much of the scientific research that has been conducted into the phenomena of magnetic sleep, somnambulism, hypnosis and altered states of consciousness can be considered as blindly groping in the dark. The need for scientific explanations for extraordinary subjective experiences such as multiple personality and spirit possession have been side-tracked down a blind alley by rejection of the earlier concept that was identified by Carl Wickland and earlier researchers, including Frederic Myers; namely that a spirit world exists in parallel with the physical.

Crabtree cites several examples from the literature that have been assigned by psychological rationalists as double or multiple personality. He makes no comment on the

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<sup>21</sup> Professional ethics demands that permission is granted from the patient to introduce any form of intervention. When the psyche of the patient is fragmented this creates problems and conflicts with the granting of permission by one part and resistance from others. In SRT the 'higher-self' is afforded executive authority over all other parts (Zinser, 2010, 141).

phenomenology of each case until collectively at the end of the chapter where he makes this comment:

When examining the data of multiple personality, one cannot overlook a phenomenon which exhibits certain striking similarities: "possession." Here, too, the subject exhibits a duality or even multiplicity of personalities which disclaim any identity with each other. Also in both the multiple personality and the possession experience, amnesias of various kinds may be present (Crabtree 1985, p. 60).

We shall see later in this thesis that Frederic Myers made precisely the same assertion more than 100 years ago.

### ***Continued Scepticism from SRT Practitioners***

Dr. Edith Fiore's contribution to the development of SRT (Fiore, 1987) is a guide for therapists in adopting a more open minded approach to the experiences of their patients despite their own scepticism, together with practical advice for individuals and a simple method of clearing and protecting themselves from spirit possession.

Published just two years after Crabtree's observations, this was Fiore's second work following the publication of her treatise on past life regression therapy (Fiore, 1978).

With regard to past-life regression and what she calls 'depossession' Fiore is quick to express her own scepticism pertaining to the reality of non-corporeal existence and reincarnation and acknowledges that she has a natural inclination towards rejection of these ideas due to the fact that she had no conceptual framework in which to accommodate them. But the reality of the 'spontaneous' altered state experiences of her patients compelled her to acknowledge their subjective reality; and she was motivated to conduct her own research into these phenomena in order to find a conceptual framework that fits the experiences.

Fiore's literature search uncovered *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, references to Jesus' casting out demons in *The Bible*, and the ancient writings of Homer, Plutarch and Josephus. She discovered the cultural traditions of the ancient Chinese in their acknowledgement of ancestral spirits that go back more than ten thousand years, and more recently the Japanese exorcistic cult 'Mahikari' which had four thousand members world-wide in 1970. Fiore accessed information on the ancient Egyptians and the equally ancient pre-Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*. Fiore takes time to explain the seven-tiered hierarchy of the Vedic model of human spiritual and physical existence (Fiore, 1987, pp.15-17).

Fiore's research uncovered information that some of the tenets of the ancient Vedic tradition resurfaced in the West in two movements in the nineteenth century with the emergence of Spiritualism and Theosophy. All of these traditions, ancient and modern led to the strongly held belief in the continuation of the individual personality after death. Fiore states that since her research was explicitly aimed at uncovering information on possession by earthbound spirits of the deceased she found particular interest in the Spiritualist and Theosophist movements and their influence on healers in various parts of the world.

Fiore discovered that, founded on the ancient world-wide tradition of *Shamanism* and the more recent *Spiritualism*, the modern healing and de-possession practices of 'Spiritism' are flourishing in South America in the present day. Strongly influenced by the work of Allan Kardec (1857), (1874), the French scientist, the modern Spiritist movement in Sao Paulo, Brazil engages thirty-five hundred mediums from all walks of life from humble illiterates to lawyers who provide their services to the suffering for no charge (ibid, p.18).

Moving right up to date at her time of writing, Fiore makes references to the work of Carl Wickland and Adam Crabtree (both referenced above) to which she adds the works of American anthropologist Michael Harner (1980) who apparently shocked his colleagues by establishing a Shamanic healing society, and British psychiatrist Arthur Guirdham (1982), who, after forty years of working with the mentally ill arrived at the conclusion that every form of severe mental illness can be caused by spirit interference.

Fiore acknowledges that there are a growing number of mental health workers who are becoming aware of a variety of de-possession techniques, and as their work is becoming known so there are others who seek training and it is with this mind that she introduces her methods.

Fiore states that throughout recorded history people have believed in the phenomenon of spirit possession by earthbound entities, and the experience crosses all boundaries of culture, class, intellect, and social structure. Despite these traditions, beliefs and experiences, Fiore still believes that life after death, reincarnation and possession cannot be proven, but suggests that the burden of proof is not a priority; but when it comes to human suffering – results are.

Dr. Raymond Moody, another specialist in the scientific research into non-corporeal existence contributed to Fiore's book with this foreword:

Oddly, since the early part of the twentieth century, it has been unfashionable among professionals in the field of psychology to explore, in a careful and introspective way, the many unusual and sometimes spectacular alterations to which human consciousness is prone. In this climate, the early pioneering work of such scholars as William James has been rejected and treated with contempt by persons who seriously stated that the study of mind as awareness was impossible, and that the only thing which can be studied under the rubric of psychology is objectively observable behaviour. Presently we are seeing a change in this attitude, and today a large number of serious, well trained professionals in the field of psychology and medicine are actively engaged in the study of altered states of awareness. My friend and colleague, Dr. Edith Fiore has made a most interesting study of one of the most controversial of one of these states – the ancient enigma of possession (Moody, 1988).

Even after treating more than five hundred patients during a period of seven years, who were possessed by earthbound spirits of the deceased, (that's 75% of her total client list) Fiore is still sitting on the fence of her own scientific scepticism, as she writes:

I am not attempting to prove that spirits exist or that my patients were possessed. Rather, I will be showing you what goes on daily in my office and introducing a therapy that, although not a panacea, is effective and embodies ancient concepts within the context of twentieth-century hypnotherapy (Fiore, 1987, xi).

Where it may be hypothesised that these pioneering therapists of modern clinical approaches to spirit possession are still a little reticent about 'coming out', they feel a powerful need to maintain their status as 'scientists'. They may have absolute faith in the efficacy of their methods, but still they question the possibility of a transcendental power that heals.

### ***From Scepticism to Conversion***

The dentist William Baldwin (1995) cited above, used hypnosis to help his patients overcome their fear of dentistry. With an ironic twist to using hypnosis as a means of dealing with a specific fear, Baldwin accidentally stumbled upon the phenomenon of spirit attachment by discovering earthbound souls attached to several of his patients. As a result of this discovery Baldwin gave up dentistry to dedicate the rest of his professional life to treating people suffering from spirit attachment, and his book is acknowledged as a key text in the education and training of spirit release practitioners right up to the present day.

Psychiatrist Irene Hickman's work is a precursor, not only to her progression into spirit release therapy, but is also an introduction to the later works of Michael Newton (1994; 2000; 2004), Gary Zukav (1990) and others who had similar experiences with patients spontaneously regressing to previous lives and the 'life between lives'.

Hickman's work progressed under training and guidance from William Baldwin to where she published her clinical experiences of spirit release in what she called *Remote Depossession* (Hickman, 1994), and added a new and interesting dimension to spirit release techniques in what could be described as the 'remote' or 'indirect' release method that I introduced above under the heading *Methods of Consultation and Intervention*. Remote (or indirect) spirit release involves the release of an attached entity without the conscious awareness of the host who may be located some considerable distance from the releasing practitioner. Hickman developed this method in order to overcome the possibility of contamination by suggestion from the therapist. Willis Harman makes reference to the pioneering work of William James in his advocacy for a revised epistemology that embraces radical empiricism in the preface to Hickman's work. William James was influenced by Myers, as my own thesis will demonstrate in Chapter 6. Further examination of Hickman's *remote* or *indirect* method and its comparison with 'remote viewing' as practised by the United States Department of Defense for covert surveillance purposes (Targ, 2004) is the subject for discussion later in this thesis in Chapter 10.

## **Spirit Release Today and the Future**

An increasing number of mental health professionals are encountering people with a wide variety of problems that do not respond to medical or traditional psychological interventions. There are those professionals who are able to respond to the needs of their patients despite their own beliefs, such as hypnotherapist Roy Hunter (2005), and adopt what would be described as a 'spirit release' technique despite his own reticence to use the term. Hunter's method is reviewed in Chapter 4 where I examine beliefs and how they are investigated by psychological research. There are others, represented by psychotherapist Tom Zinser (2010) who acknowledge an alternate reality and treat their patients with the aid of *spirit guides* in much the same way as Carl Wickland cited above.

Loose associations are being formed by practitioners and those with an open mind who are willing to learn techniques from those pioneers referenced above who have published technical manuals and set up training schools. In a move to try to redress the imbalance between the experiences of professionals in private practice and the need for education in mainstream psychiatry, an initiative in 2000 led by psychiatrist Alan Sanderson and supported by Andrew Powell, founder and chairman of the Spirituality Special Interest



Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists,<sup>22</sup> was to establish the Spirit Release Foundation (SRF) together with a group of medical practitioners and complementary therapists in order to provide a professional organisation for the education and training of SRT practitioners.<sup>23</sup> Although training is provided by experienced therapists who themselves have been trained by such pioneers as William Baldwin, Irene Hickman and Edith Fiore, the SRF has no formal accreditation by an academic or scientific institution at this time. Furthermore, there are no academic or scientific journals in the United Kingdom that have yet accepted articles or papers for publishing and peer review by the wider academic community on the subject of SRT.

There is growing momentum in this movement, and it is only a matter of time before mainstream medicine and clinical psychology accept the validity of these methods and for medical schools to incorporate them into their curricula. The Spiritist movement in Brazil, which has incorporated spirit release techniques into institutionalised medicine since the 1930s (Moreira-Almeida and Santos, 2012) is set to pave the way, and has already held three conferences in the UK specifically for medical professionals.<sup>24</sup>

Modern technology has enabled mental health service users to express their concerns and relate their experiences in social media and online video resources. Those who hear voices have a tendency to complain that mental health services treat them within the confines of the medical model and prescribe drugs, and they urge professionals to acknowledge that their experiences are real. It is apparent from these expressions that sufferers, like the mental health professionals who try to treat them, have no conceptual framework that can accommodate these experiences.<sup>25</sup>

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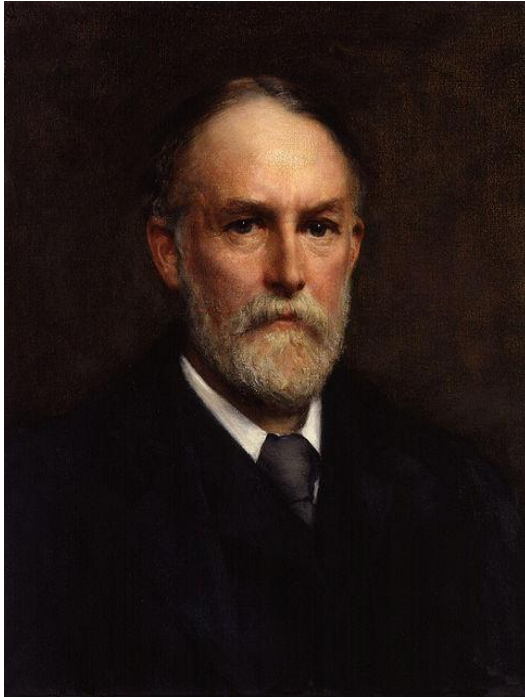
<sup>22</sup> <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx>. (Accessed 14/7/11).

<sup>23</sup> Details of their professional accreditation training programmes for health professionals are available from the *Spirit Release Foundation's* website: <http://www.spiritrelease.com/> (accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2010).

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.medspiritcongress.org/> (Accessed on 1/2/2012).

<sup>25</sup> Here is an example of a voice hearer's video report: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp09DsoK1g0&feature=share> (Accessed on 1/2/2010).

## So Who Was F.W.H. Myers?



**F.W.H. Myers (1843-1901)**

Frederic William Henry Myers was initially a Cambridge scholar of the classics and earned his livelihood as an appointed inspector of schools (Hamilton, 2009). In 1882 he co-founded the *Society for Psychical Research* (SPR) together with other academics, scientists and intellectuals who all had their respective interests in a wide variety of psychic phenomena which included somnambulism, hysteria, animal magnetism, hypnosis, clairvoyance, Spiritualism and apparitions.

Myers' primary objective was to pursue scientific evidence that Man has a soul and that his conscious personality survives bodily death:

The question for man most momentous of all is whether or no he has an immortal soul; or—to avoid the word immortal, which belongs to the realm of infinities—whether or no his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death. In this direction have always lain the gravest fears, the farthest-reaching hopes, which could either oppress or stimulate mortal minds (Myers, 1903b, p. 75).

The results of his work with the SPR, spanning a period of over twenty years, is condensed into his *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) which was published two years following his own death.<sup>26</sup> It has been hypothesised that his interest in theories concerned with the afterlife may have been influenced by his platonic relationship with Annie Marshall who died prematurely and left Myers with a deep sense of loss (Hamilton, 2009, p. 5). However, his contribution to psychology in formulating a model of mind that he called the 'Subliminal Self' was a far greater contribution to our modern understanding of the mind than is generally recognised. Myers was a pioneer in identifying what we now

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<sup>26</sup> I have referenced two editions of Myers' *Human Personality* in this thesis. The full and unedited version in two volumes (Myers, 1903) and a more concise version edited into one volume (Myers, 1903b).

term the *unconscious*, or *subconscious*, and his theories had a significant influence on the ideas of William James (1902), Pierre Janet (1976, p.11) and C. G. Jung (Kelly, 2001).<sup>27</sup>

James often referred to Myers in his classic text *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and attributes to him the discovery of a consciousness beyond the field of normal conscious awareness:

I cannot but think that the most important step forward that has occurred in psychology since I have been a student of that science is the discovery, first made in 1886, that, in certain subjects at least, there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin, but in addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs. I call this the most important step forward because, unlike the other advances which psychology has made, this discovery has revealed to us an entirely unsuspected peculiarity in the constitution of human nature. No other step forward which psychology has made can proffer any such claim as this. In particular, this discovery of a consciousness existing beyond the field, or subliminally as Mr. Myers terms it, casts light on many phenomena of religious biography (James, 1902, p. 233).

Myers influenced the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet in the formulation of his theory of dissociation in hysterics. Janet made use of Myers' radical approach to 'subliminal tendencies' (Janet, 1976, pp.256-258) to explain 'automatisms' (involuntary acts and behaviours) and the existence of hidden states of consciousness that were unknown to the hysteric's ordinary conscious awareness.

Myers' own detailed definition of 'automatism' is essential in order for us to understand what he meant in relation to the terminology used in modern psychiatric language:

Automatism.—The words automatism and automatic are used in somewhat different senses by physiologists and psychologists. Thus Sir M. Foster says (Foster's Physiology, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 920), "We speak of an action of an organ or of a living body as being spontaneous or automatic when it appears to be not immediately due to any changes in the circumstances in which the organ or body is placed, but to be the result of changes arising in the organ or body itself and determined by causes other than the influences of the circumstances of the moment. The most striking automatic actions of the living body [are] those which we attribute to the working of the will and which we call voluntary or volitional." That is to say, to the physiologist an action is "self-moved" when it is determined, not by the environment, but by the organism itself. The word thus becomes hardly more than a synonym for spontaneous. The psychologist, on the other hand, regards an action as "self-moved" when it is determined in an organism apart from the central will or control of that organism. Thus when an act at first needing voluntary guidance, by practice comes to need such guidance no longer, it is called "secondarily automatic." I have used the word in a wider sense, as expressing such

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 6.

images as arise, as well as such movements as are made, without the initiation, and generally without the concurrence, of conscious thought and will. Sensory automatism will thus include visual and auditory hallucinations; motor automatism will include messages written without intention (automatic script) or words uttered without intention (as in "speaking with tongues," trance-utterances, &c.). I ascribe these processes to the action of submerged or subliminal elements in the man's being. Such phrases as "reflex cerebral action," or "unconscious cerebration," give therefore, in my view, a very imperfect conception of the facts (Myers, 1903, pp. 16-17).

Myers linked genius with the classical notion of inspiration, saying that an 'inspiration of genius' is a 'subliminal uprush', an emergence into supraliminal consciousness of ideas that the person has not consciously originated, but which have been shaped themselves beyond his will, in profounder regions of his being (1903, p. 71).

Myers is accredited for providing Jung with a precursor to his theory of the 'collective unconscious' (Crabtree, 2009, pp.332-334), and Jung is known to have referenced the work of Myers in his own doctoral thesis (1902/1983). I discuss the relationship between Jung's and Myers' ideas on dissociation and spirit possession in Chapter 6.

Myers is recognised by a minority of modern researchers such as Edward and Emily Kelly, Adam Crabtree, Alan Gould, Michael Grosso and Bruce Greyson (Kelly *et al.*, 2007a) who acknowledge the contribution he has made to psychology. However, with the notable exception of Crabtree cited earlier, they still fail to acknowledge his work on the important concept of spirit possession.

## **Competing Theories of Possession and Myers' Contribution**

I should stress from the outset that it is not my intention in this thesis to claim that Myers explained many religious, philosophical, or metaphysical mysteries that scientific enquiry has yet to explain. However, it is my claim that he initiated a method of scientific enquiry that could still make a valuable contribution to investigations into many questions that remain unanswered by mainstream science.

Myers was not concerned with religious belief or philosophical argument, and neither was he concerned with spirit possession at the beginning of his research. However, his discovery that spirit possession was directly connected with many 'normal' and so-called 'abnormal' personal experiences raised a number of interrelated questions of a religious, philosophic, or metaphysical nature that demanded immediate attention. For example: Is there a spirit world? Can we communicate with those who dwell there? And does man have a soul? These questions were answered for Myers in observations and experiments

that resulted in over 10,000 pages of text, primarily published over a period of twenty years in the *Proceedings* and the *Journal* of the SPR.

Questions concerned with the *ontology*<sup>28</sup> of spirit entities underpin these questions, and also to the related *mind-body* problem that was arguably created with the misinterpreted philosophy of Rene Descartes' *Cartesian Dualism* (Kelly et al., 2007a, p. 44). These questions were, Myers claimed, within the realm of scientific enquiry, and subsequently he challenged the emerging science of psychology to tackle them. We may therefore ask whether psychology acknowledged and accepted the challenge, or chose instead to leave these questions to theology and natural philosophy.

Among the many methods for the academic study of possession is the study of the teachings, cosmology and theology of the major world religions. However, due to the limitations of this thesis I am restricted to citing some of those examples of supposed diabolic possession (in the Christian context) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that defy the laws of physics and biology, and to discussing the problems presented by them to the positivistic scientific paradigm that attempts to explain them.

In Chapter 3 I introduce the classification and typology of possession as defined by the Catholic Church (Ellenberger, 1970) and those with experience in clinical practice such as Adam Crabtree (1985) and Hans Naegeli-Osjord (1988), together with Myers' idea of the universal continuum in his theoretical framework for the scientific study of *all* human experience including what was then known as 'psychical' phenomena.

## **An Expanded Epistemology**

Comparisons between Myers' methods and theories with those of contemporary psychology bring to light competing epistemological and empirical concerns, the implications of which raise a range of questions around the construction of belief systems which are examined in Chapter 4.

In this initial analysis of the methods and theories regarding epistemology, beliefs in possession, empirical evidence and the subjective experience of possession and exorcism, several questions are raised for discussion. For example, Hans Naegeli-Osjord (1988) introduces the importance of personal subjective experience in appreciating the concept of possession more fully. This provides an additional perspective for our understanding and

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<sup>28</sup> Ontology - the nature of *being, existence* or *reality*. *Oxford Concise Dictionary*. See also Honderick (1995, pp.634-635) for a detailed review of the philosophical study of ontology.

introduces the principle of ‘radical empiricism’ of William James (1912) and his emphasis on ‘religious experience’ in the scientific study of religions (1902). According to James, to be ‘radical’, an empiricism must neither admit into its construction any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any that *is* directly experienced: ‘Truth is understandable solely by reference to intra-experiential, and ultimately pragmatic, tests’ (1912, p. xii). With James’ radical empiricism and Myers’ *tertium quid*<sup>29</sup> approach at the heart of his methodology the scientific value of subjective experience is a theme that runs throughout this thesis.

## **F.W.H. Myers Theories and a Comprehensive Model of Mind**

What Myers was attempting to do was to provide empirical evidence that the soul of man exists as a non-corporeal spirit entity that survives bodily death. He developed scientific methods that revealed to him that what was being experienced or observed could not possibly be attributed to anything else other than an unobservable non-material source (Myers, 1903b, p. 406). He was not concerned with what people *believed*, but with the origins of phenomena that remained unexplained by positivistic science and unavailable through the sensory organs, the human eye or ear in particular. As we shall see, Myers pioneered methods that can be acknowledged as scientific, that explained how the un-seeable can be seen and the unknown to become known.

One of the critical issues presented to Myers was how to distinguish between what could be interpreted as a ‘veridical’<sup>30</sup> manifestation or an autogenic hallucination. His investigations into what he called ‘sensory’ (ibid, p.162) and ‘motor automatisms’ (ibid, p.264) provided an essential foundation for a scientific explanation to validate the difference.

Myers’ approach to scientific enquiry and the difficulties faced by 19<sup>th</sup> century psychology are examined in Chapter 5, then, with an understanding of his approach, Myers’ model of mind, which he refers to as the ‘Subliminal Self’, is explored in detail in Chapter 6. For the purposes of introduction, Myers’ own definition of subliminal is:

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Tertium quid’ refers to an unidentified third element that is sought to be applied in combination with two known ones. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium\\_quid#cite\\_note-etymol-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-etymol-0)

<sup>30</sup> In Myers’ terminology a hallucination is any supposed sensory perception which has no objective counterpart within the field of vision, hearing, taste smell or touch. ‘Hallucinations may be delusive or falsidical, when there is nothing whatever to which they correspond; or veridical, when they correspond to real events happening elsewhere’ (Myers, 1903, p. 21).

Of thoughts, feelings lying beneath the ordinary threshold (limen) of consciousness, as opposed to supraliminal, lying above the threshold. Excitations are termed subliminal when they are too weak to rise into direct notice; and I have extended the application of the term to feeling, thought, or faculty, which is kept thus submerged, not by its own weakness, but by the constitution of man's personality. The threshold (Schwelle) must be regarded as a level above which waves may rise,—like a slab washed by the sea,—rather than as an entrance into a chamber (Myers, 1903, p. 30).

The central pillar of my thesis is the experimental method that Myers' preferred above all others, due to the versatility and fruitful results that were produced in its application. Hypnosis or 'hypnotism' as Myers called it, remains a mystery to mainstream psychology that is still unable to arrive at a consensus theory to explain the enormous diversity of psychological and physiological phenomena associated with it. It is my contention that modern theorists, in their attempts to explain hypnosis as a psychological concept, are missing the point altogether, which is that it is a gateway to unseen and unknown realms of infinite possibility in the unfolding evolution of human consciousness. Myers did not waste time trying to understand the doorway; he took a peak through it and discovered a universe that Newtonian physics cannot accommodate. Hypnosis, used as a tool, provides a starting point for exploring the world of spirit possession. It also provides SRT with a means for releasing troublesome spirit entities from those who are adversely affected by them. The concept of hypnosis is inextricably connected with altered states of consciousness (ASCs), mystical and religious experiences, clairvoyance and other forms of mediumship. A theoretical explanation of how the hypnotic trance or altered state of consciousness is connected with spirit possession, obsession and spirit release is offered in Chapter 7.

How Myers applied this method to the problem of hallucinations, or what Myers termed 'sensory automatisms', is examined in Chapter 8, where I cite examples from Myers' research that led him to conclude that telepathy and astral projection are scientifically validated phenomena.

Where Chapter 8 focuses on sensory automatisms and how they affect the individual's perceptions, Chapter 9 expands Myers' conceptual framework to examine the effects of *automatisms* on physiology, actions and behaviour in the wider context of the mind-body problem. Linking these two concepts of *sensory* and *motor automatisms* together gives new insights into how sense impressions impact on the body and on behaviour.

## Myers' Conceptual Framework and Modern Science

Mysteries remain for modern science surrounding the concept of what may loosely be called 'spiritual healing', as in the laying-on of hands and the power of prayer. Extra-sensory-perception (ESP), distant mental influence (telepathy), the influence of the power of intention on living organisms (DMILS) and precognition have attracted the attention of specialist researchers, and likewise has 'psychokinetics' (PK) which attempts to address the mind-matter problem. All of these discrete areas of enquiry now come under the categorisation of 'psi' phenomena (Thouless & Wiesner, 1947; Targ, Schlitz & Irwin, 2000, p. 219). It is my contention that Myers' conceptual framework is able to address all of these areas of interest, and in Part III I address the convergence of differing lines of enquiry with the aid of Myers' scientific methodology.

Chapter 10 examines the mysterious connection now identified as 'psi' in the context of the possessed and the possessing entity. In my examination of Myers' methods and theories there is a natural progression from sensory to motor automatisms that leads us to addresses the psi connection in terms of *energy resonance*. In my examination of the connection between Myers' theories and those of modern science I explore the differences between *magnetic rapport* (from Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism), *community of sensation* (which was Myers' term for the rapport that he hypothesised lay behind animal magnetism) and the SRT practitioners' theory of *sympathetic resonance* which offers an explanation for how spirits are attracted to people. In Chapter 10 I also introduce the concept of the power of *intention* and the *zero-point field* theory of quantum mechanics (Puthof, 1990), that tentatively offers a scientific approach to how the two domains of the physical and the non-physical can theoretically converge in so-called 'anomalous' human experience.

Myers postulated that everything in nature, and in human experience, exists on a continuum, and that this continuum can be examined and explored using rigorous scientific methods (Myers, 1903, pp. 30-31). He felt satisfied that a start had been made in the scientific investigation of mysterious and anomalous phenomena and he recognised that there remained a long way for science to go before all mysteries were solved:

Now it is that we feel the difficulty of being definite without being trivial; how little of earthly memory persists; how little of heavenly experience can be expressed in terms of earth; how long and arduous must be the way, how many must be the experiments, and how many the failures before any systemised body of new truth



can be established. But a sound beginning has been made, and whatever may be possible hereafter need not be wasted on a fresh start (Myers 1903b, p.406).

Chapter 11 alludes to the vast array of evidence that is continuously being accrued from modern 'psi' research that could support the hypothesis for the existence of a spirit world and the various influences it has on the inhabitants of the material world.

Probably the greatest challenge to Myers and his supporters was in the entrenched resistance to his findings by mainstream science. Myers insisted that it is not good enough for scientists to ignore or avoid difficult issues such as those presented by somnambulists and automatists just because they themselves did not believe in the reality of what they perceived to be 'supernatural' or 'occult'. The same challenge is presented to investigators and researchers into the paranormal to this day. Although spirit possession may be regarded as a phenomenon of human experience since ancient times, it is generally considered to have no place in the world of modern technology. But modern technology does, ironically, often play a part in how the spirit world communicates with our material world. Examples from research into *Instrumental Transcommunication* (ITC) and *Instrumental Voice Communication* (IVC) reveal evidence that spirits use modern technology to communicate with researchers.

Recent research into the nature of consciousness strongly reinforces the theory that the mind is not dependent on the physical brain (Jahn & Dunne, 1986), which in turn is supported by the principle of *non-locality* from quantum theory (Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2007). These modern discoveries are continually contributing to a greater understanding of paranormal phenomena, and moreover, all of these discoveries are reinforced and supported by a new epistemology that is founded on the concepts and theories of Frederic Myers.

Taking a purely objective view of the overwhelming weight of evidence from a wide variety of discrete psychological, biological, and physics-centred research disciplines, and by suspending our own personal belief systems to allow the data to speak for itself, we can arrive at an alternative view of the world that can be accommodated both by Karl Popper's evolutionary approach to the development of objective knowledge (1972), and Myers' earlier notion of the evolution of Man's consciousness. With these factors considered, it is extremely difficult to regard mental illness from a purely *epiphenomenal*<sup>31</sup> foundation.

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<sup>31</sup> A by-product of the brain. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/epiphenomenon> (Accessed on 20-1-2012).

Where Chapter 11 reviews the evidence for a 'spirit world' and its influence on subjective experience, Chapter 12 uses the revised epistemology to take a fresh look at mental illness.

Concurrent with the continuum of possession typology is the continuum of the methods of healing the possessed. Part of the discernment process is to understand the different causes of possession, and in every case the aetiology (cause) is an important factor. In Chapter 12 the continua of possession and deliverance methods are compared with other aetiological predisposition scales used by psychiatry in the diagnosis of possession trance and psychosis, and other psychological factors such as the 'dimensional structure of subjective emotion' (Bentall, 2004, p. 215). Myers' conceptual framework is applied in this chapter to cases that have been cited in the literature as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) (but now known as DID) which are re-evaluated by me in order to demonstrate the simplicity of considering the possibility of an alternative diagnosis.

## **Purpose of this Thesis**

This thesis will show that Myers' scientific methodology provides a conceptual framework for modern psychiatry to better understand the subjective experiences of its patients who may be diagnosed with disorders that are resistant to traditional treatment methods. In addition it is hoped that this thesis will contribute new knowledge to those working in mental health services, in Christian and other religious ministries, in social science and anthropological research and to those who find themselves in the front-line where the consequences of misguided beliefs and ignorance can interfere with the correct diagnosis and treatment of many vulnerable individuals.

This thesis argues that *Spirit Release Therapy* fits into a scientific model that incorporates both the positivistic findings of the physical sciences, the transpersonal dimensions of subjective spiritual experience and some of the theories that attempt to explain 'psi' phenomena.

I seek to demonstrate that a revised epistemology for *Spirit Release Therapy* can provide a bridge of understanding where confusion, misunderstanding and misguided beliefs have created gaps in scientific knowledge. This thesis will show that Myers' model of mind and his expanded theoretical framework can change the way we look at possession, exorcism and mental health, and provide a foundation for practical research into the efficacy of SRT as a valid form of intervention. But more than this; Myers' insights and rigorous

methodology have a profundity that mainstream psychology has yet to discover in what it means to be human.

Spirit possession (attachment) and the methods of dealing with it are contemporary issues that demand serious scientific research and academic study. For anyone who is presented with the problem of identifying and dealing with negative spirit influence, whether they are a health professional or a service user, this thesis presents an alternative approach that is built on the theoretical concepts and experimental methods of Frederic Myers.

## **PART I**

### **Possession and Exorcism – Methods and Theories**

In the first part of this thesis I will approach the topics of possession and exorcism from contemporary perspectives in order to highlight the deficiencies in those perspectives and bring into sharp focus those questions that remain unanswered by the social sciences, medical science and mainstream psychology. I will focus on those problems and unanswered questions that impact on our collective social understanding of possession, and more importantly impact on the inability of medicine and psychology to heal the sick and suffering due to their lack of knowledge and skill in responding to such phenomena. I will show in subsequent chapters how the methods and theories of Frederic Myers are able to contribute to a more appropriate integrated epistemology with a wider conceptual framework that is able to offer possible answers to these questions and address the problems raised in this first part.

## CHAPTER 1

### Social Science Observation and Interviewing in the UK and USA

Whether possession is a concept that only exists in the creative imagination of the entertainment industry, the deluded imagination of the mentally ill, or the consensual beliefs of a community, social science is able to adopt methods to assess the impact on society and how its individual members are affected. Some individuals may be directly affected at great cost and suffering to themselves and their loved ones, or they may be indifferent disbelievers with no experience or knowledge of a spirit world or of spirit entities that possess people or influence their health and behaviour. Everyone will have an opinion that is based on their knowledge and experience or the lack of it, and collectively a community will have a consensual belief or disbelief that guides their thoughts, feelings and behaviour when the topic of possession is raised. Professor Eileen Barker, Chair and Honorary Director of 'INFORM'<sup>32</sup> writes:

While social science cannot always know what The Truth is, it can be drawn upon to inform people of certain things that are not the case.<sup>33</sup> Where minority religions and alien beliefs and practices are concerned, suspicion, fear, ignorance and misinformation are rife (Barker, 2009, p. 4).

The topic of possession has occupied a key position in the politics of church and state and the judicial systems in the medieval and early modern periods of European history (Caciola, 2003; Sluhovsky, 2007). There have been occasions in England and Europe when decisions concerning possession have meant the difference between life and death for individuals accused of witchcraft and collusion with the Devil (Sluhovsky, 2007, pp. 81-82). But how do ideas about possession affect the way we live today? Does the subject have any importance at all apart from being a source of inspiration for horror films? Is it ever reported in the news or is it neatly sidestepped? How society is affected may be viewed through the methodological lens of the sociologist or any other specialist social scientist, and it is through these lenses that we may be

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<sup>32</sup> 'INFORM' – Information Network Focus on Religious Movements. <http://www.inform.ac.uk> (accessed on 17 April 2010).

<sup>33</sup> This statement is questionable. To suggest that social science, or any science can determine that some things are not the case makes an assumption that knowledge is complete.

able to gather some form of sociological foundation for an understanding of what possession is and how society deals with it.

Contributions to La Fontaine's edited collection *The Devil's Children* by adepts of *Positive Possession* (that which is invited by the host) are reviewed in Chapter 2, where I will begin with Christina Harrington (2009), an historian of religion and practitioner of *Wicca* who invites possession by the *goddess*, followed by Mercy Magbagbeola (2009) a psychiatric nurse and a prophetess of the *Celestial Church of Christ* who invites possession by the *Holy Spirit*.

Conversely there are cases where religious exorcists have become possessed or damaged by the demons they are trying to exorcise (Martin, 1976; Peck, 2005). There are others, whose experiences have not yet been published, who have been adversely affected or possessed by those entities that they are trying to help their patients deal with. It is hoped that further contributions will be made in future by those practitioners who may be fearful of 'coming-out' by presenting their findings in peer reviewed journals and contributing to information data bases on possession issues.

I begin this chapter with a quote from Eileen Barker in her introduction to La Fontaine's *The Devil's Children*, (2009) where she elucidates the aims and objectives of the organisation 'INFORM' that was established at the *London School of Economics* in 1988. INFORM is supported by all the mainstream Churches and the British Government, in helping to provide information that is as reliable, balanced and as up-to-date as possible about minority religions, faith movements and spiritual communities. Barker writes:

'INFORM' relies on the methodology of the social sciences to assess the accuracy and objectivity of the data it gathers in its attempt to offer information that is more dependable than that from other sources such as section of the media, some cult-watching groups and the movements themselves, all of which may have an agenda that tends to make them somewhat selective in their accounts (Barker, 2006, pp. 371-395).

### ***Methodological Agnosticism***

Barker acknowledges that the social sciences have their limitations in that they have no expertise, technologies or skills that allow them to judge theological or ethical claims. However, this does not mean that they cannot use their methods to attempt to understand the theological and ethical beliefs of those it studies. Barker highlights the observation that social

science - indeed all science - can only describe and explain empirical or natural phenomena, and has to remain 'methodologically agnostic' (ibid). Scientific enquiry, according to Barker, has no way of telling whether a supernatural being can be responsible for any particular happening - whether it be God, the Devil, angels or evil spirits - and it cannot cite these concepts as independent variables. The fact that objective criteria that could be used as independent variables are missing from investigations into supernatural phenomena has led, according to Barker, to 'methodological atheism' where claims of possession are explained away as 'cultural expectation' (ibid).

### ***Disproving the Non-empirical***

These methodological issues are no different to those that were the primary concern of Frederic Myers and his colleagues at the *Society for Psychical Research* a hundred years ago, and it is for this reason that Myers' work is the focus of this thesis. One important scientific question raised by the concept of possession is; 'How can we determine the aetiology of subjective phenomena when there is no identifiable independent variable that could be attributable as causative?' The point being made by Barker is a reinforcement of the notion proposed by Karl Popper that empirical data by its very nature cannot be used to disprove a non-empirical belief, and that the social sciences are more justified in trying to describe and understand who believes what, rather than trying to judge the truth or falsity of spiritual beliefs (Popper, 1963, pp. 33-34). For a spirit to be assigned as an independent variable, it is necessary for its ontological existence to be validated, and this is where Myers' conceptual framework has its true value.

In order to gain a full understanding of the methods and theories of Myers it is necessary to appreciate the value of the methods and theories that are in current use in the social sciences, together with their deficiencies. Survey data can be quantified and categorised according to common characteristics and features and then used for hypothesis testing. Failing that, it can still be used for simple demographic data and descriptive statistics for later sociological and cross-cultural comparisons, and in epidemiological<sup>34</sup> studies.

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<sup>34</sup> Epidemiology – the study of health events. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epidemiology> (Accessed 10/2/1012).

My first example of this kind of social research methodology is the work of Eleanor Stobart, an independent consultant and researcher. Her report referenced below (2009) was commissioned by the *Department for Education and Skills* on child abuse linked to accusations of possession and witchcraft and first published by HMSO (Stobart, 2006).

## **Stobart's Survey of Children Accused of Witchcraft in England**

A survey of reported cases of child abuse across England that are linked to accusations of possession and exorcism has enabled Stobart to categorise recurring characteristics from the raw data and identify emergent patterns and features (Stobart, 2009). Her research method was to read case reports and discuss the cases with social workers, police, teachers and voluntary workers connected with the cases.

Although Stobart does not claim that this data is a full account it does represent a 'first reconnaissance' into the problem (ibid, p. 161), and there is sufficient data to enable the identification of significant features of this form of child abuse, and to identify those steps that are needed to address the problem.

The number of cases of child abuse linked to accusations of possession or witchcraft is very few in relation to the total number of child abuse cases known to Social Services in England. Stobart's study revealed only 74 cases from January 2000 until her report was presented in 2006, of which 38 were analysed. This is a very small sample in comparison with the 72,100 child protection enquiries received by Social Services in the year 2003 – 2004 (ibid, p.151). Stobart reports that there were 30,700 children placed on the child protection register in the year 2004 – 2005 and she makes the comment that as awareness increases so more cases are revealed. This suggests that the true incidence of children being accused of possession and witchcraft could be significantly higher than has been revealed to date (ibid, p. 152).

Stobart has been able to classify her raw data into quantitative, tabulated statistics under the headings of: age and gender of victims, UK region, ethnic origin, UK residency, religion, involvement of place of worship, family structure, child differentiation characteristics, type of accusation, type of abuse and outcomes (ibid, pp.151-172).

Among Stobart's findings from the difficulties in tabulating some of the data, one of the most notable features of the cases studied was the difficulty in understanding the relationships



within these troubled families between the child and its caregivers. Children live with mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles and it was difficult to establish exactly who was directly related to the child. Some carers had several partners or were transient, and some appeared to have polygamous marriages. The research suggests that children become more vulnerable to accusations of possession or witchcraft when there is a change in family situation or if there is no bond of affection between carer and child. Children who are marginalised by the family group are often scapegoats and, as outsiders, they are blamed for troubles that affect the family, such as unemployment, sickness or financial problems.

Stobart's research reveals that carers often describe bad behaviour or 'naughtiness' as a sign of possession. Such behaviour may include rebelliousness, disobedience, independence, defiance and developing individuality. These behaviours are typical of disenfranchised or adopted children, who feel isolated and disconnected from their caregivers (Verrier, 1993), but in ethnic communities with a strong belief in possession and witchcraft there is a tendency to attribute such behaviours with evil intent, not on the part of the child but of evil forces that use the child as an instrument of evil (ibid, p. 163).

Stobart's findings show that children with disabilities are often viewed as different and their disability may be explained away as possession by their families. The disabilities identified in Stobart's sample of cases include epilepsy, stammering, deafness, learning disabilities, autism, mental health issues and other life-limiting illness (ibid).

In 11 cases of the 38 there were concerns for the mental health of a carer. Illnesses included post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and schizophrenia. Three carers were sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Although there is no legitimate excuse for the abuse inflicted on children by their carers, Stobart points out that these carers genuinely believed the child to be possessed by the 'devil' and that any violence is directed at the devil and not the child. These carers believed that the child was not there anymore. This concept is difficult for public sector professionals to understand and they further had difficulty in understanding how an adult carer could be so fearful of the power of a child to be so 'evil' as to threaten the life of a carer. Some would assume that anyone holding such a belief must be mentally ill. Whilst only three of the carers were sectioned under the Mental Health Act all others were prosecuted as child abusers (ibid, p. 167).

The relationship between possession, mental health and criminal behaviour is complex and confusing, and demands more attention than the limitations of this thesis will allow. In the meantime, it may be worthwhile to note that where there is a belief in possession, there is a possibility that the accuser is the one who is influenced by a spirit entity rather than the accused. Projection is a psychological concept that has proven to yield positive results where confusion reigns, especially in cases of 'paranoid personality disorder' (PPD) (Beck, Freeman, Davis & et, 2004, p. 117) and 'dissociative identity disorder' (DID) (Phillips & Frederick, 1995, p. 203). A failure, however, to consider the possibility of spirit influence in unconscious motivation to serious criminal behaviour inevitably leaves victims of negative spirit influence, where genuine, in the long-term care of prisons and mental institutions with no prospect of any release from their agony. Examples of the failure of authorities to acknowledge the signs of negative spirit influence are provided (although not intentionally) by the forensic psychiatrist Helen Morrison (2004) from the transcripts of her recorded interviews with notorious serial killers.

In the case of John Wayne Gacy, a serial child killer, Morrison was invited by Gacy's attorney to give evidence for the defence of insanity. Gacy's younger sister, Karen, in an interview with Morrison stated:

I remember that once he passed out at the top of the stairs and didn't remember who he was when he came to. He was like someone who was drunk, but he wasn't drunk. Something in his voice was different. It was not his voice (ibid, p.82).

This evidence offered by Gacy's sister suggests that Gacy had either an alter-ego (according to the theories of DID), or was possessed by an entity other than his own. Together with many other significant clues as to what motivated Gacy, this was either ignored or overlooked by Morrison.

Consistent with Myers' concept of the continuum of human experience (which I introduce more fully in the next chapter), manifestations of spirit influence can vary between subtle compulsions to take a particular course of action without any conscious comprehension of how we are influenced, to the terrifying intrusion of loud voices in the head giving instructions. As reported of Gacy by Morrison, 'He heard a voice, a compelling, humbling voice that thundered in his head, echoing loudly' (Morrison, 2004, p. 134). Similarly with reference to the case of

Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, Morrison writes, 'There is no doubt that Peter Sutcliffe used the idea of commandments from God just to kill people' (ibid, p.139).

Psychiatry assumes that hearing voices that give commands to commit crimes, diagnosed as 'command hallucinations' (Soothill, Rogers & Dolan, 2008, p. 446) is a symptom of schizophrenia (APA, 1987, p. 312) and treatment usually involves the prescription of drugs to overcome the voices. However, those psychiatrists who are familiar with Spirit Release techniques such as Alan Sanderson (2003) and Andrew Powell (2005) are aware that the cure for internal voices may not rest solely with medication, but require the release of the invading spirit from the patient. In contrast, the following quotation from Morrison gives a clear and unambiguous message that she believes that such voices are always the creations of a diseased mind:

When these killers hear voices from God, what they're really hearing is only their own inner voice, imagined permutations of what's in their own minds (Morrison, p.134).

The above statement by Morrison suggests that she had come across this concept many times with many serial killers, but without knowledge of the possibility that these voices may originate from an external source, she was unable to consider an alternative diagnosis.

The relationship between spirit possession, witchcraft, mental health and criminality is only marginally referred to in Stobart's study, where care givers have been found guilty of physically abusing the child in order to drive out perceived demons, but it does open an avenue for investigation that must wait until these concepts are taken seriously by dedicated researchers and when funding is made available for serious further investigation.<sup>35</sup>

In summary, Stobart's study highlights the problems with beliefs in possession in the identified ethnic groups and offers recommendations to avoid negative outcomes. The abuse occurs when violent forms of exorcism are attempted, and Stobart makes recommendations for public service agencies to be in closer contact with those voluntary sector groups with which immigrant families are more likely to turn when in need of help. When the exorcism is attempted it is already too late. Schools and teachers are better positioned to become aware of anything wrong before serious abuse occurs.

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<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, it is anticipated that the deeply entrenched attitudes and procedures in national institutions such as the Judiciary, the Prison Service, Social Services and the National Health Service are unlikely to support or approve research of this kind.

Stobart acknowledges that it is not possible to change deep seated beliefs about possession and witchcraft when they are an endemic factor in the culture and religious belief system.<sup>36</sup> However, education is available through The *Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service* (CCPAS)<sup>37</sup> which provides literature and training on all aspects of child protection including exorcism and gives guidance for best practice.

The *African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance* (ACEA)<sup>38</sup> in partnership with *Churches Together in England* (CTE) held a conference on black majority churches looking at a range of issues including child protection and interaction with local authorities. The ACEA, Metropolitan Police, Local Authorities and CCPAS held a conference on child protection, focussing particularly the issue of accusations of possession and witchcraft towards children in particular.

Stobart recommends a centralised information system on all cases of reported abuse linked with possession and witchcraft that can be accessed by all agencies including police and social services, although she is not specific on how that data should be collected and presented as routine. Her report recommends that places of worship need to have child protection policies in place, together with procedures for best practice in deliverance or exorcism.

In order for a meaningful picture of possession and accusations of witchcraft to be produced, data collection would need to conform to a defined format that enables the dissemination of information in tabulated form for trend analysis and intervention efficacy. Below I have constructed an example of how data can be tabulated even from the primitive personal records of an interventionist; in this case the 18<sup>th</sup> century exorcist Father Johann Joseph Gassner (Midelfort, 2005, p. 63). Although the data presented below could hardly be described as rigorous or scientific, it does show some of the complaints that Father Gassner treated with religious exorcism with a degree of success.<sup>39</sup> What is important for my argument is that we, as a society, need to know to what extent possession is a problem, and what are the resources and recourses of action that are currently in use by various groups and individuals to deal with it.

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<sup>36</sup> Conversely, it is difficult to change beliefs in those who have no personal experience of possession.

<sup>37</sup> Information and guidance on issues of child protection linked to accusations of possession and exorcism are available from the CCPAS website at [http://www.ccpas.co.uk/Spirit\\_Possession.html](http://www.ccpas.co.uk/Spirit_Possession.html) (accessed 17 April 2010).

<sup>38</sup> ACEA website address: <http://www.eauk.org> (accessed 13 April 2010) It is unfortunate the ACEA has suspended its operations due to lack of funds as a result of the economic recession.

<sup>39</sup> Gassner treated literally thousands of people, often in large groups (Midelfort, 2005, p. 80).

**Gassner's cures in Klosterle: 1767-1769**

Complaint	Male	Female	Unknown Gender
Epilepsy	2	8	3
Sick	4	7	1
Chest & Heart	3	2	0
Fevers	7	7	Many
Blind	5	4	
Deaf	0	1	
Throat	0	1	
Head and Face	2	5	
Womb	0	1	
Crippled, Lame	13	16	
Cramps & Paralysis	1	2	
Pains	4	1	2
Dead	0	1	
Cancer	0	1	
Mad	10	11	
Stomach, Vomiting	1	2	
Consumption	0	1	
Marital impediment	1	1	
Lockjaw	0	1	
Leprosy	0	2	
Could not eat	1	1	
Unknown	1	0	62
Totals	56	76	70 plus two entries listing 'many'

Stobart had no contact with victims or perpetrators; information came solely from public services and voluntary agencies connected with the cases. The views and opinions collected are therefore representative of observers, and there are no expressed opinions, testimonies or

beliefs of the victims, perpetrators of abuse, traditional ethnic healers or church ministers who practice deliverance or exorcism. This inevitably produces a report that is biased by the opinions, assumptions and beliefs of observers of the negative consequences of inappropriate action against children accused of possession or witchcraft. Where the beliefs and assumptions of observers make no provision for a belief in possession; it makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate the levels of fear experienced by those who do feel threatened by demonic forces. In contrast, if an observer were to become a participant and actually experience what it feels like to be possessed by an external intelligence with evil intent, then all assumptions and beliefs would change and the whole issue would be viewed from a completely different epistemological perspective. However, modern secular epistemological foundations have a strong tendency to prevent such ideas being considered. What I have learned from Stobart's study is that there is a conflict between belief systems with their concomitant divergences in epistemology.

Stobart's study was not designed to consider any theory about possession, other than to present it as a factor in the cultural and religious belief system of those who were brought to the attention of public services agencies due to their inappropriate attempts at exorcism. The study therefore was only able to assess the characteristics and outcomes of the belief systems of those families represented by the case samples. Stobart's study therefore represents a simple social science study that has no recourse to hypothesis testing. Observers of the outcomes of belief systems and those whose beliefs are shaped by experience will inevitably have difficulty in communicating and understanding what they observe and what they experience with each other. Our epistemological foundations of knowledge are therefore fundamental in our search for making sense of the possession phenomena.

To take us one step further into the efficacy of social science methods, Michael Cuneo's study, which I will now consider, has more depth and was conducted across a broader spectrum of society. He employed a more detailed research methodology for examining possession. He had more time than Stobart to interview exorcists and victims as well as observers and commentators on the negative outcomes of inappropriate interventions, and was therefore able to enhance the depth and accuracy of his study. Stobart's study was deficient in witnessing at first hand those procedures that were used by healers and ministers of religious deliverance where the accused child was helped, and her study was biased by her emphasis on

cases where the exorcism caused physical abuse and serious damage to the accused child. In contrast, Cuneo's study was able to report on the positive outcomes experienced by the victims of possession by more appropriate interventions by experienced exorcists and deliverance ministers.

## **Cuneo on the Impact of Entertainment on the Vulnerable in the USA**

Partly funded by the *Society for the Scientific Study of Religion*, the anthropologist and sociologist Michael Cuneo conducted research into the phenomenon of demonic possession in North America during the 1970's, 80's and 1990's (Cuneo, 2001). Cuneo highlights the public paranoia created during the 1970's by the publication of William Blatty's book *The Exorcist* (1971) followed by the film of the same title (1973), and by Malachi Martin's book, *Hostage to the Devil* which depicted in graphic detail five cases of alleged demonic possession in the modern United States (Martin, 1976).

In order to negate any bias that may have been created in his mind by the dramatization of Blatty and Martin's works, Cuneo's research method was to witness for himself actual exorcism rituals performed by authorised and unauthorised Catholic exorcists, together with lay self-appointed individuals and ministers of the Neo-Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and to personally interview retired practitioners of exorcism and deliverance. The result of Cuneo's investigation is a more balanced overview than Stobart's in that he highlighted both the negative and positive outcomes of sensationalist reporting in the media and the social hysteria created from the dramatization of reality for the benefit of the entertainment industry.

Cuneo discovered several factors that contributed to the peak of hysteria around satanism and demonic possession in the 1970's that was maintained and reinforced through the 80's and well into the 1990's. Among them was the disturbing case of the murder of Sharon Tate by Charles Manson and the release of the satanic film, *Rosemary's Baby* by Roman Polanski (1968).

In comparison to the cases examined in England by Stobart above, the American news media exploited the fear associated with stories of satanic ritual abuse, whereas in England the news media focussed on the failings of Social Services.

Cuneo asserts that it was the entertainment industry in its over-dramatization of the notion of demonic possession that drove people in their thousands to seek exorcism from the Catholic Church and deliverance from Protestant Pentecostalism (ibid, p. 83). Neo-Pentecostal churches responded with the introduction of deliverance rituals into their practices and the Catholic Church, after strong denial and resistance, eventually succumbed to the pressure of public demand acceded to an increase in the appointment of official exorcists (ibid, p. 258). The church also, extraordinarily, acceded to permit the live broadcasting on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1998 of the exorcism of a sixteen year old girl (ibid).

Cuneo maintains that where the entertainment media were responsible for over-dramatization which led to public paranoia, eventually it was responsible for the Catholic Church's open acknowledgement that, although rare, demonic possession was a reality and they had an obligation to provide the solution where and when it was justified. Cuneo reports that the Catholic Church openly acknowledged that demonic possession and exorcism are a real but rare occurrence. Furthermore, his reporting on the experiences of ministers of deliverance in the charismatic movement presents the view that interference from supernatural evil forces is more common than most people would like to admit. It seems that the fear of demonic forces can be justified if the resources to deal with it are known and made available. However, the danger lies in creating mass hysteria and not providing the resources to deal with the panic.

A positive outcome some 20 years after the furore created by Blatty's book, was that a true and accurate account of the factual case of 'Robbie Mannheim', a 14 year-old boy, (on which Blatty's book and film were based) was written by investigative journalist Thomas Allen (1994). Using the original journal written by an attendant Jesuit priest who was an eyewitness, Allen produced a de-fictionalised account that was devoid of false drama or embellishments.

Some of Allen's comments from the preface of the 2000 edition of the book are worthy of note. For instance, he speaks of how the film *The Exorcist* reached deep into the unconscious and stirred up 'nameless fears' in many who viewed it (Allen, 2000, p. ix). He further comments that following a viewing of the film many people had to seek therapy to rid them of fears they could not explain and psychiatrists were writing about cases of what they began calling, 'cinematic neurosis' (ibid, p. ix-x).



Thomas Allen's observation revealed something that Michael Cuneo's investigations failed to. The cinematic dramatization of Blatty's book seems to have touched a nerve in the psyche of many otherwise rational human beings to the extent that it made them psychologically ill. This is not just a good example of the very real effects of an *idea*<sup>40</sup> imposed onto a suggestible public. More than that this suggests that the fear-behaviour created is similar to the fear exhibited by infant primates (chimpanzees) the very first time they see a snake. This is not a learned fear but an instinctual one. The suggestion is that human beings have an instinctual fear of the demonic, and this would go a long way to explain a compulsion for its fascination.

Cuneo makes it very clear in his assessment that the belief systems and 'expectations' of people play an extremely important role in their perception and their experience. He writes:

Most people who seek out an exorcism are suffering from some psychological or emotional problem that they're convinced has been caused by demons. They believe that demons are just as real, if not quite so obvious, as anything else in the world and that only through an exorcism will their problem be illuminated and their circumstances improved. They anticipate walking away from the exorcism with a new lease on life. The person charged with performing the exorcism and the supporting cast of friends, family members, and assistants anticipate the same thing. All parties to the exorcism have an enormous investment in the affair: They want it to work, they expect it to work, they pray for it to work. The symbolic universe they inhabit, with its shared religious meanings and discourse, demands that it work. It doesn't always work of course, but often enough (if only temporarily) it seems to. And little wonder – exorcism is a ritualised placebo, a placebo writ large, one that engages its participants on levels to which more conventional therapeutic procedures could scarcely aspire (Cuneo, 2001, p. 278).

Recognition of the power of *expectation* does not originate with Cuneo's observation.

Sluhovsky writes on the subject of exorcism in the European early-modern period:

No matter who performed the exorcism, they had to manipulate the power of the sacred in a precise manner that corresponded to a number of verbal and performative forms that satisfied their clients' expectations. This helps us to understand why, once an exorcist's authority was established, exorcism rarely failed (Sluhovsky, 2007, p. 38).

The relationship between expectation and success is explored more fully later in this thesis, together with Myers' approach to dealing with it as a contamination factor in his research. Myers considered very carefully the power of expectation and suggestion when conducting his

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<sup>40</sup> As this thesis progresses it will become apparent just how powerful an *idea* can be as a source of creation or destruction.

experiments and took steps to eliminate them as far as possible in his experimental methods, as I shall explain more fully in Part Two.

Cuneo claims to have undertaken his research with the ‘open-minded Canadian scepticism’ (2001, p. 274) of the anthropologist who needed to understand the mass hysteria surrounding demonic possession and exorcism. Having witnessed more than fifty exorcisms, it is interesting that he was still unable to answer the definitive question of whether demons are real or imagined. Cuneo claims to have been open-minded but sceptical about the prospect of witnessing demonic possession and exorcism as they were portrayed in Blatty’s film:

I wasn’t expecting to encounter demons – especially not the ripsnorting, mind-blowing demons of popular imagination – but I was entirely open to being surprised. If something happened during an exorcism that defied rational explanation, that seemed to reek of supernatural evil, I was committed to reporting it. Hell, I would have been happy reporting it. But nothing happened – at least nothing startling, nothing that reached out and grabbed me by the throat (Cuneo, 2001, p. 274).

It is my own opinion that Cuneo is making a fundamental error. Although he claims to be an open-minded sceptic, he is still influenced by the popular misconception, reinforced by dramatic entertainment, that all cases of possession are like those depicted in Blatty’s film and others of the genre. Cases that are as dramatic as that depicted in *The Exorcist* are rare, though the fact that this film was loosely based on a factual case shows that such cases do occur in the real world. The case of ‘Anneliese Michel’ (Goodman, 2005) is another real-life case that has been presented to the public in two films: *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (Scott Derrickson, 2005) and *Requiem* (Hans-Christian Schmidt, 2006). The point is this: just because a serious researcher does not witness what he or she may expect to witness, does not mean to say that it does not exist. There are a sufficient number of documented cases of demonic possession on record to provide evidence for the phenomenon to be recognised as a significant event in human experience (Caciola, 2003; Midelfort, 2005; Naegeli-Osjord, 1988; Sluhovsky, 2007). How these phenomena are explained is another matter, and it is these explanations that science should be concerned with. Those reported cases where the host’s body is disfigured beyond the known laws of biology (that I cite in Chapter 3) strongly suggest that the phenomenology of spirit possession is not purely psychological.

SRT practitioners do not usually have to deal with cases that are documented and classified as contravening the laws of physics and biology as we currently know them, but they do

encounter less dramatic cases that cause distress and suffering to their patients. Whether the demons that plague their patients have ontological reality or are autogenic is open to scientific scrutiny, and this is precisely where Myers' methods are important. Cuneo was unable to verify whether the demons that he witnessed being exorcised were real or imagined, and whether the cure was exorcism or another form of psychological placebo. What does appear to be real, however, was the fear in those who believed in their existence. With regard to many of those who subjected themselves to therapeutic exorcism or deliverance, he writes:

Their depression lifted, their fears fled, their inner torments dissipated, their blues melted away. I have no way of knowing how extensive this improvement was, or how long lived. ...it's quite possible that exorcism actually works, but it may have nothing to do with driving out demons (Cuneo, 2001, p. 276).

Cuneo's conclusions reinforce the opinions of scientists and mainstream psychiatrists that possession is a form of psychological dysfunction and that exorcism is a placebo remedy. As I commented earlier on the work of Stobart, raw data collected by observation and interview can be categorised and tabulated to provide insights into trends in the incidence of cases and their phenomenological characteristics. Cuneo's work would have had more value if he had compiled an efficacy table of the results of the exorcisms he had personally witnessed and subjected them to statistical analysis.

Fear of the demonic was endemic in the Middle-Ages (Tuan 1980), and as a sociologist, Cuneo reports that similar fear of the demonic reached levels of mass hysteria in the 1970's and 80's in middle class America. What remains to be identified is the object of this fear. Is this fear justified by the presence of a real demonic threat, or a projection of an inherent weakness in the spiritual psychology of human mass consciousness? The answer to this question could, as we shall see, lie within those findings of Myers that even he was astonished to uncover through his rigorous research methodology.

There are other very important questions to consider here. For instance: can a person be possessed by some spirit entity other than a devil or demon? Can a person be possessed by the spirit of a deceased person, or by the conscious will of another living person, or by a self-created demon as an instrument for self-punishment, or by a curse placed upon them by another person who may be living or dead? There are ways of discovering the answers to these

questions and during the course of this thesis I will explore the epistemological foundation that is required to answer them with the help of Myers' methods and theories.

## **Conflicts in Epistemology**

The development of research methodology involves the incorporation of additional concepts as well as expanded theories and the testing of hypotheses (Diesing, 1971). Cuneo's study is representative of an observational study that included the witnessing of exorcism and deliverance rituals and interviewing in-depth those who experienced possession and those who administered to it. Where Cuneo's study fell short was in the fact that he remained an observer. He was never a participant in the experience of being possessed or of being subjected to exorcism or deliverance ministry. In short, his study lacked subjective experience. Modern science claims to be objective and must therefore ignore subjectivity. However, in my thesis I assert that experience is an essential component, not only in the quest for greater understanding, but also in the accuracy of scientific research and analysis. My assertion is reinforced by Diesing's academic treatise on the *Patterns of Discovery in the Social Sciences* (1971). On the process of developing an effective participant-observer method Diesing writes:

The procedure is, first, to become socialized into the system, to learn a set of roles and normative elements, to form relationships, and thus to participate in the normal routines and occasional crises of the system. If the system is small, the researcher can gradually turn himself into an analogue of the system, so that he reacts as it reacts, feels as it feels, thinks and evaluates as it does. The next step is to make this implicit knowledge "personal knowledge" explicit. The researcher constructs hypotheses about parts of the system out of the recurrent themes that come to his attention and tests these hypotheses against a variety of data – what he sees, what others tell him, how he reacts, and how others react to his probing actions. Many detailed hypotheses are gradually combined into a model of the whole system, whose parts are tested by how well they fit together and how well they agree with the data (Diesing, 1971, p. 6).

The social surveys of both Stobart and Cuneo lack the dimension of observer-participation as briefly described above by Diesing, and it is for this reason that in the following chapter I give careful consideration to the importance of the personal experience of possession.

With regard to the scientific study of psychological phenomena in general, the practice of introspection that was espoused by William James, Carl Gustav Jung and others in the early days of psychology's developing methods was abandoned with the introduction of what was perceived to be the more scientific method proposed by Watson (1913) of behaviourist

observation. The adoption of the purely objective observation of human behaviour as a science of psychology was one of Myers' greatest criticisms of the development of psychology's scientific methods (Myers, 1903). This criticism was shared by James who declared that 'all experience is subject to scientific scrutiny, which includes all subjective experience (James, 1902).

On the value of clinical experience with specific regard to spirit possession, the Swiss psychiatrist Hans Naegeli-Osjord writes:

It should be emphasised that critics who lack any experience of their own are trained only in the traditional sciences will have no valid basis for evaluating the phenomena of possession and exorcism, but some will do it anyhow. Their belief in the widely accepted "knowledge" provides enough motivation. I would like to provide some food for thought: "*In order to reach the source, one has to swim against the current.*" (Naegeli-Osjord, 1988, p.175).

The above statement may seem a little harsh towards mainstream science, but Naegeli-Osjord is making a point of importance with his metaphor of going against the current. This metaphor has a double meaning; to go against the current of mainstream opinion, *and* to move towards the *source* of a problem rather than focus on symptoms.

By way of conclusion, it can be recognised that the principal objective of social science is to appreciate and acknowledge (if not fully understand) the *beliefs* of a community towards possession and the *effects* of such beliefs on individuals and communities. However, issues of epistemology are fundamental to our understanding of the difficulty in accommodating others' ideas and belief systems. Further study from other perspectives, which include the participation and personal experience of the observer, will provide insights into the power of these beliefs, and whether beliefs can be more fully understood in light of more detailed scientific scrutiny.

In addition to recognising the belief system of a community, much more can be made of sociology by following the example of its pioneer Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) who used descriptive statistics to pose questions about what is happening in society to influence those behaviours. Stobart was able to record the incidence of cases of children accused of witchcraft being brought to the attention of the police and social services, and the family circumstances that indicated those vulnerable children who are at most risk. In so doing, she also discovered the differences in the number of cases of children being placed into care by social services from

one year to another. The source of that information can be used for other studies where descriptive statistics are useful to sociology.

Stobart was able to offer recommendations to government institutions, church authorities and volunteer groups on how to approach the problem with preventative measures, and a centralised database of reported cases.

There is no reason (apart from a lack of will) why data collection methods cannot be used to record all incidences of reported possession and witchcraft in any ethnic group, or any church, or any other selected group or section of the population. Just as Durkheim was able to ask questions about trends in the incidence of suicide between Catholics and Protestants in France in the 1800's (1897), surely we too are able to record the cases of reported possession and witchcraft in England or the USA in any given period for use in epidemiological studies. Naturally a recognition of spirit possession, or at the very least a recognition that the term is used by some sections of society is a prerequisite. To ignore the fact that the term may justifiably be used in relation to beliefs, and to behaviours and experiences that are seriously damaging to individuals and families, is to ignore an important dimension of human experience.

Michael Cuneo did not make use of the data he collected on the cases of possession that he witnessed in order to evaluate the efficacy of the treatments that they were subjected to. Even if he had, in view of his own scepticism and his conclusion that exorcism is merely an exotic form of placebo, would such data have any value other than as a descriptive statistic? Cuneo was making an observation of religious exorcism and Pentecostal deliverance procedures, in contrast to psychiatric approaches to treatment, by describing exorcism as a placebo. What Cuneo did not do was to consider the practice in psychiatry of addressing the spiritual dimension of human experience with a form of clinical spiritual cleansing that differs dramatically from any form of exorcism or deliverance. What Cuneo would have been unaware of was the clinical practice of Spirit Release Therapy. If he had known that, then, perhaps his conclusions could have included more valuable information from a less sceptical and biased position.

A further question for Cuneo's study is: 'How do the reported cases of possession compare from one year to the next and what are the explanations, if any, for movements in trends?'

These are questions that could be answered if all psychiatric practitioners in the UK and USA were to submit reports on their cases and the outcome of their interventions, together with reports submitted by churches and other institutions who administer to those suspected, reported or found as being possessed. All that is required is an extension of Stobart's recommendations for accurate records to be kept by churches and clinics that treat reported cases of suspected possession and related mental health problems. The greater the database of information, the greater the value it has in showing growing and decreasing trends, and in showing clusters of aetiology, intervention method and outcome. This type of social science information, if handled correctly, can be used in much the same way as data collected from clinical trials to evaluate the efficacy of drugs or other forms of medical or psychiatric intervention. Again, I repeat, all that is required is acknowledgement that genuine spirit possession is a sickness whether it is autogenic or veridical. As to whether it is autogenic (self-created) or veridical (from an external source), Myers has a conceptual framework and method that modern psychiatry can utilise.

Sociological studies are limited in the information they can provide because of the restrictions on their ability to test hypotheses. Social science is essentially phenomenological and unable to fully empathise with the meaning of beliefs and experiences unless the observer has similar beliefs and experiences.

Stobart's study shows the damage that can be done to children by inappropriate action by caregivers who believe in witchcraft, and what Cuneo's study shows is the power of belief, expectation and suggestion on sections of society who he considered to be susceptible to the power of dramatic entertainment. The concepts of belief, expectation and suggestion are powerful contributors to human experience as observed personally by Cuneo and academically by Sluhovsky above, and these concepts arise continuously throughout this thesis. Myers was especially concerned with the power of belief, expectation and suggestion as *contaminants* in his scientific research, and he took steps to eliminate them as far as possible in order to arrive at scientifically robust outcomes and conclusions. The steps he took are explored in detail, with examples, in Chapter 7 and 8. Meanwhile, in the chapter that follows, I examine the experience of *positive possession*, when the host invites the possessing entity. I am introducing this in order to enable those who experience possession to give their own testimony of the experience, thereby contributing to a more balanced argument that may subsequently

contribute to a wider understanding of the value of the subjective in the scientific and academic study of the phenomenon of possession.



## CHAPTER 2

### Conflicting Theories of Possession in Cross-Cultural Studies

In the previous chapter I examined the value of a simple social science method of analysing data from a very small selected sample of child abuse cases from the population of England conducted by Stobart (2009), and a wider social and cultural study of the impact of the entertainment and news media on a wider cross-section of society in North America by Cuneo (2001). The value of these forms of social study with specific application to the epidemiology of possession is dependent on the type of data collected and on its categorisation and tabulation for recognising trends, aetiology, diagnosis, intervention method and outcome. But in order for this to work the concept of possession and related phenomena needs to be accepted as a significant factor in the lives of many more people than is currently recognised by social scientists and psychiatrists.

From the two studies cited in the previous chapter I was able to identify a difference in the epistemological foundations between the observers and the subjects of observation that prevented a fuller understanding of what it means to be possessed. The hypothesis is that the belief system of the observer influences the deductive findings of the observer's studies, and that subsequent judgement and opinions formed are unable to capture the essence of the experience of possession. In summary I have concluded that those who experience possession believe its subjective reality while those who observe do not. Observers therefore try to arrive at explanations that fit their own preconceived theoretical frames of reference.

In this chapter I focus on two specific examples of *positive possession* in England, where the spirit entity is invited by the host for benevolent purposes. I will then take into consideration the value of the subjective experience of the participant-observer as it is conceived in social and cultural studies in order to determine whether or not it contributes to a scientific knowledge of spirit possession, and, subsequently to ascertain whether this knowledge can be accommodated into an expanded epistemology in line with the methods and theories of Myers.

## Classification of Possession Typology and the Continuum

For Myers the continuity or uniformity of nature was one of the most fundamental principles guiding scientific knowledge. Myers believed that all phenomena - mental and material, normal and abnormal, commonplace and rare - are in some sense continuous, coherent, and amenable to the rational, empirical methods of science. He further believed that scientific knowledge would advance qualitatively only when scientists address *all* phenomena, and in particular those that did not fit readily into prevailing views. Myers writes:

If nature is to be intelligible to our minds she must be continuous; her action must be uniformitarian and not catastrophic (Myers, 1895, p. 22).

The phenomenology of possession can be seen on a progressive scale from the overtly dramatic at one end of the scale to the much more subtle (to the degree that it is virtually undetectable) at the other. Using his theory that everything in the universe exists on a continuum, I hypothesise that possession has its own continuum, and correspondingly the methods of dealing with it are on a continuum of correlation. This means that the method of intervention, whether it be exorcism according to the Roman Catholic rite of exorcism, the *Rituale Romanum*,<sup>41</sup> or other less dramatic methods, needs to conform to the dictates of the form of possession on the continuum. The key is to accurately diagnose the nature and degree of the possession, which in traditional religious language is the *art of discernment* (Sluhovsky, 2007, p. 169; Caciola, 2003, p. 225; Baglio, 2009, p. 107), and this is precisely where the skills and training of the Spirit Release Practitioner come into their own, as I shall be discussing in Chapter 12, *Psychiatry and Possession*.

It is an essential requirement of scientific methodology to categorise and label all events, processes and phenomena, but this gives the impression of the existence of discrete phenomena. In this and the next chapter it has been necessary to categorise selected possession phenomena, for example, positive (invited) and negative (uninvited) possession. Within each division there are sub-categories that identify different types of possession, and

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<sup>41</sup> The *Rituale Romanum*, the Roman Catholic Rite of Exorcism, originally set down in 1614, was updated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) (Baglio, 2009, p. 15). A complete translation of the 1614 version from the original Latin, together with a full explanation is presented by Malachi Martin (1976, pp. 459-472).

each sub-division can be further sub-divided into grades of intensity. Ultimately the grades and discrete sub-divisions coalesce into a continuum of human experience.

Myers conclusion that the 'possession' of a person's thoughts by discarnate entities made sense in arriving at an explanation for previously unexplained psychological phenomena (Myers 2003 p.1484). However, we who live our lives according to our sense perceptions of the material world are surprised to learn that unseen forces have a continuous, variable and fluctuating influence on our daily lives and experiences.

An example is the influence of the moon on the oceanic tides and the menstrual cycles of women.<sup>42</sup> Many more examples could be listed here that are known to the physical sciences, but Myers' research revealed that there is more to influence us than can be detected using the instruments of physics. Our susceptibility, vulnerability or resistance to the influence of the spirit world is also on a continuum of individual differences, and it can be hypothesised that the degree of intensity of the possession experience is partly dependent on the individual's strength or weakness in their own concept of self otherwise referred to as the *ego* – a hypothesis suggested by Naegeli-Osjord (1988, p. 135).

Later in this chapter I broaden the scope of the enquiry to include examples from ethnographic studies of religions from diverse geographical locations, where positive possession and *soul-loss* (an alternative explanation for possession that I will explain later) are common factors in the socio-cultural belief system of the whole community.

## **Positive Possession**

Willing hosts see themselves as intermediaries between this world and the world of spiritual beings and are appropriately named *mediums* by spiritualists (Crabtree, 1985, p. 63). They may be controlled or possessed by discarnate human entities or other intelligent entities during the rituals of some occult traditions. Participants may give themselves freely to be possessed by a god or goddess, a process which may be referred to as 'magical invocation' (ibid) that is practised in order to gain knowledge or power to promote personal growth or healing for others.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.3109/00016348609158228/abstract>. Accessed 2/7/11.

Littlewood makes the distinction between voluntary and involuntary possession states (2009, p. 29). He uses examples of voluntary possession states that are typical in Africa, such as *Sar* in East Africa, *Bori* in West Africa, the Afro-Caribbean *Santeria* of Cuba, Trinidadian *Shango*, Haitian *Vodou*,<sup>43</sup> and the Afro-Brazilian cults of *Candomble* and *Umbanda*. Each has its own characteristic pattern of beliefs and practices when spirit entities are invited to interact with the participants in the rituals. In contrast, involuntary possession is less standardised and the experience is damaging in the course of everyday life, causing illness or madness (ibid, p.29).

## Positive Possession in Wicca

Positive possession is not confined to tribal communities in what we in the West may see as ‘developing’ countries. In the UK, according to practising Wicca adherent Christina Harrington; ‘Wicca is a nature based initiatory religion with a theology centred around two cosmic deities known as the Goddess and the God’ (Harrington, 2009, p. 103). Practitioners of the Wicca religion believe in a largely benevolent spirit world, and they believe that the body of the dedicated can be taken over and shared with the gods. Wicca therefore employs the practice of deliberate possession – ‘not of demons, I stress, but of our gods’ (ibid).

Harrington’s first-hand experience of the ceremony of *Drawing Down the Moon* provides an important perspective in gaining a fuller understanding of the subjective meaning and emotive qualities of positive possession in contrast to a phenomenological approach which generally avoids the central concerns of the society or group under scrutiny. Prior to her own possession by the deity, Harrington describes the emotional connection with the high priestess as she witnessed her first *Drawing Down* ceremony:

Once an initiate, I could attend the private secret rituals. As I recall, it was at the first ritual after my initiation that I first saw what we call ‘the Drawing Down of the Moon’. The high priestess of the group had the Goddess of Wicca called into her, and the Goddess was made present in her body. In that possessed state, she spoke a beautiful inspired speech that I recall as being poetic and deeply emotionally moving (Harrington, 2009, p. 104).

The emotionally moving experience Harrington described above, whilst in the presence of one who is possessed by a divine being, bears a strong resemblance with the emotions reported by

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<sup>43</sup> Schmidt (2009, p. 91) reports that there are several spellings for Afro-Caribbean religious terms. For example ‘*Vodou*’ can be written as *Voodoo*, *Vodu*, *Wodu*. According to Schmidt most scholars use the Creole spelling of *Vodou* in order to distinguish it from the negative Hollywood portrayal as *Voodoo*.

Bettina Schmidt (2009) on her personal participation in a possession ceremony with a group of Afro-Caribbean migrants in New York. Schmidt's report is relevant to our concerns here because she says that she became 'overwhelmed by this unfamiliar situation' and didn't quite understand why (ibid, p. 92).

Schmidt acknowledges that despite her extensive experience as an anthropologist in observing the possession of mediums in Puerto Rican *Santeria* she had never been permitted to participate in ceremonies because of the dangers of becoming possessed by an *Orisha* (the name for the divine entities in *Santeria*), and that 'it would be difficult for me to get rid of one if he/she possessed me' (ibid, p. 91). The prospect of participating in a ceremony offered Schmidt a unique opportunity, and she had been invited by a colleague to attend a ceremony in a Vodou temple of a Haitian woman in New York.

Schmidt's report, although promising to be informative with regard to the subjective phenomena experienced through direct participation in a ceremony, leaves the reader uninformed as to the emotional nature of her experience. Apart from feeling overwhelmed when speaking with the *mambo* at the end of the ceremony, the only other reference to her own subjective experience was this: 'I was touched by this experience when I left the temple physically exhausted from the long night' (ibid, p.92).

Schmidt's explanation for her emotional experience was that it was in response to being accepted as an outsider into a sacred environment (ibid, p. 93). This could be seen as a cognitive deduction where the intellect takes precedence in order to arrive at a rational explanation. Alternatively she could have explained it as an emotional reaction to being in the presence of a divine being as Harrington does. Schmidt's choice of explanation may give a clue as to her own epistemology which may still be one of non-experience or non-belief in the ontology of spirit beings. In contrast, Harrington goes on to describe her experience of inviting the Goddess into herself, and of the need to be protected from negative spirit entities.

### ***Preparations and Subjective Experience of Positive Possession***

Harrington's description of the preparations for her own initiation into the possession rite draws attention to the principle of protection from unwelcome spirit agencies and to the pantheistic nature of the religion:

We met in a temple room, and there were about ten people present in a chalk marked circle. The Wiccan circle – the sacred space that keeps out undesirable forces whilst containing the power of the ceremony – had previously been blessed with consecrated salt water, and protective guardian spirits were called forth to guard the rite. These protective spirits act as sentinels of protection against any unwelcome supernatural forces that might be about; and whilst for us the unseen realms are not believed to be filled with evil forces, we do not want undesirable or incompatible presences in our place of working, particularly when we are working with possession rites. In Christianity these are the four archangels; the guardians of our tradition are ancestral forces, also associated with the four elements of earth, air, fire and water (Harrington, 2009, p. 104).

Consecrating salt water with a blessing is the same formula used by the Christian Church for producing holy water. The context of blessing the sacred circle with blessed salt water is precisely the same as the use of holy water in protection and other sacraments in the Christian Church. In all religions that believe in possession the precautions and rituals for protection from unwanted or evil spirit interference is virtually universal, and according to the experienced psychic Dion Fortune:

We live in the midst of invisible forces whose affects alone we perceive. We move among invisible forms whose actions we very often do not perceive at all, though we may be profoundly affected by them (Fortune, 2001, p. 3).

Fortune's advice is offered to everyone who is unaware of the negative influences of a spirit world and the destructive intentions of those who know how to use the black arts, but David Ashworth's warnings and methods of protection are directed specifically to the practitioner of those complementary therapies that would be considered as a part of the 'new age' spiritual movement (Ashworth, 2001). In contrast to Christian and other religious protection rituals, SRT practitioners are not known for using holy water in their procedures or drawing circles or pentagrams on the floor (although it is possible that some do). However, the precautions for protection normally do include a procedure whereby the space being used for the release of attached spirits from clients is declared in some way as a *sacred space*, usually with the invocation of *Divine Light* (Hickman, 1994). Protection from negative spirit forces is a recurring theme in all rituals that involve the intentional invocation of spirits, and is of prime importance in the healing practices of Spirit Release Practitioners (Ashworth, 2001, p. 35).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> With the intention of focussing on the methods and theories of Frederic Myers I am restricted in the attention that I am able to direct to the serious concerns of other authors, but it is important to note

## ***A Common Characteristic – the Altered State***

A recurring characteristic of all forms of possession, whether they are positive and invited or negative and uninvited is the phenomenon of the *altered state of consciousness*. According to Harrington: 'Everyone in the ritual needs to be in a *heightened state* in order to be receptive to the God' (2009, p. 105). The importance of the altered state is relevant to the scientific methods applied by Myers in his experiments with his subjects, and I shall explore his method of using the altered state later in Chapter 7.

In an altered state of consciousness, the experience becomes more emotionally profound, and it is this deep profound emotional quality that is missing from observers' reports.

The connection between the Wicca experience of possession by the Goddess (the God for male devotees) and mystical or transcendental experience as a *heightened state* is provided by Harrington as she describes her participation in the ritual for the high priestess' possession.

A serenity came upon me, and I was somehow at one with the whole cosmos. I saw a woman I knew, a gracious and serene woman in her sixties; yet she was transformed; she looked like herself, but was also infinite. And then she spoke these words, hers but yet not hers. I was moved by a sense of being beyond the world.... I felt touched by the most tender force imaginable, and I felt that whatever happened to me – for the rest of my life – all would be well, for she was with me always. ...When it was over, the priestess then became herself again (ibid).

Harrington's own experience of being possessed by the goddess describes a deeper mystical experience that incorporates a sense of being *out of body*:

I never felt that I was losing myself, but rather that the part of me that is caught up in daily life linked to (and embraced into) a more still and eternal Me, which in turn is a part of a divine universe. My consciousness pulled back into a night sky, so eventually I was looking down at a young woman's body, and seeing her look at a man kneeling before her. I saw all this through the eyes of a Goddess, not through personal eyes. When I spoke the words of the Charge, the poetry came through me from a far greater place than I had ever been able to imagine (ibid, p.107).

By Harrington's description of her experience it can be appreciated that she did not experience full possession whereby she loses all sense of herself as one would if they were completely taken over by a possessing spirit. In contrast she experienced being herself and more than herself and goes on to say:

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here that the published works of both Dion Fortune and David Ashworth are essential reading for the serious student of psychic and spiritual protection methods and procedures.

If we get it right, the individual is at once themselves and something far, far beyond themselves. As pantheists, we believe that this is really true about each person, whether or not they are experiencing it consciously. Being part of a tradition where one witnesses, and then participates in deity trance possession, gives us a ceremonial, regular reminder of the fact that we believe in the sacredness of each individual. Surely this is something that could only be described as a sacrament (ibid, p.108).

The interaction between host and the spirit entity can be seen on a continuum from subtle mental influence in thought impressions, symbolism and ideas at one end; to full possession at the other where the host relinquishes conscious control and the entity uses the body and mind of the host in totality.

From a more objective perspective, the phenomenological characteristics of Harrington's experience point to a mediated ritual of organised religious practice that results in a mystical experience of connection with a divine being. Her own description of something ineffable and being in touch with something greater than herself offers clues that would classify her experience as mystical. According to Underhill, 'True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life process, a something which the whole self does' (Underhill, 2002, p. 81). It is for this reason that the study of mysticism has an important contribution to make in explaining what Harrington is saying. Theories of mystical experience play a central role in linking the practical application of Myers' methods and theories with William James' philosophical approach to the scientific study of religion (James, 1902). Myers did not believe that science was the only means of acquiring knowledge, but that contemplation, revelation, mystical experience and intuition can produce profound truths (Myers, 1900, p. 114).

## **Voluntary Possession in a Branch of Christianity**

Mercy Magbagbeola, originally from Nigeria, is a social worker and mental health assessor working with the English Social Services. She uses her knowledge of the beliefs and customs of her native Nigeria, together with her gift of prophecy through possession by the Holy Spirit in her work as a prophetess in the *Celestial Church of Christ* with the Nigerian community in a district of London. Magbagbeola's testimony of the experience of being an instrument of the Holy Spirit offers an informative example of positive possession. In addition she has valuable knowledge and experience of the profound belief systems held by many diaspora that originate in African and Afro-Caribbean communities (Magbagbeola, 2009, pp. 109-113).



Magbagbeola describes her gift as, 'hearing messages from God, either as a clear vision or as God speaking directly into my heart' (Ibid, p. 109). She goes on to say that:

As Christians we are all filled with the Holy Spirit but possession, according to our faith, is attributed to the Powers of Darkness or to affliction by a demonic power (ibid).

The relationship between possession and witchcraft is described by Magbagbeola according to her own experiences and belief system:

A witch has demonic power as the human agent of Satan; some know about it, others do not. But they cannot control it; they are controlled by it. Witchcraft may be handed on from a senior generation; mothers may even give the power to practise witchcraft to a child before they die if they have no one else to give it to. Children can be as powerful as witches as adults, but sometimes if they are given the powers of witchcraft it lies dormant until puberty. Witches use the power of darkness. Sickness that cannot be healed, barrenness, working hard (like an elephant as we say) but getting nowhere – all this can be caused by witchcraft. They plan evil by night but their actions are carried out by day. Witches can use their power to affect specified places such as Islington or more widely to affect London or even cause a natural catastrophe like a tsunami (Ibid, p.110).

It is unfortunate that statements like the one in the last sentence above are taken as evidence that people like Magbagbeola are suffering from delusions in everything they say. There is a tendency to discount every statement made by a person on the basis that it is supernatural nonsense when just one statement stretches the imagination beyond the limits of commonplace views of reality, so that the proverbial baby is subsequently thrown out with the bathwater. Magbagbeola is in danger of leaving herself open to the theoretical claim that all who experience such things are mentally ill, when she herself declares that:

If people show signs of thought disorders, that is their words do not make sense, even in terms of their own culture, or what they say is quite impossible, then they are not possessed and need psychiatric treatment (ibid).

If, by using her gift of discernment through the Holy Spirit, she has cause to believe that someone is possessed, or rightly accused of witchcraft as she defines it, then the person (sometimes a child) is brought to the appropriate place of worship where the remedy is affected.

Only if children's abnormal behaviour coincides with misfortune in their family are children thought of as witches. Beating them will not change anything; only the power of prayer, the power of the Word, the power of the Name and the blood of the Cross could rid them of the evil (ibid, p.112).

She continues:

The solution for those who are not mentally ill concerns God. The pastor will pray over the prophet or prophetess who will receive the Holy Spirit which will descend upon them and give them the solution which must be written down and carried out to the letter (ibid).

When Magbagbeola describes her experience of communicating with the Holy Spirit for guidance she is in effect describing her experience of an altered state of consciousness, or trance:

If God wants me to see something, I will stop seeing you and I will see whatever it is God wants me to see. Within that space of time, those two minutes, I will not know what is happening around me, because I will be cut off from it. When the vision is over, I will come round and I will be able to write down what God has revealed (ibid).

The perceived reality of her experience and the firmly grounded belief system of her community is summarised in her statement:

This is our reality. It is not just gossip and it is not just odd ideas, it happens in people's lives (ibid, p.113).

The *Celestial Church of Christ* is a branch of a syncretistic religion that merges primitive tribal beliefs with Christian theology. Even though Christian missionaries were able to introduce Christianity to primitive peoples in Africa, they were often unable to replace primitive beliefs with Christian doctrine, and consequently their original belief system became integrated with Christian teaching. The result is a religion that still holds beliefs about spirits, witchcraft and possession, but with Christian resolutions, rather than more primitive ones that involve witch doctors or shamans. A similar thing could be said about our own traditions in the Anglican Church.<sup>45</sup> It must therefore be acknowledged that religious beliefs and traditions, although their origin may be lost to conscious thought, still persist in the collective consciousness of a community. Littlewood, a psychiatrist with training in anthropology, is aware of the tensions between these different discourses and advises physicians to be aware of them:

While treating the underlying major psychiatric condition, if any, the physician must remain sensitive to the cultural issues, couched as they may be in a totally alien

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<sup>45</sup> The celebration of Christmas and Easter for example are syncretistic of pagan rituals and Christian teaching; and May Day in England is still celebrated as a continuation of the pagan celebration of the rites of fertility.

medium. It is unwise to directly contradict a patient's or relative's statements about the reality of spirit possession, but instead to offer any psychiatric treatment (including pharmaceutical drugs) as something which experience has taught the doctor to protect against spirit attack (Littlewood, 2009, p. 34).

In order to get to the truth, whether a phenomenon of mental illness or spirit possession, it is important to take into consideration the epistemology of the culture concerned, together with the epistemological outlook of the observer or commentator, and then consider the hermeneutic interpretation of the phenomenology of the experience. Furthermore, the contextual semantics used by respective parties in their interpretation of spirit possession must be acknowledged.

Those theories that are likely to be applied to the experiences of both Harrington and Magbagbeola would include the socio-cultural, auto-suggestion, hysteria and cognitive errors. These theories are products of the positivistic scientific paradigm which discards the possibility of the existence of a spiritual realm. The theories of Frederic Myers and William James considered an alternative hypothesis that they sought to test, and they would attempt to deduce whether the voices originated in a part of the subliminal self or the voice of an external spirit entity.

Even without consideration of the methods and theories of Myers, modern psychology could use the scientific methods it has at its disposal to test the efficacy of the methods of discernment and resolution that are used by the Celestial Church of Christ and other healing ministries in the treatment of alleged possession and witchcraft. All that is required, as I have stated earlier, is to collect information on the diagnosis, the method of intervention and the outcome – just as Gassner did in the 1700's,<sup>46</sup> and just as all medical practitioners do with accepted diseases and remedies. With particular regard to the methods of the Celestial Church of Christ, the questions that I seek to explore in this thesis is how efficacious are the remedies offered by the Holy Spirit (or whoever it is that speaks), and how can the efficacy of interventions be measured?

The common theme in the invited practice of positive possession in both Wicca and the Celestial church of Christ is the *intention* of asking for guidance from a higher source for healing. It is this theme that raises another question that my thesis will address in Chapter 10. I

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<sup>46</sup> See Table 1 in Chapter 1.

also pose the question: what are the similarities between the ritual of *Drawing Down the Moon* in Wicca and possession by the *Holy spirit* in the Celestial Church of Christ with those of Spirit Release Therapy, with Christian Spiritualism and with the Spiritism methods used in the institutionalised medicine of Brazil? It is my contention that it makes little difference whether a person with the *intention* to heal his or her fellow human is a devotee of Wicca, Christianity, Haitian Vodou, Spiritualism, Spiritism, or any other religious, mystical or spiritual tradition, because there are common characteristics that can be identified to bring them all together as spiritual healing practices. In addition to the *intention* of the healer and the host of a possessing entity, the other significant characteristic is the *altered state of consciousness*.

There are mystical, cultural, sociological and psychiatric theories to explain both Harrington's and Magbagbeola's beliefs and experiences, and these theories are applied just as readily to other examples of positive possession in ethnographic studies of shamanism, which I will now examine below.

## **Positive Possession and Social Dynamics**

Various forms of possession have long played an important part in traditional religious beliefs and practices in a wide variety of cultures (Lewis, 1942; Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2009; Schmidt, 2009). We may choose any tribe, anywhere in the world and, in all probability, they will have their beliefs in a spirit world and possession, with their concomitant traditions for embracing benevolent spirits and for exorcising evil ones (Carus, 1900, p. 7).

We are reminded by Mulhern (2009, p. 38) that language presents us with a problem when trying to make a cross-cultural comparison of spirit possession, because of the different terms used to make sense of spirit entities and their interactions with human beings. The how, why and where of spirit possession can also vary between cultures, within a given culture, and from one historical period to another. Transposing differences in language and terminology from any ethnic group into our own language: the taxonomy of possession in primitive cultures presents particular challenges.

However, according to Mulhern, spirit possession is always to some extent an organised public event with consensually agreed local beliefs about the relationship between natural and supernatural worlds. It characteristically involves the public acknowledgement that an *altered*

*state of consciousness* has occurred in an individual and that their body/mind has been transformed by a disembodied spirit-being with an autonomous volition.

If the altered state is characteristic of all types of possession, including the positive possession of the Wicca goddess as experienced by Harrington (2009) and the Holy Spirit by Magbagbeola (2009), then an understanding of the relationship between altered states and the possession of discarnate entities and the souls of the deceased is crucial. This relationship is fundamental in the methods used by Myers in his search for answers to the question: 'Does man have a soul'? To quote Myers: 'If in truth souls departed call to us it is to them that we shall listen most of all' (Myers, 1903b, p. 35).

There is a conflict in their approaches to the study of possession between anthropologists, who use social science methods, and psychiatrist / anthropologists, whose perspectives are altered by their knowledge of medical science (Lewis, 2003, p. 160). Thus, Lewis asserts:

If there is one thing that traditionally unites most British social anthropologists it is their fierce antagonism and their disregard for the psychological aspects of the social phenomena which they study. In common with their intellectual ancestor Durkheim, they seem to feel a positive obligation to relegate the scope of psychology to individual abnormalities, and thus misrepresent it as a field of study which is generally irrelevant to their preoccupations (ibid).

Lewis, in his critique of anthropologists, who study ecstatic and mystical experiences in comparative religions, makes even more critical demarcations between researchers of different persuasions. He is critical of anthropologists whose main interest has been 'in the expressive or theatrical aspect of possession; and they have frequently not even troubled to ask themselves very closely what precisely was being 'expressed' – except of course a sense of identity with a supernatural power' (ibid, p.22). He further comments:

Nothing after all is easier than leaping to conclusions and projecting our own ethnocentric psychological (or psychoanalytic) assumptions and interpretations on to exotic evidence which may correspond only in superficial detail with apparently similar data from our own culture (ibid).

The fixation with all that is dramatic in possession contrasts sharply with the social anthropological approach to the study of witchcraft. In Lewis' opinion it is within this corner of comparative religion that the anthropologist focuses squarely on the social nexus in which accusations of sorcery and witchcraft are made. It is here, according to Lewis, that the

anthropologist passes beyond the beliefs to examine the incidence of accusations in different social contexts, and is thus able to show convincingly how charges of witchcraft provide a means of mystical attack on relationships fraught with tension where other means of conflict resolution are inappropriate or unavailable. In Lewis' estimation, it is possible to see the accused witch as victim rather than bewitched subject, because anthropologists do not generally believe in witchcraft themselves (ibid, p. 23). This is precisely where Stobart (2006) stands in her report on the incidence of children who were rightly or wrongly accused of witchcraft in England. The accused are seen as victims because the observers do not believe in witchcraft or possession themselves, and this gives the same distorted and biased view that any anthropologist will have in attempts to study any comparative religious experience from either a phenomenological or psychiatric perspective. It is here, within either the positive or negative belief systems of observers and experimental scientists alike that the bias occurs; and it is here that Myers' greatest concerns lay. He maintained that in order to get to the truth of the matter it is important to ignore or to bypass the assumptions and preconceived ideas of the researcher, and the term, 'without prejudice or presuppositions of any kind' is written into the constitution of the Society for Psychical Research (1882, p. 4).

Similarly, according to the psychiatrist / anthropologist, Roland Littlewood:

Possession denotes a local belief that an individual has been entered by an alien spirit or other superhuman force, which then controls the person or at least significantly alters their actions and identity to a greater or lesser extent' (2009, p. 23).

Littlewood's model of possession is comprised of three elements, the first of which is the *belief* in possession, the second element is an *altered state of consciousness* (ASC) that may be experienced in isolation, and the third is a combination of the two which constitutes a *possession* state (2009, p. 29). In Littlewood's model a shamanic vision quest is likely to be a trance, and the possession cults of Brazil or the Caribbean are likely to be classified as possession trance (ibid). A possession belief by itself can be inconsequential and hardly affect daily life at all. Littlewood's deconstruction of the possession state into the two components of belief and ASC, which combine into the third, does little to help in understanding the phenomenology of the possession state, other than describing it as a form of socially accepted ritual that is dependent on belief and an altered state. It is this compulsion within psychiatry to deconstruct and classify that detracts from an understanding of the semantics and diversity of spirit possession and shamanic journeying. My argument is that Myers' concept of a continuum

can better be applied to account for subtle variations in possession experiences. But more importantly, Myers asserted that in order to get to the essentials of automatist phenomena, one had to bypass the effect of belief systems. I will argue that Myers demonstrated that what happens in the domain of spirit communication is *not* dependent on a belief system. The importance of this aspect of Myers' work is examined in Chapters 7 and 8 where I discuss his experimental methods with hypnosis and their application to sensory automatisms.

Returning to the anthropological concept of social dynamics, according to Mulhern the function of ritualised possession in the cultural idiom is to 'exercise control, explore and celebrate the deviant, possession-permitting ritual expressions of normally unthinkable behaviour' (2009, pp. 46-48). Lewis, in his treatise on *Ecstatic Religion* (2003, p. xiii), views possession as a social rather than a culturally specific phenomenon, where he explores which social categories of people are most vulnerable<sup>47</sup> to the voluntary invitation of possessing spirits, and what social consequences follow. Lewis also examines 'how the character of possessing spirits relates to the social circumstances of the possessed' (ibid, p. xiii).

Examples of this form of possession expressed as a social dynamic include, among the Waitaka of Kenya, the experience of *Saka* which results from women being denied requests to their husbands for something that the men typically regard as their prerogative (Harris, 1957, cited by Littlewood 2009, p. 31). Described by Western observers as 'hysteria', the pattern of *Saka* provides a social caricature of women as uncontrollable consumers, vulnerable, emotional and out of control. The contrast with men is seen as a malady, and the cure is for the husband to sponsor a public ceremony where his wife wears male clothing, or new clothes and this inversion of normal behaviour may be seen by Westerners as a resolution of the conflict. From the perspective of the local men *Saka* may be seen as an illness, but also as an attack by malign spirits, and as a simple expression of women's social position and personality. According to Littlewood, Western observers are more likely to see *Saka* in parallel with drug overdose as an 'attention-seeking ploy' (Littlewood, 2009, p. 32).

The above interpretations of positive possession are based on reports of anthropologist observers who had no experience of participation in the ceremonies that were observed. As I noted earlier in Chapter 1, Diesing (1971) advocates personal experience in forming

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<sup>47</sup> Vulnerability to spirit possession is examined in Chapter 12.

relationships with those being studied and experiencing the same phenomena that they do as important for the social scientist.

According to Schmidt's theoretical interpretation of her observations of Haitian Vodou and her partial participation in a possession ceremony, she concludes that:

Vodou serves as an important function in the diaspora. It can signify home for first-generation immigrants and its practitioners offer support in a hostile environment, but it can also mark cultural or ethnic identity for succeeding generations whose home is the diaspora' (2009, p. 99).

Valuable as this may be to the scholar of traditional religions, what concerns us here is the value of *experience* in an understanding of what it is to be possessed oneself. Harrington's description of the emotional experience of being in the presence of someone who is possessed by a divine being is very similar to Schmidt's in the terminology used. But their respective explanations for the emotional experience are very different, and I am suggesting that the differences in interpretation are the result of differences in epistemology.

The different theories espoused by anthropologists and psychiatrists betray their background and training. But it is the *experience* of possession that I am searching for in the scientist, and it is to this end that I shall now turn my attention to the benefits of the personal experience of 'shamanic Journeying', which is a practice of entering into an altered state of consciousness, and then journeying into an alternate reality where spirit entities are purported to exist.

## **The Shamanic Journey & Soul Loss**

Spirit possession is the most widely held *mystical* interpretation of trance and of other associated conditions according to Lewis (2003, p. 40). The other major mystical theory is that which attributes these states to the temporary absence of the victim's soul, and is consequently known in anthropology as 'soul-loss' (Littlewood, 2009, p. 29). Spirit possession and/or soul-loss, (depending on the cultural interpretation) are the two principal mystical explanations (Lewis, p. 57). Lewis reports that the culturally determined emphasis on soul-loss, rather than spirit possession, is a strongly developed motif in many North American Indian societies (ibid, p. 43). The psychologist and medical anthropologist Alberto Villoldo, reports on soul-loss in traumatised children:



Among Hispanic and Native American communities throughout the U.S., when children suffer from *Susto* (fright), they are taken to a special place to retrieve the part of their soul that was lost or taken from them (2005, p. xi).

Villoldo spent twenty five years studying the healing practices of the Amazon and Inca shamans. His personal experiences of the traditional rites of passage of these indigenous peoples, and of being trained in shamanic healing arts have enabled him to adapt and translate these practices within a modern scientific context.

In his preface, Villoldo draws a parallel between the time taken to train a medical practitioner in western medicine and a shamanic healer respectively. He has taken what he has learned through practice under the guidance of respected shamanic healers, and translated its principles and procedures into the modern language of Jungian psychology, where he applies them in healing practice and written works. He declares that his practice is 'extraordinarily powerful and effective, and must only be used with the strongest code of ethics and integrity' (2005, p. xi).

The Jungian scholar Leon Schlamm (2008, p. 110) reminds us that journeys into the shamanic mythic realm through Jung's concept of 'active imagination' can be a dangerous practice:

Jung was well aware that the practitioner of active imagination who was unable to maintain a differentiated, self-reflective conscious point of view in the face of unconscious visionary material would be vulnerable to mental illness: either in the form of psychosis where consciousness is overwhelmed by unconscious visionary materials; or in the form of conscious identification with numinous unconscious contents leading to possession by them (Jung, 1916/1958).

Similarly, Villoldo draws a direct corollary between shamanic journeying and Jung's active imagination journeying into the unconscious, and it is not difficult to see why he emphasises the importance of training for the shamanic journey with experienced master teachers. The act of altering our state of awareness from the everyday normal consciousness to an altered state that facilitates access to other realms can be spontaneous and unmediated in the vulnerable person and can lead to mental disturbances or possession by archetypal unconscious contents, as Jung warns. The continuum of vulnerability and susceptibility to spirit influence is discussed in Chapter 12, where I examine the relationship between mental health and spirit possession.

Villoldo is representative of those anthropologists and psychologists who have taken that all-important step in developing cognitive, emotive and social relationships with those he studies, in accordance with the ethnographic research ethos of Diesing (1971).

The consequence of Villoldo's personal participation (not just in the life and culture of the community, but also in the esoteric healing arts) is that he has taken what is of value and applied it for his own benefit and the benefit of others in his own culture; and instead of merely fulfilling the generally accepted role of an anthropologist or psychologist, he has become a healer in the shamanic tradition – in other words a neo-shaman with a Jungian perspective.

Scholars such as Kelly *et al* (2007a) and Adam Crabtree (2009), have begun to recognise that Jung's concept of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1959) was influenced by Myers' concept of the 'Subliminal Self' (Myers, 1903b, pp. 26-27), and that furthermore, the permeable Subliminal Self is open to interaction with the wider collective unconscious. The interconnection of human individual consciousness with the minds of others (known as telepathy) is central to Myers' theory of 'sensory automatism' (Myers, 1903b, p. 162), and continues to be the subject of more recent research findings into the nature of consciousness, which I will explore more fully in Chapters 10 and 11. Furthermore, the process of 'active imagination' is relevant to this discussion, with respect to the theories and methods of Myers, as a means of connecting with the collective unconscious and the subliminal self. In other words, there are similarities between Jung's process of active imagination and the principles contained in the process of self-hypnosis. The phenomena associated with hypnosis, altered states, mystical experiences, possession and soul loss are explored more fully in Chapter 7, and it is my own contention that the primary differences between these inter-connected concepts are in the terminology used by adherents and practitioners and in the induction method adopted.

By way of a conclusion to this chapter, that introduced the value of personal experiences in shamanic journeying and its relationship with Jung's collective unconscious, I think it prudent briefly to highlight the opinion of Lewis towards his work. This will help us to put the anthropologist's task into perspective and contrast it with the methodological perspective of Frederic Myers:

The anthropologist's task is to discover what people believe in, and to relate their beliefs operationally to other aspects of their culture and society. He has neither the skills nor the authority to pronounce upon the absolute 'truth' of ecstatic manifestations in different cultures. Nor is it his business to assess whether other people's perceptions of divine truth are more or less compatible with those embodied within his own religious heritage, whatever he may feel about the latter. Indeed I would go further. Such judgements might be more fittingly left to the jurisdiction of the powers which are held to inspire religious feeling. Certainly, at least, it is not for the anthropologist to attempt to usurp the role of the gods whose worship he studies (Lewis, 2003, p. 24).

Lewis' sentiments regarding the role of the anthropologist are in sympathy with the comments made by Barker (2009, p. 4) that I cited in chapter one. Both agree that social scientists are not in a position to comment on the 'truth' of a religious belief – only that they can discover what the belief is and how it affects a community's social reality. Whether there are gods or demons or whether there is an alternate reality is not for the anthropologist to judge. This leads to the questions: Who can say whether there are gods and demons, and how can we test the hypothesis that there are? My response to these questions is that Myers' experimental methods and his particular emphasis on the need to bypass religious beliefs in order to discover what truths lay beyond them can provide a possible answer. Myers valued the work of anthropologists in bringing the rituals and beliefs of cultural groups to our attention, but he was critical insofar as they failed to acknowledge what he saw as the greater value in their work. Thus he writes:

The connection of anthropology with psychical research will be evident to any reader who has acquainted himself with recent expositions of Primitive Man. He may think, indeed, that the connection is *too* evident, and that we can hardly bring it into notice without providing a good deal more than we desire. For us the creeds and customs of savage races become better known, the part played by sorcery, divination, apparitions becomes increasingly predominant. .... Certainly it was evident to me that the mass of phenomena included under this title had, at any rate, a psycho-physical importance which the existing works on the subject for the most part ignored (Myers, 1886, pp. xlv-xlv).

It was Myers' belief that the rituals of shamans of less technologically developed cultures than our own were a valuable route of enquiry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is my contention, in agreement with Myers, that this avenue is still available to us today. Furthermore, it is through understanding the relationship between the observed trance and shamanic healing that we can gain a deeper understanding of those mystical or anomalous occurrences that ordinary people experience in their everyday lives.

According to the modern transpersonal psychology researcher Professor David Fontana, the rapid technological developments of the past 300 years have progressively alienated modern Western man from his biological and spiritual roots (Fontana, 2005, p. 13). He further comments that living much closer to nature, and to three of the areas that linked humankind to nature – birth, procreation and death – than the modern Westerner, people in less developed cultures grow with an enhanced *sensitivity* to their environment (ibid). Fontana reinforces the importance of experience by saying that, ‘sensitivity of this kind depends greatly upon *experience* in order to develop a set of skills that can be applied to healing practices. Without such experience the potential may be irretrievably lost’ (ibid, p.12). It is in agreement with David Fontana, Paul Diesing (1971), Hans Naegeli-Osjord (1988) and William James (1912) that I have persistently reinforced the importance of personal subjective experience in coming to terms with, and understanding the concept of spirit possession. I would argue (in agreement with too many others to reference here) that in the modern world we have become insulated from our natural environment to the degree that we have relinquished our *sensitivity* to the ultimate reality of the spiritual dimension.

We may think of this sensitivity in terms of a heightened ‘physical’ awareness because of the physical sensations associated with emotions, such as ‘gut-feelings’ and ‘racing heart’. But, according to Fontana (2005), the cultures concerned speak of ‘non-physical’ awareness, one that renders them receptive to realities beyond normal ways of seeing and hearing. It is thought that this awareness allows contact with the spirits of the dead, either through apparitions or dreams. Particularly gifted individuals are able to make contact at will, even travelling in some cases to the dimensions where these spirits are said to exist. ‘These gifted individuals are known to Western anthropologists as shamans’ (Fontana, 2005, p. 13). There is ample evidence that many respected anthropologists have taken this claim seriously, including Joan Halifax, a medical anthropologist and author of scholarly research into the subject including *Shamanic Voices* (Halifax, 1979), Felicitas Goodman who has written on the value of shamanic ritual in accessing an alternate reality (1988) and Alberto Villoldo (2005). In addition, David Peat (a theoretical physicist) expertly reconciles shamanism with natural science and Jungian psychology. On the relationship between the experience of shamanic journeying and Jung’s archetypes, he writes:

Many of the symbols found in the indigenous science of the Americas (the tree, four sacred directions, fire, serpent, bear, rock, sacred plants, sacred animals, worlds within worlds, etc.), are shared by indigenous peoples across the earth and are found in records left by the peoples of prehistoric times. The psychologist Carl Jung associated these with archetypes of the collective unconscious, but to the native mind they are not metaphors, images, representations, or archetypes. Rather they are reality itself (Peat, 1996, p. 257).

Many of the concepts contained in Jungian psychology appear to have a direct relationship with shamanism, mysticism and spirit possession, and it is with these observations in mind that a greater understanding of these relationships may be of advantage to the modern Jungian analyst or scholar. The influence of Frederic Myers on Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, and Jung's personal experience of spirit release from his own home are examined more closely in Chapter 6, *Myer's Model of Mind*.

In this chapter I set out to demonstrate that the development of theories on spirit possession is dependent on the perspective of the theorist, which in turn is influenced and dependent on an epistemological foundation of first-hand experiential knowledge. Ethnographic anthropologists, medical anthropologists, psychiatrists and psychologists will all have a different epistemology that influences their interpretation of what they observe. When an observer makes judgements that are based on a predetermined theory then an explanation for possession phenomena will fit the theory accordingly. However, if the perspective is altered by personal experience of possession then the epistemological foundation is altered and this in turn facilitates a different theory. In this chapter I have shown that those who open themselves to positive spirit possession often have a completely different perspective to those who merely observe. Similarly, those who have been adversely affected by uninvited intrusion will have their own perspective. In conclusion, and in order to drive the point home, the words of psychologist Dion Fortune seem appropriate:

I think I may fairly claim to have practical, and not merely theoretical, qualifications for the task. My attention was first drawn to psychology, and subsequently to occultism as the real key to psychology, by the personal experience of a psychic attack that left me with shattered health for a considerable period. I know for myself the peculiar horror of such an experience, its insidiousness, its potency, and its disastrous effects on mind and body (Fortune, 2001, p. xiv).

In the chapter that follows, I take a closer look at some of those reported cases of demonic possession that defy the laws of physics and biology as we currently understand them. These

cases are seen through the eyes of witnesses and participants in the Catholic exorcism ritual and offer the opportunity to question the validity of eye witness testimony, together with an exploration of alternative hypotheses according to Myers' conceptual framework.

## CHAPTER 3

### Eye Witness Testimony – Is Seeing Believing?

In chapter one I have been critical of the deficiencies of surveys and interviews in social sciences where the researchers have had no experience of possession phenomena themselves, and I have suggested that subjective experience is critical in arriving at a less biased and more informative interpretation of the concept of possession.

Chapter two introduced the value of personal participation in ethnographic studies in order to take the gathering of meaningful information beyond the method of detached phenomenology. Those anthropologists and psychologists who are prepared to surrender themselves to the genuine experience of the culture they are studying run the risk of being seduced by that culture and 'going-native' (a negative view), or of adopting genuinely beneficial spiritual practices that can be shared with others in acts of psychological / spiritual healing (the positive view).

The contribution made by personal experience to our respective epistemological foundation is the subject of Chapter 4 - *Beliefs in Possession – Epistemology and Empiricism*. However, before I reach that stage there is another point of view that must be considered if we are to gain a broader understanding of possession: that of the eye-witness account of those paranormal phenomena that defy the laws of physics and biology (as we currently understand them). A tension is created when eye witnesses testify to paranormal or supernatural events that defy the laws of physics and there is a tendency for consensus to lean towards those laws for reassurance. But Frederic Myers asserted that nothing is paranormal – all is normal, and that nothing is supernatural – all is natural. On the subject of abnormal phenomena he writes:

When we speak of an abnormal phenomenon we do not mean one which contravenes natural laws, but one which exhibits them in an unusual or inexplicable form' (Myers, 1885, p. 30).

Myers maintained a belief in the ultimate rationality of the interrelatedness of all phenomena, mental and physical, and he attempted to forge a new perspective and broaden concepts by continually examining assumptions, hypotheses and views contrary to those that prevailed. Myers' view therefore proffers the possibility that our knowledge of physics is incomplete, and

in this chapter I look at some of those cases of possession that challenge the laws of physics in order to illustrate the difficulties that physical reductionist science has in accommodating them.

It was in chapter two that I introduced the continuum: one of the cornerstones of Myers' scientific theories which states that all human experience can be seen on a progressive scale, rather than as discrete phenomena. I used two examples in Chapter 2 of 'positive' possession in order to illustrate the perceived benefits of inviting spirit entities to interact with the host, and to suggest how the continuum of human experience can be applied to possession phenomenology. In this chapter I show how the continuum can be applied to 'negative' possession, and how discrete categorisation of possession typology can be accommodated on the scale of intensity. This will help to demonstrate the validity of Myers' concept of continuity in his proposal for an expanded naturalism that can accommodate all forms of possession into a natural order. At the extreme end of the scale of intensity are those examples of demonic possession that defy the known laws of physics and question the validity of eye-witness testimony. In the case of 'Anneliese Michel', which was brought to court when the actions of the exorcist were criminalised; priests, doctors, psychiatrists and an anthropologist were called to give expert testimony on whether demonic possession was a genuine phenomenon, or whether Anneliese was mentally ill (Goodman, 2005, pp. 177-199). One of the witnesses, Father Adolf Rodewyk, gave testimony that he believed that Anneliese had been possessed, and he 'compared possession states with hypnotic ones, where the subject was without a will of his/her own whilst the state lasted and entirely normal when the state was not present'<sup>48</sup> (ibid, p. 189).<sup>49</sup>

The methods of discernment - that is the art of distinguishing whether a person is suffering from some form of spirit interference or whether they are mentally ill - is introduced in this chapter in order to demonstrate the difficulties that are presented to psychiatrists who lack the knowledge and skills of discernment.

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<sup>48</sup> This one statement from an eye-witness provided the key that links possession with altered state vulnerability. This was ignored in the case of Anneliese Michel, and is the central core of this thesis.

<sup>49</sup> The case of Anneliese Michel, as presented by Felicitas Goodman (2005), herself an experienced anthropologist, is an example of how differing opinions, beliefs and perspectives, together with power politics between church, the medical establishment, the law and the state can influence the outcome of a legal process.



I cite an example from the case files of the contemporary psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck (2005) who witnessed and participated in the Roman Catholic rite of exorcism of two of his own patients. First I cite the case of 'Jersey' in order to demonstrate difficulties in discernment, and later in this chapter I introduce Peck's second case, that of 'Beccah' to challenge eye-witness testimony with several hypotheses according to Myers' expanded framework.

A full and complete treatise on all the signs and indications for full diabolic possession, partial diabolic possession and demonic possession, obsession, infestation, etc., as recorded in theological / academic texts is far too great a task for this thesis. I am therefore only able to present three examples (in addition to Peck's) of case studies that are characteristic of paranormal phenomena that defy the laws of physics as we currently understand them.

### **Categories of Possession on a Continuum**

Father Johann Joseph Gassner (1727-1779), a Jesuit exorcist in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, distinguished between two different types of illness: 'natural' ones that belonged to the realm of the physician, and 'preternatural' ones which he divided into three separate categories: (a) *circumsessio* - what appeared to be a natural illness but was caused by the devil; (b) *obsession* - the effect of sorcery; and (c) *possession* – that is overt diabolical possession, the least frequent of the three forms, and the most dramatic (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 55). In chapter one I presented a chart of the illnesses categorised as (a) *circumsessio* that Gassner claimed were healed by his method of exorcism by prayer and the authority of the name of Christ (Midelfort, 2005, p. 64). This leaves two remaining categories according to Gassner – obsession and possession. But these remaining categories are not sufficient to accommodate the diversity of alleged demonic afflictions.

In 1998, the Conference of Italian Bishops asked the International Association of Exorcists to come up with a list of terms that could be used by everybody (Baglio, 2009, p. 46). The categorisation they collectively agreed upon is: (1) infestation, (2) oppression, (3) obsession, and (4) demonic possession. But exorcists also assert that the devil is most active in its capacity to 'tempt us to do what we do not want and what is not right' (ibid, p.46). The so-called 'ordinary' activity of the devil is by far the most common according to Father Gabriel Amorth, retired senior exorcist to the Vatican, who writes:

...how great – and growing – is the demand for exorcists. ...First why is there such a high demand for exorcists? Can we make the case that the demon is more active today than in the past? Can we say that the incidence of demonic possession and other, lesser, evil disturbances is on the rise? The answer to this and similar questions is a decisive Yes. Rationalism, atheism – which is preached to the masses – and the corruption that is a by-product of Western consumerism have all contributed to a *frightening decline in faith*. This I can state with mathematical certainty: where faith declines, superstition grows (Amorth, 1992, p. 12).

*Temptation* must therefore take its place in the categorisation of demonic activity, and I have revised the graded list accordingly: (1) temptation, (2) infestation, (3) oppression, (4) obsession and (5) diabolic and demonic possession.

In light of Myers' continuum as a model, temptation could be seen as the thin end of the wedge. As individuals with the power of volition (free will), each person has the choice of permitting themselves to be tempted into dangerous practices or not. However, unless an individual approaches their life according to strict moral teachings or religious dogma, (such as Catholicism or Islam), it is unlikely that they would attribute any form of pain or suffering resulting from foolish behaviour to the devil. This is the danger that Father Amorth speaks of.

Moving along the continuum, *infestation* is the presence of demonic activity in a location or object, such as a haunted house. Phenomena can include unexplained sounds such as footsteps and other mysterious noises, loud bangs, laughter, screams, dropping temperature, objects disappearing suddenly and reappearing mysteriously in another part of the house. Strange 'presences' can be felt, and can include offensive odours, interruption or malfunction of electronic devices, pictures that mysteriously bang or fall off walls, doors and windows that open and close on their own, dishes or other objects levitating and flying about the room (Baglio, 2009, p. 47). According to Baglio the general agreement of exorcists is that infestation is often caused by a curse, and the solution is usually for an exorcist to say prayers and to celebrate the Mass on the site (Baglio, 2009, p. 48).

According to psychiatrist Hans Naegeli-Osjord (1988, p. 150), an *infestation* may cause the victim to sometimes suffer physical torture, but more often there are physical disturbances in the environment. These physical manifestations are often ascribed to poltergeist activity, but whereas poltergeist activity usually lasts only for a short period, for the person experiencing infestation, it may last for several years (Naegeli-Osjord, 1988, p. 151).

*Oppression*, or psychic attack, can include mysterious blows to the body and strange signs or letters appearing on the body (Baglio, 2009, p. 48). Baglio suggests that these afflictions are generally aimed at people closest to God. Examples include Saint Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380), Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and Saint Gemma Galgani (1878-1903) (ibid, pp.48-49).

As in the Book of Job (1-42), victims of this kind of attack may also suffer in their work, health, or relationships. The purpose of the demonic is supposedly to drive these people towards isolation and despair so they may turn their back on God (Baglio, 2009, p. 49). Extreme examples of oppression or psychic attack include cases of stigmata which is a phenomenon that Myers took the time to investigate. He gives examples of stigmata and, through experimental hypnosis, offers a scientific explanation for this phenomenon, which I will discuss in Chapter 9.

*Obsession*, according to Baglio, (2009, p. 49) involves an intense and persistent attack on the *mind* of the victim. These attacks can include random or obsessive thoughts that are often quite absurd. Thoughts can be so intense that the victim may be unable to free himself from them, or much more dangerously, that he may actually believe them to be true. For example, he may be led to believe that loved ones who seek to comfort him and relieve him of his symptoms, are conspiring against him. Paranoia can be the result of demonic obsession. Italian exorcist Father Franscenco Bamonte notes:

Some are thoughts and impulses that urge people to harm others; some make people think that a pact with Satan can get them out of their troubles or bring them success; some are thoughts to profane the Eucharist, others are thoughts to drive one to suicide (cited in Baglio, 2009, p. 49).

The use of the term *obsession*, as adopted by psychiatry in the diagnosis of *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder* (APA, 1987), has its origins, according to Naegeli-Osjord, in ideas described by Swedenborg as 'imprisoned by false ideas' (1988, p. 68). This degree of possession is also named 'harassment' by Naegeli-Osjord (1988, p. 135), who asserts:

Harassment differs fundamentally from possession. Spirits of all kinds, but most probably 'poor souls', and less frequently angel demons of cosmic-archetypal origin appear to be involved. *Elementals*, for example spirits developed from ethereally condensed images and emotional content may also occasionally take part. None of these beings is capable of conquering the body of the victim, but they harass it at a

distance, although nothing is measurable within the dimensions of transcendence (ibid).

Naegeli-Osjord is of the opinion that the ego of the harassed person may provide a strong enough defence to resist the onslaught of full possession from these lesser spirit forms. On harassment he writes:

The harassed person does not inflict injuries on himself. He believes that he hears voices in his environment, perceives odours and suffers irritating and sometimes painful touches on the surface of his body. Inexplicable changes in his environment, special displacements of household objects (telekinesis) cause him to firmly believe in spirits which are external to his psychosomatic reality. The situation here resembles what shall later be described as 'infestation' (Naegeli-Osjord, 1988, p. 137).

Naegeli-Osjord suggests that the incidence of harassment (obsession) is far greater than possession, but in the past 150 years the incidence of both have decreased considerably, probably due to the ego strengthening of individuals and increased intellectualisation in Western nations (ibid, p.137). Although increased intellectual capacity and stronger egos may provide increased protection from spirit influences, those with weak egos or other forms of psychological or emotional predisposition are still vulnerable (and it is this vulnerability that is discussed in Chapter 12).

*Diabolic or demonic* possession has been diagnosed by the Roman Catholic Church according to specific criteria at different times in its history. Demonic possession was originally a catch-all term that was used in pre-modern times to describe all sorts of both physiological and psychological afflictions, the causes of which were not self-evidently organic, or afflictions that failed to respond to standard naturalist medical cures (Sluhovsky, 2007, p. 14). Somatic symptoms that signalled possible demonic possession have included unusual marks on the skin, bloating and levitation (Caciola, 2003, p. 47), swelling of the body and limbs and acute pains (Sluhovsky, 2007, p. 85).

According to the exorcist Malachi Martin (1976),<sup>50</sup> 'as far back as the life of Jesus himself a peculiar revulsion to symbols and truths of religion<sup>51</sup> is always and without exception a mark of the possessed person' (ibid, p.13). Martin uses the word *possessed* only in one context – that of *diabolic* possession. There are other supernormal phenomena according to Martin that are

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<sup>50</sup> Malachi Martin was author of *Hostage to the Devil* and mentor to M. Scott Peck, the psychiatrist who conducted two exorcisms himself (Peck, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> It is acknowledged that Martin is referring to the Christian religion.

attributable to diabolical possession. These can include, but not always, an inexplicable stench, freezing temperature, telepathic powers about religious or moral matters, a peculiarly unlined or completely smooth or stretched skin, an unusual distortion of the face, or other physical and behavioural transformations, *possessed gravity* - when the possessed person becomes immovable, *levitation* - when the possessed floats in the air, violent smashing of furniture, constant opening and closing of doors and tearing of fabric with no discernible causes (ibid, p.13). All of these manifestations are in conflict with our understanding of the known laws of physics, and always elicit incredulity when they are witnessed.

Naegeli-Osjord, one of the first modern psychiatrists to report cases of possession encountered in contemporary clinical practice includes other supernormal phenomena that defy the known laws of physics and human biological functioning:

Paranormal events include poltergeist phenomena of all kinds. In addition there are smells of putrefaction and the stench of sulphur. In drastic cases, we encounter the occurrence of manifestations from the body. Feathers, iron fragments, smelly fluids emerge from the surfaces of the body or are vomited. The attack can occur spontaneously, it can be announced, or it can be provoked by priests or exorcists (Naegeli-Osjord, 1988, p. 31).

Baglio reports that diabolic possession is by far the most spectacular and the rarest. In a diabolic possession the devil takes temporary control of a person's body, speaking and acting through it without the person's knowledge or will. The control does not last indefinitely but only during moments of crisis when the victim enters a trance like state. After the crisis passes, the victim will rarely remember what has transpired. At times when the possessing demon is not in control, it may be possible for the victim to go about his business as if nothing is wrong. However, they can still be affected with obsessive thoughts of persecution, anxiety, depression, hatred or thoughts of suicide (Baglio, 2009, p. 50).

During moments of crisis the devil may manifest in a variety of ways; including bodily contortions that defy rational explanation, unnatural strength, knowledge of hidden things, or speaking foreign languages. In some cases the devil may speak through the victim in an odd or unnatural voice that is full of hate or rage (ibid, p.50). Paranormal phenomena may include the appearance of misshapen bugs (with antennae or wings missing for example) (ibid, p.50).

Baglio points out that it is important to note that in the case of demonic possession the soul of the victim is not possessed, just the body (ibid, p.50). According to the Catholic Church even a

person who is in a state of grace could also be possessed as the lives of the saints bear testimony. This raises the question as to what exactly happens to the soul whilst the body is possessed and where does it go? Myers' model of mind has having a permeable boundary, can provide an answer, together with the concept of dissociation (see Chapter 6). The exception to the soul remaining in a state of grace is when a person invites the possession and relinquishes their soul to the devil. In that case the person becomes permanently possessed, 'and is like a demon walking on the earth' (Baglio, 2009, p. 51).

Having introduced a typology of possession that may be accommodated on a continuum, it now remains to determine how to differentiate between the subtle signs of possession at the lower end of the scale and symptoms of mental illness.

## **Discernment and Alternative Diagnoses**

According to Sicilian exorcist Father Matteo La Grua, the discernment of spirits is far more than just an educated guess, and is not to be confused with intuition. Instead:

Discernment is one of the gifts that God gives to the faithful. It is like a 'holy light' that comes from God and that allows those who receive it to see how God is present in all things (cited by Baglio, 2009, p. 110).

The Bible lists discernment as one of the nine spiritual manifestations of the Holy Spirit, mentioned in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians, 12: 8-10).

The practice of discerning spirits has a long history in the Christian tradition (Caciola, 2003; Sluhovsky, 2007). For mystics such as Saint Ignatius of Loyola it was a way to understand the impulses of the soul, which, he claimed, were influenced by either good angels, who desired the soul to be filled with faith, hope, love and joy, or by demons who strive to impede our spiritual advancement with temptations of sin and desperation (Baglio, 2009, p. 110). And while it may sound simple, it is not, because in their cunning demons often disguise their attacks, sometimes even appearing as angels of light (ibid, p.110). The best way to differentiate between them, says Saint Ignatius, is to look at the end result of the action. If the message will lead to selfishness, hatred, violence and such then its origin is Satan and should be resisted; however, if the end result is for good then the source is God (ibid).

The *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 gives three signs that indicate the possible presence of a demon: abnormal strength, the ability to speak and understand a previously unknown language,<sup>52</sup> and the knowledge of hidden things (Baglio, 2009, p. 110). These signs can offer some indication of demonic possession, but since they are not necessarily caused by the devil, attention should be paid to other factors, especially in the realm of the moral and the spiritual. Knowledge of hidden things is particularly troublesome, because spiritualists and others with a gift for clairvoyance will have these abilities. Myers' experiments with spiritualist mediums were probably the most significant factor that led him to conclude that possession (in the positive context) is a reality. The most common sign of the presence of the demonic, according to Catholic doctrine, is aversion to the sacred or an inability to pray or speak the name of Jesus or Mary, to go to mass or take communion (ibid, p.110).

In the experience of seasoned exorcists there is a negative correlation between people who seek an exorcism and those who actually need it. According to Father Carmine De Filippis, a Capuchin exorcist in modern Rome; 'generally these people [who think they are possessed] are a little unbalanced, or maybe scared by some books or a movie' (cited by Baglio, 2009, p. 111). Conversely numerous mental illnesses can be mistaken for possession, and it is for this reason that exorcists should insist on a full psychiatric assessment before proceeding. Typically, an exorcist will have a team of professionals, including a psychiatrist, a psychologist and possibly a neurologist, whom he trusts to help with discernment (ibid, p.112). Not just any psychiatrist will do, and collaboration is only possible when the medical or psychiatric expert is open to the possibility of possession or obsession. It is of additional benefit if the psychiatrist is a Catholic or at the very least a Christian. The reason for this is because, if a psychiatrist is not a Christian, then there is a high probability that he/she is more likely to dismiss the possibility of possession when it could be a correct diagnosis (ibid, p.112).

Dr. Richard Gallagher, an academic psychiatrist in the New York diocese says that the role of the psychiatrist is to make sure that these phenomena do not have a natural explanation before jumping to the preternatural or supernatural one (ibid, p.112). There are many individuals that may become psychotic for one reason or another, and they may have delusions, hallucinations and they may think that God, the devil, a spirit or aliens are communicating with them and they really believe it (ibid, p.112). Gallagher claims that

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<sup>52</sup> Xenoglossia.

instances of demonic possession are more straightforward than cases of mental illness. For example, a person who has a severe personality disorder, and who thinks there is evil inside him, will not have his voice completely change or experience amnesia after an attack.

According to Gallagher:

It is indicative of the full possession syndrome that the individual affected never remembers what the demon says whilst it is speaking during an exorcism,' (cited in Baglio, 2009, p. 112).

If it is a case of an overactive imagination, according to Gallagher, an experienced psychiatrist should be able to tell the difference:

If you have the paranormal there is no way you can believe it is not coming from somewhere. Even if you do not believe in the devil, you have to say that there is some explanation beyond the natural (cited in Baglio, 2009, p.112).

Only in extremely rare instances, say exorcists, is a person suffering from some form of demonic attack. Some exorcists have never seen a full demonic possession, whilst others encounter the phenomena with some frequency (Baglio, 2009, p. 49).

M. Scott Peck's case of 'Jersey' presents an example of how a psychiatrist can diagnose a condition of mental illness and then, through subtle signs, arrive at the alternative diagnosis of possession. Peck's account of the process that he and Jersey experienced is too long and complex for an in-depth discussion here. It is used however, as an example of how psychiatry and the church can cooperate, and how they can both get it wrong. The salient points of this case are summarised below:

After a four-hour interview with Jersey, Peck initially diagnosed her with borderline personality disorder, partly due to her switching between the 26-year-old mother of two that was the personality that she presented to the world, and a younger, flirtatious, naive and over-dramatic alter personality. Peck was about to end the interview and report that Jersey was a case for regular psychiatric treatment when she commented that she felt sorry for the demons within her. Peck writes:

The reason this stopped me dead in my tracks was that it did not fit with standard psychopathology. It seemed to me that if a young woman – particularly a somewhat hysterical one – had a need to invent demons, she would create great, strong, hairy demons, not weak and pathetic ones.



“Could I talk to your demons?” I asked.

“Oh no,” Jersey responded. “They would be much too afraid to do that.”

I was already in utterly uncharted waters, so why not keep rowing ahead? “Perhaps they would talk to me under hypnosis,” I said, “How would you feel about being hypnotised Jersey?”

“That would be kind of fun,” Jersey replied in her childlike manner, more like that of a twelve year old than a twenty six year old mother of two (ibid, p. 20).

Under hypnosis, Jersey reported that there were many demons, but only two were willing to talk to Dr. Peck. They were female, weak and afraid, and reported that they did things to hurt Jersey, but did so under threat from their ‘employer’, who would hurt them if they did not. They asked Dr. Peck to help them. Peck had no idea how to proceed, so he referred to his mentor, Malachi Martin, the exorcist and author of *Hostage to the Devil* (1976), for help. This is where Peck takes a direction that is significantly different from those taken by other psychiatrists who found themselves in similar situations such as Naegeli-Osjord (1988), Baldwin (1995), Fiore (1987), Crabtree (1985) and Hickman (1994). Peck educated himself in the use of religious exorcism rather than the less ‘drastic’ techniques discovered by the pioneers of SRT referenced immediately above.

Peck was confronted by supposed demons that were afraid and who explicitly asked for his help. Instead of learning how to help them, he followed Martin’s advice and learned how to expel them using deliverance methods and the harsher *Rituale Romanum* of Roman Catholicism, which instructs the exorcist to avoid any dialogue with the possessing spirits, but concentrates on their expulsion without negotiation.

Peck asked a psychologist to test Jersey for mental illness, and no signs of abnormality were found (2005, p. 24). Peck then sought approval from the Church to put together a team for an exorcism, and after attending to the legal formalities of informed consent from the patient and her family, he proceeded with his team to conduct the exorcism. On the exorcism and his patient’s involvement, Peck writes:

I was impressed by the sheer power of the ancient rite of exorcism yet simultaneously aware that its power entirely depended upon Jersey’s will. Three nights before we had gone through the same lengthy ritual but then it was an empty gesture, as Jersey had psychologically isolated herself and her demons from the words and their potential power. This night could not have been more different. Although we made it clear that she had no responsibility in the rite, since she had already chosen against Satan and his

minions, thereby expelling them, this time Jersey was obviously alert, peaceful and fully present. Her state endured during her baptism and the communion that followed it, when she did play an active role. She clearly, vocally renounced Satan and all his works during her baptism and she received the communion host with grace (ibid, p. 63-64).

In conclusion of the case of Jersey, Peck comments:

To this day I remain intrigued by the fact that Jersey continued to be bothered by voices for at least six years after the exorcism. In fact, I imagine she still hears them. Still, Dr. Lieberman [Jersey's own psychiatrist] felt she was healthy and she behaved as if she were healthy. Once someone who abandoned her infant children, she became, as far as I could discern, the very best of mothers. Once a completely muddled thinker, she became a person who could think with penetrating clarity, who routinely submitted herself to the demands of scientific objectivity (ibid, p. 125).

What I dispute about Peck's procedure with Jersey is his focus on expelling Satan as the cause of her distress and ignoring the lesser voices that remained with her. It is a common experience in SRT practice that lesser entities and even earthbound souls of the deceased can be manipulated by fear of punishment by a *master* or an *employer* to inflict harm on the host (Baldwin, 1995, p. 327). It would appear from Peck's account that the employer of the lesser demons had been expelled by the use of the *Rituale Romanum*, but those lesser entities were not cast out, or dealt with in a more appropriate way. Alternative procedures for dealing with more powerful demonic entities such as masters or employers, and lesser entities who could also be the earthbound souls of the deceased are taught to SRT practitioners<sup>53</sup> as alternatives to the use of the *Rite*.

In matters of discernment, for seasoned psychiatrists like Peck who have extensive experience in dealing with the mentally ill, any unusual quirk that does not quite fit in with the known and expected symptoms can be a clue, such as a crafty sneer or a fleeting look of hatred when religion is mentioned, or a silent giggle or smirk when the therapist is made to feel uncomfortable (Peck, 1978, p. 135). On the subtleties of clues, Peck writes:

People are remarkably different. There is no type of person who is immune to possession. Consequently, possession can be uncovered in people of every personality type and psychiatric diagnosis. The only commonality among them is that their

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<sup>53</sup> The Spirit Release Foundation (SRF) provides specialist training in spirit release techniques to professionals. Information on their courses is available at their web site: <http://www.spiritrelease.com/>. (Accessed on 16/2/2011). Although William Baldwin's *Spirit Release Therapy* (1995) is a manual for would-be practitioners, there is no substitute for hands-on experiential training.

behaviour has differed in a few subtle ways from the traditional diagnoses – ways that cannot quite be explained by the science of psychiatry (ibid, p.135).

Peck's 'Jersey' highlights how easy it is to misdiagnose and consequently mistreat a patient.<sup>54</sup> Moving to the other end of the continuum and treating her as diabolically possessed was a mistake, because this procedure fails to take into account the possible presence of earthbound spirits, who need just as much help as the host. This case demonstrates the difficulty of discernment when a decision is made that is *either-or*. I would want to ascertain whether there is anything else that needs investigating with *all* supposed cases of dissociative or personality disorder. Peck used the correct method with hypnosis, but he did not follow it through by establishing a working dialogue with the entities he encountered, which could have received benefit by being released from their attachment to Jersey by means of a more appropriate procedure than exorcism.

Cases such as Jersey's are challenging to psychiatry in the diagnosis and discernment process at one end of the continuum, where the clues are subtle and can be missed or misread. But at the other extremity of the continuum are those cases that challenge our known laws of physics and biology, and it is to these cases that I shall now turn, in order to highlight their extraordinary phenomenology.

## **Physical Phenomena that Challenge the Laws of Nature**

The cases of possession I have chosen to cite below are among those that present the greatest difficulty for the physical sciences to explain. They also serve as an introduction to attempts by scientific experimentation to address the *mind – matter* problem (which is the subject of Chapter 9).

The cases of possession that follow were reported as cases of diabolic possession, and are characteristic of cases where the *Rituale Romanum* is the chosen method of intervention. These cases are chosen, because they represent well the dramatic cases that Michael Cuneo was hoping to witness, but failed to find during his investigation (Cuneo, 2001) – a failure that reinforced his own scepticism. In addition, these three cases are chosen to illustrate why the

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<sup>54</sup> Jersey's presenting symptoms were characteristic of borderline personality disorder (BPD) and most psychiatrists would have probably treated her accordingly, but without success because of her attached entities.

natural sciences find it difficult to accommodate possession into its conceptual frames of reference. I will argue that one of the fundamental laws of physics *does* provide a frame of reference that can accommodate certain aspects of the phenomenon.

Of the different types of possession reviewed in this chapter, diabolic possession is the most extreme and dramatic of all forms of possession, and the one that captured the imagination of those who saw Blatty's film *The Exorcist* (1973).

### **Three Cases of Diabolic Possession**

In the literature on possession, the terms *devil* or *demon* are frequently mentioned. These terms denote nonhuman spirits with evil intent, usually fallen angels of God (Crabtree, 1985, p. 93). When the expression *the Devil* is used, one of the leaders of the fallen angels is usually meant, often given the names Satan, Beelzebub or Lucifer (ibid, p.93). Lesser nonhuman spirits are normally not named and are simply referred to as devils or demons; the latter has now come to signify 'evil spirits' in general (ibid, p.93) and, according to Crabtree, can include the spirits of 'wicked discarnate human beings' that often do reveal their names when exposed (ibid, p.93).

#### ***The Illfurt Boys 1869.***

In the 1860's a case of *diabolical* possession occurred at Illfurt in Alsace that illustrates well some of the characteristic behavioural phenomena alluded to earlier. A detailed account of this case is given in *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* (Summers, 1966), and Crabtree describes the case from that source:

Joseph Burner, a Catholic, had two sons: Thiebaut, born in 1855, and Joseph, born in 1857. They were quiet boys of average ability until 25<sup>th</sup> September 1865 when they began to behave very 'strangely'. Sometimes, whilst lying down, they would spin around with amazing speed. Sometimes they would be seized by convulsions which produced extraordinary contortions in every limb. At other times they became totally rigid, lying motionless for hours, the joints immovable. Often these attacks would end with violent fits of vomiting (Crabtree, 1985, p. 93).

Their hearing was sometimes affected, leaving them for whole periods deaf to the loudest sound. But their speech more than anything displayed great abnormalities: at times they could not speak at all (ibid, p.94), at other times they shouted continually in the voices of rough men,

not schoolchildren. They would curse, swear and blaspheme for hours, terrifying the neighbours (ibid, p.94).

The Illfurt Boys eventually displayed many of the classical behavioural signs of diabolical possession as recognised by the Catholic church, including paranormal knowledge (Martin, 1976, p. 460) (for example, describing in detail events happening at a distance) and fluency in other languages (ibid, p.460), (in this case, English and Latin along with various dialects in Spanish and Italian although they had never even briefly been exposed to the latter) (Crabtree, 1985, p. 94). Another symptom considered to be a sure sign of the devil's presence was the boys' violent reaction to seeing holy objects such as holy water, medals, rosaries or relics of the saints (Martin, 1976, p. 460). The Blessed Sacrament was an object of particular horror and any pictures of the Virgin Mary, or even the mention of her name, would send them into a frenzy (Crabtree, 1985, p. 94).

The boys were exorcised separately. The elder, Thiebaut, was first and he had to be forced to enter the chapel where the exorcism was to take place (Crabtree, 1985, p. 94). Three strong men were needed to hold him during the whole ceremony as he stood before the tabernacle, eyes closed, face beet-red, lips swollen, drooling a continuous stream of thick yellow froth. The first day of ritual and prayer met with no success (ibid, p.94).

On the second day Thiebaut was strapped into a straightjacket and seated in an armchair (ibid). As the rites began, the boy roared in a deep bass voice and struggled against his bonds (ibid). Later when the priest called upon the Blessed Virgin, a horrible scream of agony came from Thiebaut's lips, his body gave a sharp convulsion and he fell forward in a deep sleep (ibid). He returned to consciousness an hour later with no memory of the previous two days. Although he was dazed he was completely himself again and the exorcism had succeeded (ibid, p.95).

In the meantime, Joseph's condition had been deteriorating. He remained separated from his brother as preparations were made for his exorcism to be performed by the parish priest, Father Charles Brey. The ritual began on October 27<sup>th</sup>, immediately after the celebration of mass. In this case, it took only three hours to obtain the boy's release. After struggling and screaming frantically, he gave out a loud roar and collapsed. In a moment, he awoke and was amazed to find himself in a church surrounded by strangers. Like his older brother, he had no memory of the exorcism (ibid, p.96).

The Illfurt Boys case demonstrates many of the *behavioural* aspects that are often characteristic of demonic possession. In contrast, the case of Anna Ecklund in 1928, in the United States, which I will now describe, can be seen to be characterised by some of the *physical* phenomena suggested by Martin (1976, p. 13) that defy the known laws of physics.

### ***Anna Ecklund 1928.***

The case of Anna Ecklund, reported by an eye witness and assistant to the exorcist, the Reverend Carl Vogel (1935), features some of the most sensational physical phenomena recorded in the literature on diabolic possession. I cite this case in order to reinforce the argument that such cases tend to be dismissed as beyond the bounds of belief and credulity, because they are in contradiction to known physical laws. Myers asserted that our understanding of the laws of physics is incomplete, and the case of Anna Ecklund reinforces that view.

Anna was born in 1882 in the Midwestern United States and raised as a Catholic. She is reported to have been very pious, but at the age of fourteen began to find it difficult to enter into a church (Crabtree, 1985, p. 95). She felt that she was being prevented by some invisible force. She also began to be plagued by disturbing thoughts about committing unspeakable sexual acts, and the shame of this led her to despair. She began to have impulses to attack holy objects, which indicated intermittent but partial possession (ibid, p.95).

Anna experienced full possession in 1908 when she reached the age of eighteen (ibid. p.95), but because of scepticism by the church authorities, on the basis that they attributed her condition to mental illness, her exorcism was not performed until 1912 when Father Theophilus Riesinger, a Capuchin monk, was appointed the task (ibid, p.95). This first exorcism was temporarily successful but she became possessed again for many more years. In 1928 Father Theophilus made another attempt that finally ended Anna's suffering (ibid, p.96).

The second attempt at Anna's exorcism took place in a Franciscan convent and lasted a total of twenty three days during which several nuns had to be transferred to another convent because of their traumatic experiences during the exorcism. In addition, their pastor, Father Joseph Steiger, became exhausted after having experienced nocturnal disturbances in his room, a

mysterious car accident and his parishioners being disturbed (ibid, p.96). In describing the initial events of the exorcism at the convent, Reverend Vogel writes:

Hardly had Father begun the formula for exorcism in the name of the Blessed Trinity, when a terrible scene followed. With lightning speed the possessed dislodged herself from her bed and the hands of the protectors, her body, carried through the air, landed high above the door of the room and clung to the wall with catlike grips. All present were struck with a trembling fear. Father alone kept his peace. "Pull her down, she must be brought back to her place on her bed!" Real force had to be applied to her feet to bring her down from the high position on the wall. The mystery was that she could have clung to the wall at all! (Cited in Crabtree, 1985 p. 97).

Among the phenomena witnessed by Vogel were a variety of voices coming from her body and not from her mouth, inexplicable increased body weight and impossible contortions of her body. Vogel describes the voices:

Let it be noted that Satan in his speeches and answers did not use the tongue of the poor possessed girl to make himself understood. The helpless creature had been unconscious for the greater period of the trial, her mouth was closed tight. Even when it was open there was not the slightest sign that the lips moved or that there were any changes in the position of the mouth. It was possible for these evil spirits to speak in an audible manner from somewhere within the girl, possibly they used some inner organ of the body (ibid, p.97).

On the distortions that challenge the known law of physics and biology Vogel writes:

The woman's face ... became so twisted and distorted that no one would recognise its features. Her whole body became so horribly disfigured that the appearance of her human shape vanished. Her pale, deathlike and emaciated head often extended to the size of an inverted water pitcher, became fiery red like glowing embers. Her eyes would protrude, her lips would swell up actually to the size of hands, and her thin emaciated body would bloat up to such enormous size that at the first occurrence the pastor and the sisters drew back out of fright, thinking that she would be torn to pieces and burst open. At times her abdominal regions and extremities became hard like iron and stone and were pressed into the bedstead so that the iron beams bent to the floor (ibid, p.97).

Anna vomited large quantities of foul matter even though she ate nothing and drank little. She had an uncanny ability to know when something had been blessed. Before the exorcism started, when she had been eating normally in the convent, she would never touch anything that had been sprinkled with holy water. The nuns could never deceive her with this. The possessing spirits spoke languages that Anna could not possibly have known, in much the same way that was demonstrated in the case of the Illfurt Boys cited above.

### ***Karen Kingston 1974.***

Our third and final example of diabolic possession characterised by paranormal physical phenomena is the case of Karen Kingston, reported by Robert Pelton (1979), that took place in North Carolina in 1974 and is cited by Crabtree (1985, p. 101):

The exorcism sessions were studded with startling paranormal occurrences. Karen was twice levitated off the ground for considerable periods of time. The first instance was most remarkable. The third demon, Elizabeth,<sup>55</sup> had been carrying on with her vicious side so that Father Tyson and Reverend Sutter had to sit on Karen and hold her down lest she harm someone in the room, then:

Her face became grotesquely distorted and her eyes flashed with spite. "So, you god-damned imbeciles want to play a game huh? Well, hold on tight ... I'm going to show you a thing or two." With this outburst, Karen's body tensed and became rigid. She slowly raised herself up in mid-air. There she stayed, suspended, with Tyson and Sitter still in position, approximately five feet off the floor. Tyson just sat there gasping. He looked rather ridiculous with his long legs dangling. Sutter looked like a captive who had been shot and draped over a horse (Crabtree, 1985, p. 104).

There is no scientific explanation for the paranormal phenomena that are characterised in these three cases, and although some extraordinary events such as levitation and muscular rigidity can be mimicked by theatrical trickery (Melechi, 2009, p. 207) (and remains a source of modern popular entertainment), their mystery remains in cases of possession. The formation of the Society for Psychical Research by Myers and others in 1882 was part of the movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to halt the epidemic of trickery and charlatanism that became associated with spiritualism, and bring investigations of associated phenomena back into the realm of legitimate scientific enquiry (ibid, p. 262).<sup>56</sup>

The above cases have been selected in order to identify those physical phenomena that challenge our current understanding of the laws of physics - and I emphasise the term our *current* understanding. This suggests that our level of knowledge concerning the physical universe is still incomplete.

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<sup>55</sup> Demons do not normally have human names, and Elizabeth was most probably the corrupted spirit of a person whose life had been evil.

<sup>56</sup> Popular entertainers such as Derren Brown use their knowledge of hypnosis and showmanship to debunk theories of clairvoyance and other psi phenomena by demonstrating tricks of illusion.



There are three possible lines of enquiry that have the potential to address this problem. The first is offered by the *First Law of Thermodynamics* and is concerned with the physical, mechanical transformation of energy in a closed system. The second is that the universe is not confined solely to a physical domain but is linked to, and interactive with, a spiritual universe where the laws of our physical three-dimensional universe are more flexible. The third line of enquiry is offered by the science of quantum theory which I explore more fully in Chapter 10.

It is my own contention that each of these three lines of enquiry into the physical, the spiritual and the sub-atomic will ultimately lead to a convergence of all three into a unified whole.

It is because this thesis is primarily concerned with the theories of Myers that I shall focus on the second line of enquiry – the possibility of a spiritual domain that connects with, and interacts with the known physical space-time continuum (which is the subject of Chapter 11). However, I do feel that it is necessary to put Myers theories into a frame of reference where they may contribute to a model of the whole. (I can visualise a sandwich with physics and quantum theory as the bread, and Myers' spirit-world as the filling that binds the sandwich together). It is for this reason that here I introduce the First Law of Thermodynamics that emerged with the needs of industry to optimise energy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The First Law of Thermodynamics**

One of the fundamental principles in physics is the *First Law of Thermodynamics*, discovered by physicist James Prescott Joule (1818-1889), the inventor of the first electromagnetic engine. It states that, in the principles of conservation and indestructibility of mass and energy, matter only changes form, but the energy potential remains constant (Joule, 1963).

The *First Law* states that energy cannot be created or destroyed; rather, the amount of energy lost in a steady state process cannot be greater than the amount of energy gained (Joule, 1843, p. 263). This is the statement of conservation of energy for a thermodynamic system. It refers to the two ways that a closed system transfers energy to and from its surroundings – by the process of heat transfer and the process of mechanical work. The rate of gain or loss in the stored energy of a system is determined by the rates of these two processes (ibid, p.263).

The First Law clarifies the nature of energy in a closed system (that is the physical, three-dimensional universe). It is a stored quantity which is independent of any particular process

path, i.e., it is independent of the system history. If a system undergoes a thermodynamic cycle, whether it becomes warmer, cooler, larger, or small, then it will have the same amount of energy each time it returns to a particular state. Mathematically speaking, energy is a state function and infinitesimal changes in the energy are exact differentials (ibid).

All the Laws of Thermodynamics, with the exception of the First, are statistical and simply describe the tendencies of macroscopic systems. For microscopic systems with few particles, the variations in the parameters become larger than the parameters themselves, and the assumptions of thermodynamics become meaningless (ibid). This inevitably leads us into the super-microscopic realm of quantum theory.

The First Law of Thermodynamics is applied by physicists to mechanical energy transfer systems, and to theories concerned with physical bodies with large mass, such as planets and stars. It is my contention that the First Law, when applied to living systems, suggests that the energy that is contained within the living body is transformed into other forms of energy when the body dies. The energy contained within the organic matter of the body is transformed through the decomposition process into chemicals and the energetic potential of those chemicals, because the body is a closed system. But the question remains; what happens to the *emotional* energy of the possessing spirit, or the *life-force*, when the body ceases to function as a biological living thing, and where does its potential go?

In open systems, the flow of energy needs to be integrated with another energy transfer mechanism, and other variables, such as those pertaining to living systems, would need to be included in the expression of the First Law.

The *emotional energy* of the spirit could be regarded as that of an *open* system (Mollinson, 1988, p. 10), and according to the First Law of Thermodynamics it is logical to hypothesise that the spirit continues as a form of energy, but that form of energy exists beyond the instruments currently available to mechanistic science. The reason is that the energy of the spirit is not confined to the material realm as we currently understand it, but may, because it is infinitesimally small, be consigned to the sub-atomic realm of particle physics. Recognising the extraordinary paranormal phenomena witnessed in diabolic possession gives scientific enquiry the opportunity to acknowledge its current limitations and subsequently to expand its conceptual frames of reference accordingly.

The scientific philosophy of Frederic Myers was to not reject any hypothesis without testing it thoroughly – a view endorsed by William James (1912, p. 42), and the observable fact that physical phenomena, described as ‘paranormal,’ are manifest during diabolic exorcism implies that there are laws that we are still not familiar with. Myers asserted that all phenomena are manifestations of a natural order and that the terms ‘paranormal’ and ‘supernatural’ have no meaning other than that they are unusual (Myers, 1885, p. 30).

## **Exploring Eye-witness Testimony**

A rigid acceptance of the laws of physics, as we currently understand them, together with theatrical demonstrations of carefully constructed illusions that appear to defy the known laws of physics, contribute to the notion that all such phenomena are the results of illusions or fraud. Therefore is it necessary to test the validity of eye-witness testimony and explore those psychological mechanisms associated with it.

Myers considered research on hallucinations particularly important, because they provide an instructive means of studying the relationship between subjective, mental, internal perception and objective, physical, external reality. Myers noted that our senses do not provide us with an entirely objective representation of external reality. Sensory perception is in itself a mental construct that, in its own way, is highly symbolic (Myers, 1903, p. 277). Likewise, hallucinations further confound our already doubtful contrast between objective and subjective, and between real and unreal things (Myers, 1891, p. 125).

I shall now apply Myers’ views on hallucinations to the examination of eye-witness testimony of an account of a person diagnosed as possessed by spirits. The psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck was one of a team of seven, including priests, doctors and psychiatrists attending to the possession of his patient ‘Beccah’. This case is particularly pertinent to our discussion as it raises questions regarding the efficacy of eye witness testimony, the possibility of altering physical nature with spiritual power, and the concept of *telepathy* between spirits and the living, which was another cornerstone of Myers’ research which I explore more fully in Chapter 7.

On Beccah’s appearance during the exorcism, Peck writes:

...while Beccah’s head was continuing to hang down listlessly, it had slowly started to move back and forth in a strange weaving pattern that looked remarkably like that of a

cobra. We had some brief discussion as to whether this phenomenon might somehow be representative of the snake in the Garden of Eden – of the devil in its earliest recorded appearance (Peck, 2005, p. 172).

‘The single most dramatic part of the day, and the days to come, was the appearance of the monstrous snub-nosed snake with hooded eyes. I use the word ‘appearance’ because I am speaking now strictly as a sceptical, typically materialistic scientist. With the exception of a moment but a few seconds in length, Beccah’s satanic appearance was not captured on the videotape – although I might add that with the team constantly having to restrain her it was difficult for the videotape to capture Beccah’s face at all. .... Beccah’s snakelike appearance was so commanding that we all perceived it and everyone commented on it. The team’s experience of Beccah as a snake was unanimous (ibid, p. 176).

The fact that all seven people in attendance at Beccah’s exorcism perceived her as a snake presents three possible hypotheses. Is it possible that all seven witnesses perceived her as a snake according to their own religious beliefs and predetermined ideas about the manifestation of evil as the serpent in the Garden of Eden? In other words, were they simply *projecting* their own thoughts and ideas onto how they perceived the patient? Alternatively did possession by the devil actually affect the physical appearance (trans-configuration) of the patient? Or, as a third alternative, was it possible for the demon (or whatever it was that possessed Beccah, if indeed she was possessed at all) to actually have the extraordinary ability to induce the *illusion* of the serpent into the minds of all seven witnesses at the same time?

If the first hypothesis is correct, then it could be argued that the serpent was a projected manifestation of the perceptions of each individual, or as a collective, the convergent imaginations of all seven witnesses. This line of enquiry would test the reliability of eye-witness testimony, suggesting that people can agree on seeing something that is not objective reality, but is a perceptual or symbolic interpretation that results in a hallucination for each individual that is based on a consensus of belief. The stimulus for the projection could have been Beccah’s movements. It was her strange weaving pattern that initiated the idea of a snake and prompted the discussion between the witnesses about the serpent of the *Old Testament*. This is the theory that would stand the highest chance of acceptance by mainstream psychology, and discounts the possibility that the stimulus for the projection (Beccah’s appearance) was veridical (originating in another place).

According to Myers, veridical hallucinations are both subjective and objective. Even when the stimulus for the hallucination is external and objective, the percipient’s mind often contributes

by modifying that original stimulus in idiosyncratic ways, such that the hallucination may take on a symbolic, unexpected or familiar form (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886, p. xxx). This could provide a psychological explanation as to why all seven eye-witnesses perceived Beccah's appearance as the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

In contrast to researchers such as Pierre Janet, who believed that hypnotic phenomena such as suggested hallucinations could only be produced in hysterical subjects (Janet, 1901, p. 277), Myers and Gurney demonstrated that normal individuals can be hypnotised and induced to experience vivid hallucinations (Myers, 1892, p. 470). In addition, they demonstrated the frequent occurrence of spontaneous hallucinations among normal persons (Kelly, 2009, p. 109).

To test the hypothesis that comments from one witness can influence the perception of another, Myers conducted some experiments (1892, pp. 460-461) in which two hypnotized subjects were given different suggestion about what they should see. They were then brought together to describe what they saw. Each subject described what had been suggested to him, and neither of them was able to convince the other of what they saw or to report anything else. Such experiments are pertinent to the question of collective hallucinations, and particularly the hypothesis that the comments or reactions of one person having a hallucination influences others present to have a hallucination that they otherwise would not have had (Kelly, 2009, p. 107).

Myers theory still leaves open the possibility that the objective stimulus (Beccah's features and movement) was veridical, and it is this second hypothesis that challenges even further the epistemology of mainstream psychology.

If the second hypothesis is correct, then the devil (or some other unexplained discarnate intelligence) does have the power to manipulate the physical form of the possessed. In other words; mind can manipulate matter. This is the hypothesis that challenges the laws of physics, and addresses the perennial mind-body problem. Modern researchers who are investigating psychokinetics (PK) are testing the hypothesis that mind can influence matter, and experiments in PK show that under certain circumstances the hypothesis is supported (Radin, 2006).

Scientific evidence points to the conclusion that consciousness can influence or manipulate the body in a variety of different ways. But we are still left with the question: 'Whose mind is doing

the manipulating?’ And: ‘Do they really have the power to manipulate the physical form of a person?’ The answer to the first must remain a mystery for the time being, leaving us to look for an explanation as to how a person’s mind can affect another person’s body. These questions are addressed in Chapter 9, where I show how Myers’ methods produced answers.

Myers suggested that all ‘supernormal’ phenomena, including those in which the thoughts of one person seem to have affected the body of another person, may reflect an ability to act on other bodies ‘such as the living energy, whatever it be, in each of us is wont to exercise upon the brain’ (Myers, 1894, p. 417). By naming a mysterious process as ‘telergy’<sup>57</sup> (Myers, 1903, p. 32), the extension of one person’s volition to another person’s body would seem radical, but Myers concluded by saying that we are just as ignorant about the nature of volition as we are about how it affects the body:

It is the very secret of life that confronts us here; the fundamental antinomy between mind and matter ... I here say only that since this problem does already exist,... we have no right to take for granted that the problem, when more closely approached, will keep within its ancient limits, or the mind, whose far darting energy we are now realising, must needs be always powerless upon aught but the grey matter of the brain (Myers, 1894, p. 421).

The phenomena created by self-suggestion in the waking state of the students of Dr. Wingfield at Cambridge demonstrate the power of suggestion in affecting changes in the body (Myers, 1903b, pp. 123-125). Myers remarked on these experiments by saying:

The trivial character of these laboratory experiments makes them physiologically the more remarkable. There is the very minimum of predisposing conditions, of excited expectation, or of external motive prompting to extraordinary effort. And the results are not subjective merely – relief of pain and so on – but are definite neuromuscular changes, capable of unmistakable test (Myers, 1903b, p. 125).

Myers proposed that there is a part of the subliminal self that has complete mastery and control over all functions and aspects of the body. When the legitimate possessing entity (the Subliminal Self) has been scared away or is absent from its rightful place as controller of the body, so that the body may become possessed by a malevolent entity, then that entity has the power to manipulate the body in the absence of the legitimate soul or spirit. It could therefore be assumed that in the absence of any suggestion from any person present, or in the absence

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<sup>57</sup> The force exercised by the mind of an agent in impressing a percipient, involving a direct influence of the extraneous spirit on the brain or organism of the percipient.

of any act of will from the legitimate host, should the body become deformed or changed in any way, then those changes could be caused by a possessing entity.

If the third hypothesis is correct then an unidentified mind has the ability to plant thoughts and ideas in several people all at the same time. This hypothesis is dependent on the theory that a discarnate intellect is at work, and is based on the theory of *telepathy* (that is mind-to-mind communication). It is in this area that the work of Myers was concentrated in his early years of research, and it is the concept of telepathic communication that is of particular interest with regard to possession and SRT as a form of intervention.

Hallucinations raise an acute form of the problem between subjectivity and objectivity. The instances that Myers believed to be the most important to study, are collective cases, where more than one person perceives an apparition simultaneously, because collective cases suggest some kind of objective stimulus for the hallucination. For Myers, these cases raised 'the perplexing problem of the relation of psychical operations to space' (Gurney et al., 1886, p. 302).

To investigate this problem, Myers, Gurney and Podmore examined cases that they published in *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) where an image (phantom) of a living person was seen by other persons at a distance from the originator of the image.

Evidence from cases cited in *Phantasms of the Living* can provide support for the hypothesis that Peck and his fellow eye-witnesses perceived a phantasm that was suggested to their individual subliminal selves by a discarnate spirit that enabled them to perceive the features and behaviour of Beccah as snakelike.

Myers fully believed that there are laws of mental causality, or psychological laws, in addition to those of the physical world, but not derived from them. Moreover, he believed that some concepts such as telepathy – the hypothesis that individual minds can, at some subliminal level, interact with other minds, will be important elements in the major laws or principles of psychology that still remain to be discovered. Myers thought that these undiscovered laws would demonstrate what he called 'the Interpenetration of Worlds' (1892, p. 534). The belief that there is a world beyond the known physical one has been fundamental to most religions, but in Western minds these two worlds have been seen as separate and discontinuous. Myers

believed that the demonstration of telepathy would provide a scientific basis for belief in the other world and that there is interaction between them (1903, p. 69).

Of the three hypotheses presented above, the first is acceptable to psychology, the second is rejected completely on the basis that there is no scientific theory that conforms to positivistic epiphenomenalism to support it, and the third is rejected by mainstream psychology on the grounds that telepathy is not a concept that can be accommodated by positivistic science, and a spirit world does not exist (other than in the deluded mind of the religious believer).

However, according to the theories and research findings of Myers, not only is a spirit realm a possibility, but strong evidence supports its existence as a non-material realm that interacts with the material world (see Chapter 11).

There is of course a fourth hypothesis that rests purely on the epistemology of the physical sciences and the theory that all human thoughts and perceptions are epiphenomenal: that all seven witnesses were experiencing pathological hallucinations and that they were all delusional. This hypothesis would suggest that Peck's diagnosis of possession was no more than a projection of his own delusions and all other six assistants at Beccah's exorcism were accomplices and equally delusional. This assumption may be compared with the observations of those caregiver witnesses who accused children of witchcraft and possession in Stobart's study that I reviewed in Chapter 1 and were either criminalised or deemed mentally ill.

### ***Summary***

In this chapter, I have cited cases that defy the laws of physics as they are currently understood, but the First Law of Thermodynamics gives an indication that there is more to discover about the physical laws and how they interact with other laws, yet to be discovered, that enable the spirit world to interact with the material universe. Discovery of these new laws may lie in the research being conducted into the nature of consciousness and in quantum theory, which I will introduce in Chapter 10.

Myers' theory that everything in the universe is on a continuum can be applied to possession states that are defined by early and more recent practitioners of exorcism, and the methods of releasing spirits are correspondingly on a correlational continuum. The continuum is one of those concepts of Myers' thinking that has been adopted by mainstream psychology in the measurement of personality traits (Eysenck, 1952), and in the measurement of a wide range of



other psychological aspects of human potential and behaviour including hypnotisability (Heap, Brown & Oakley, 2004) and schizotypal personality (Bentall, Claridge & Slade, 1989; Claridge, 1990; Clarke *et al.*, 2001). The correlation between these psychological domains is examined in Chapter 12, when the theories of Myers are examined in relation to his legacy to modern psychological methods.

A recurring theme that has emerged from the different types of possession that have been examined so far is the one of the *altered state of consciousness* (ASC) that is characteristic of the majority of possession states, whether they are positive or negative. The theme of the altered state is referred to by Naegeli-Osjord in his methods of intervention as ‘hypnosis’ (1988). The inter-relationship of the ‘possession’ altered state and the ‘healing’ altered state of hypnosis is central to Myers’ scientific method and warrants close scrutiny in Chapter 7.

Having reviewed simple sociological methods of investigating spirit possession in chapters 1 and 2, and highlighting the difficulties in discernment and eye-witness testimony here in chapter 3, we are left with questions that the physical sciences are still unable to answer. I have used cases that illustrate the extraordinary physical phenomena that can be witnessed in dramatic cases of diabolic possession. In subsequent chapters I introduce those methods that Frederic Myers used in his experiments to test key hypotheses that underpin these physical phenomena. Subsequently, Myers’ methods and theories may go some way to answering those questions on behalf of physics, that persist in stretching the current limits of the scientific understanding of human experiences. These principle questions are: ‘How can mind influence mind, and how can mind influence the body?’ Myers’ methods and theories that were designed to investigate these questions are examined in Chapters 8 and 9 respectively. In the meantime, as a precursor, in the chapter that follows I will show how modern researchers investigate beliefs in paranormal phenomena and how a revised epistemology according to Myers’ conceptual framework may contribute to a broader understanding of spirit possession.

## CHAPTER 4

### Beliefs in Possession

In this chapter I question the power of belief and how it relates to knowledge and experience with particular regard to spirit possession. These are the central issues of epistemology, or ‘how do we know what we know?’ Frederic Myers questioned the epistemology of mainstream science and the emerging science of psychology, and this chapter is pivotal in appreciating Myers’ concerns about researching spirit communications and how he embarked upon his research methodology which is the subject matter of the next section.

In the previous chapters it emerged that the power of belief is pivotal to the perspective from which spirit possession is viewed, whether from that of the observer, or the participant in possession and exorcism rituals. It was Myers’ contention that the power of belief is a contributor to false perceptions and an obstacle to objective scientific enquiry. In his theorising he made strenuous efforts to avoid the complex arguments surrounding religious belief systems (Myers, 1885, p. 24), and he took rigorous precautions to avoid the influence of belief, expectation and the power of suggestion in the outcome of his experiments. It is important therefore to explore the influence of beliefs in how they affect our perception and how they contribute to the epistemological foundations of scientific enquiry. Myers’ own belief was that science, applied with an open and inquiring mind, can reveal truths that are hidden behind false beliefs.

In this chapter, I shall explore the relationship between beliefs and knowledge with an example of how one man’s experience can create beliefs in many that lead to miraculous outcomes. I also review how beliefs are tested scientifically by modern researchers who investigate *psi* phenomena, and how research outcomes can be influenced by the preconceptions and beliefs of researchers by way of the *experimenter-effect*.

Later in this chapter I shall cite a therapeutic approach that may be used irrespective of whether or not the client or the therapist has a belief in possession, or a belief in a transcendental power. I shall question whether the beliefs of a therapist, in treating people who believe they are possessed, are either important or inconsequential. This question may also have relevance to whether those therapists who are not trained in SRT techniques

are able to respond to the needs of their patients in an appropriate way or otherwise. This question is relevant insofar as it questions whether a revised epistemology that is grounded in Myers' conceptual framework is important in the practice of SRT or not.

## **The Relationship between Belief and Experience**

Beliefs in possession have different meanings and effects depending on the culture, social norms or religious context, and these beliefs are not confined to any particular social or geographical area (Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2009, p. 13). The world over, and throughout history, people have held the belief that human beings can be possessed, taken over, shared or influenced in some way by an alien spirit, god, devil, deity, or ancestral spirit. On the importance of belief regarding manifestations of spirit possession, Lewis writes:

It matters little whether manifestations of possession are in reality due to physical or psychological abnormalities or whether they are artificially induced by auto-suggestion. The essential factor in possession is the belief that a person has been invaded by a supernatural being and is thus temporarily beyond self-control, his ego being subordinated to that of the intruder (Lewis, 2003, p. 57).

It is believed in many cultures that the presence of an evil spirit can be indicated by a variety of manifestations such as serious disabilities, miscarriages, addictions to drugs or alcohol, excessive lust, violence or even lack of religious faith. In some communities the failure of crops, unexplained deaths, infertility in animals or people may indicate an evil presence at work. In parts of Africa, there are Pentecostal Christians who believe that demons can endow humans with the power to cause harm to others by witchcraft. Diviners are then called upon to expose the witch, who is then subjected to ritual exorcism (Barker, 2009, p. 7).

Belief in possession is an essential requirement in Littlewood's (2009) model of possession states and, according to his model, belief on its own is inconsequential. The belief needs to be supported by an *altered state of consciousness* and a *societal consensus* that the behavioural characteristics are commensurate with possession (ibid, p. 30). I examine the concept of *altered states* in Chapter 7, meanwhile, with regard to *societal consensus*, the healing activities of the medieval German exorcist, Father Johann Gassner can provide a good example of the power of belief and expectation.

The success of Gassner is identified by Ellenberger (1970, pp. 53-37) as a landmark in the historical development of modern psychiatry. Gassner was recognised as the most

successful exorcist of his time and enjoyed enormous public acclaim over a wide ranging area outside of his own parish (Midelfort, 2005, pp. 59-86). Midelfort, from his detailed study of eye witness reports and Gassner's own records and diaries, presents the theory that Gassner's success was built on his own *experience* of healing himself through self-exorcism by prayer. From his research on Gassner's ministry, Midelfort writes:

from early in his career Gassner had employed special blessings and cures; but as a result of a series of chronic ailments from 1752 to 1759 he developed a special technique for healing the headaches, fainting spells, and sudden weakness he experienced, especially whenever he was to preach or say mass (Midelfort, 2005, p. 12).

Midelfort cites this as a good example of how an idea can be mobilised, with practice, to become a fully-fledged *experience* (ibid, p.12). By practicing on his patients who suffered from *circumsessio* – illness that he attributed to the devil (but could have been natural illness), by helping them to *experience* their condition as demonic, Midelfort suggests that Gassner was creating the first and crucial precondition for successful exorcism. 'It was a kind of negative spiritual exercise that paved the way for further experiences' (ibid, p.12). Here we have all the ingredients for several theories linking experience; where Gassner used (a) his own *experience* of a successful remedy to apply to his patients, (b) the power of *suggestion* upon the belief of his patients, and (c) their *expectations* of a cure. However, Gassner's experience of suffering when he wanted to preach or say mass could be an indication that the demonic was at work (according to the *Rituale Romanum*), together with the fact that prayer was successful in exorcising the cause. These two factors relative to an assumed cause and the positive outcome of a cure support the Catholic religious belief that demonic forces impact on human beings and the power of prayer is the solution. On the other hand, the powers of suggestion, belief and expectation are interpreted by medicine as the *placebo* effect, which sceptics use in their arguments against the hypothesis that prayer has power (Trier & Shupe, 1991, p. 351).

All of these conceptualisations gave rise to the controversies, discussions and theories that emerged from Gassner's ministry and the challenges proffered by Mesmer and his followers (Ellenberger, 1970; Crabtree, 1993). These conceptualisations and the conflicting theories that surround them have persisted in a variety of forms for the past two hundred and fifty years right up to the present day in modern psychiatry (Lewis, 2003, p. 160). The medical model of psychiatry still does not fully understand the power of belief in creating experience, the power of suggestion in placebo, and the power of intention and expectation in both the patient and the healer. There are those who are sceptical of the

motivations of medical science in rejecting the power of placebo (which costs virtually nothing) in preference to pharmacology that has built a global industry on the treatment of illness with drugs. The power of belief is therefore a very controversial topic when it comes to healing the sick. A similar controversy exists in investigating the objectivity of communications with a spirit world. It was therefore Myers' determination to find ways to avoid the power of belief that was so important to his research methodology.

I have been unable to find any modern psychological research that specifically addresses the origins of beliefs in spirit possession. However it has been incorporated as a factor into some sociological research into the fundamentals of belief systems that are related to other forms of paranormal phenomena, including extra sensory perception, psychic phenomena and psychokinetics. (See the two tables below).

All of these concepts can be incorporated under the main heading of *psi-phenomena*. In keeping with Myers' assertion that all psychical phenomena are interconnected and can be accommodated within a continuum of human experience, I have chosen to examine how beliefs in *psychic phenomena* are explored by modern psychology researchers. It is my contention that Myers' assertion that preconceived assumptions and beliefs are contaminants to objective scientific enquiry should be applied to all scientific enquiries into psi phenomena, and in this chapter I apply Myers' assertion.

## **Psychometric Testing of Beliefs in Psychic Ability**

One social survey in the United States suggested that 50% of Americans believed in psychic and paranormal phenomena and that this belief was on the increase (Newport & Strausberg, 2001). A breakdown of the percentages of those who believe in specific phenomena is illustrated in the table below (Irwin, 2009, p. 1).

### Beliefs in paranormal phenomena

Phenomenon	Per cent
Psychic or spiritual healing	54
Extrasensory perception (ESP)	50
Haunted houses	42
Ghosts	38
Telepathy	36
Visits to Earth by extra terrestrials	33
Clairvoyance	32
Astrology	28
Spirit communications	28
Witchcraft	26
Reincarnation	25
Spirit possession	15

It can be seen from the above table that beliefs in spirit possession are held by 15% of the surveyed population. Similar beliefs are held in Great Britain, Northern Europe and other parts of the world (Haraldsson, 1985), and an independent poll commissioned by the Institute for Research in Social Science (1998) identified endorsement of beliefs in a selection of paranormal beliefs, as illustrated in the next table (Irwin, 2009, p. 2).

## Beliefs in the paranormal (2)

Phenomenon	Per cent
God answers prayers	86
God	84
Life after death	73
Heaven or hell	68
Biblical account of creation	62
ESP	60
Diabolic possession	55
Psychic or spiritual healing	55
Ghosts	41
UFOs	39
ET visits to Earth	34
Astrology	33
Being at least somewhere superstitious	25
Reincarnation	25

In the above table, beliefs in diabolic possession are held by 55% of the sample population. I would argue that this is a higher percentage than might be expected, and could be a result of those factors previously examined in Chapter 1 when I examined Cuneo's work (2001) on the impact of Blatty's book and film *The Exorcist* (1971; 1973).

Research into such beliefs is predominantly conducted by sceptics who attest that such beliefs have no scientific evidence to support them (Irwin, 2009, p. 3). According to Wiseman and Watt (2006), there are three theories used in parapsychology research in attempts to explain the psychological mechanisms underlying the formulation of such beliefs: The *motivational* perspective examines whether such beliefs are developed in part because they fulfil the need for control,<sup>58</sup> or form an integral part of a religious or philosophical world-view. The second theory argues that psychic abilities *actually exist* and that these beliefs are formed from the subjective experience of genuine psychic phenomena (ibid, p.323). The third theory is that people who believe in psychic

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<sup>58</sup> The need for control may be viewed as central to our ontological security, and is arguably the most important concept that forms our belief system. Ontological security was the most significant factor in Ronald Laing's treatise on the family dynamics resulting in schizophrenia (Laing, 1965).

phenomena have psychological attributes that make them more likely to misattribute paranormal causation to normal experiences. This is what Wiseman and Watt call the 'misattribution' theory (ibid, p. 324), and their paper presents a qualitative and critical review of the research relating to this third theory.

Wiseman and Watt provide a useful categorisation of psychic ability that is divided into two main types: extra-sensory perception and psychokinetics. Extra-sensory perception (ESP) is the apparent ability to receive information through a communication channel that mainstream science is not yet able to recognise. This category includes *mediumistic clairvoyance* where the information is unknown to anyone else, *telepathy* where the information is transmitted from another person, and *precognition* where future events are predicted. It is these same psychic phenomena that Myers and his colleagues at the Society for Psychical Research were investigating in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Psychokinetics (PK) is the apparent ability to influence physical objects or biological systems using means that are still inexplicable to mainstream science. This may also include the ability to cause levitation; influence random event generators (REGs) and forms of spiritual healing that are considered to be 'paranormal'. It is in this area that the dramatic physical phenomena witnessed in those cases of diabolic possession cause the greatest challenge to the physical sciences, and I shall return to this problem later in this thesis in Chapter 10. In the meantime I shall enable Wiseman and Watt to show how belief systems in psychic ability are structured and measured by contemporary psychology, and then I shall examine how their analysis compares with the theoretical frameworks of Myers.

Wiseman and Watt found that several psychology researchers have developed a range of psychometric instruments to measure belief in psychic abilities. These instruments include the Australian Sheep-Goat Scale (ASGS) developed by Schmeidler (1945), and the Paranormal Belief Scale (PBS) by Goulding and Parker (2001). All of these instruments are built using modern theories on the development of self-report psychometric testing (Breakwell, Hammond & Fife-Shaw, 1995). The ASGS is built with sixteen items on a visual analogue scale, and the PBS is comprised of twenty six items on a 7-part Likert scale that is anchored by strongly-agree and strongly-disagree. These scales include questions of belief relative to such phenomena as life after death, spiritualism, UFOs, superstition, precognition, astrology, luck, spirit possession and various other PK and ESP phenomena. Wiseman and Watt, in their paper, have focussed on just one of the factors from all of these instruments – that of *belief in psychic ability* - and treat it as a single dimension. They



evaluate the 'misattribution' hypothesis by examination of four processes that may lead to misattribution. These processes are; (a) poor general cognitive abilities, (b) probability misjudgements, (c) propensity to find correspondence in distantly related material and (d) fantasy proneness' (Wiseman & Watt, 2006, p. 326). Their analysis of the literature from a range of studies that examined (a) *poor general cognitive abilities* arrived at the conclusion that there is no support for the hypothesis that disbelievers and believers differ in their general cognitive functioning (ibid, p. 327).

Analysis of the literature testing beliefs in psychic ability and (b) *misjudgement probability* does provide some evidence but still failed to support the hypothesis. Wiseman and Watt suggest that there is a strong need for more ecologically valid studies to provide a more direct test of the hypothesis (ibid, p.333).

On the literature on research to test for beliefs in psychic ability and (c) *the propensity to find correspondence in distantly related material*, Wiseman and Watt found that research conducted by Brugger and Taylor (2003) argued that high scores on tasks involving perceived connections in distantly related material are the result of the type of disinhibition of semantic network activation that may act as one basis for schizophrenic thought disorder. Wiseman and Watt point out that other researchers have stressed that this should not be used to pathologize belief in the paranormal, but instead should help clarify the distinction between healthy forms of such beliefs and those forms that could be associated with psychological ill-health (ibid, p. 330). These conclusions strongly suggest that there is a link, or the possibility of confusion between psychic ability and mental health which inevitably directs attention to be focused in that area. Both Frederic Myers and William James disagreed with Pierre Janet on this very point on the subject of 'automatisms'. Janet asserted that dissociation and automatisms were pathological (1889) whereas James and Myers argued that each case should be evaluated on its own merits due to the observable fact that healthy minded individuals also experienced dissociation and automatisms (Myers, 1903, p. 20).

The fourth process, (d) *fantasy proneness*, entails a propensity to fantasise to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish the difference between what is imagined and what is caused by an external source (Lynn & Rue, 1988). The fantasy proneness hypothesis predicts that believers in psychic ability will have higher scores than non-believers on those measures that relate to fantasy proneness, which include for example, hypnotisability, suggestibility,

imagery skills, absorptions and dissociation (ibid). (All of these concepts are examined in Chapter 7 *Hypnosis as Experimental Method*).

Wiseman and Watt found a considerable literature on research into the relationship between beliefs in psychic ability and fantasy proneness that have several factors that are consistent and are interconnected, and thus may reflect the operation of a single underlying concept. This suggests to Wiseman and Watt the need for caution in accepting these findings. They point to the large body of work by Australian parapsychologist Michael Thalbourne, on the hypothesis that 'transliminality' is the single underlying concept that underpins a wide range of factors including; dream interpretation, fantasy proneness, absorption, magical ideation and mystical experience (Wiseman & Watt, 2006, p. 331).

'Transliminality' is Thalbourne's own term to describe the ability (or tendency) to enter into an altered state of consciousness (Thalbourne & Delin, 1994; Thalbourne, Bartemucci & Delin, 1997; Thalbourne, 1998). His use of the term 'trans-liminal' inevitably directs our attention straight back to Myers who initially conceived the term 'subliminal' with reference to mental process below the threshold of conscious awareness. This is a clear indication that Myers' theories are in the process of being revisited (or rediscovered) by modern scientists - an indication that is endorsed by Kelly and colleagues (2007a).

In their conclusions, Wiseman and Watt suggest that there is a pressing need for future work to try to resolve the inconsistent results in this area of research, by attempting to control the areas of inconsistency. They suggest that the entire area would greatly benefit from a more reliable and more finely grained measure of belief in psychic ability that includes such factors as reflecting on the degree of conviction with which such beliefs are held, and the evidence on which they are based (e.g. personal experiences, another person's experiences, media influence and religious influence). They express their hope that such work would help to clarify many of the unsolved mysteries currently associated with the formation and maintenance of such beliefs (ibid, p. 333). This recommendation concurs with my own assertion, supported by suggestions resulting from the inadequacies of observation studies in the social sciences and anthropology that *experience* supported by *corroborating evidence* are essential factors to be included in scientific research methodologies.

The use of psychometric testing is a cognitive processes method that relies upon conscious awareness. Where psychometric tests give an indication that there are unconscious or

*subliminal* processes at work then it is logical to adopt a method that is able to access the subliminal directly, without the illusions and predispositions of the conscious mind getting in the way and creating obstacles. In short, the illusions of the environmentally conditioned conscious mind need to be bypassed by a more direct and effective method. The work of Lynn & Rue (1988), points in this direction, as does the work of Thalbourne (1994).

The decision of Wiseman and Watt to pursue the third (sceptical) avenue is a strong suggestion (or hope) that it is a potentially more rewarding avenue for scientific research, than to consider the validity of religious or philosophical belief systems, or the possibility that paranormal phenomena are genuine. In other words, to pursue this avenue is motivated by mainstream scientific scepticism where it is important to find an alternative hypothesis to the one that declares that psychic (psi) phenomena are integrated with, and interactive with, the world of matter. There is a theory that those experiments or surveys that are conducted by experimenters who are sceptical are more likely to produce an inconclusive result due to their scepticism, and those who are not sceptical will produce a result that supports the hypothesis. This is known as 'experimenter-effect', which I will now explore.

### ***Experimenter Effect***

Sceptics and proponents can be identified by the kind of research they do. This is demonstrated by Wiseman and Watt (2006) who chose to examine studies where the hypothesis to be tested is that believers in psychic ability have some kind of psychological misattribution. Given that they are sceptics, they would rather see the hypothesis supported, and where the evidence points in the opposite direction, they recommend more stringent psychometric instruments. Conversely, the 'experimenter-effect' theory suggests that when they conduct experiments to test the hypothesis that psychic phenomena are a reality; the probability is that their scepticism will produce a negative result.

To investigate the validity of the experimenter-effect theory, Wiseman, as a self-confessed sceptic, cooperated with Marilyn Schlitz, a proponent of evidence for psychic ability, in two studies where each experimenter tried to influence mentally the electro-dermal activity of participants at a distance. These first two collaborations produced evidence of the experimenter effect; that is, experiments conducted by the proponent produced significant results to support the experimental hypothesis, whereas the experiments conducted by the sceptic did not. A third study conducted by Wiseman and Schlitz, with the collaboration of

Caroline Watt and Dean Radin, attempted to replicate the findings of Schlitz and Wiseman but failed (Schlitz, Wiseman, Watt & Radin, 2006). In their concluding discussion and recommendations for further research, Schlitz *et al* suggest that:

It is hoped that the studies described here will encourage researchers working in other controversial areas, such as the role of trance in hypnosis, false memory syndrome, unorthodox forms of psychotherapy and complementary medicine, to engage in similar joint projects and that such work will help advance our understanding of the phenomena underlying these controversies (Schlitz et al., 2006, p. 320).

Once again the findings and recommendations point towards the development of a methodology that not only builds on the inadequacies of the current psychometric methods in use, but also point to a different methodology, where not only cognitive processes are involved, but also more subtle emotional ones. This is something that psychometric testing on its own is ill equipped to do. It is my contention that the inconclusive results of psychometric experiments to test hypotheses that refute the existence of psychic phenomena point to the alternative hypothesis that they do exist. Furthermore, sceptics' persistent attempts to design more sensitive psychometric instruments will ultimately result in confirmation that psychic phenomena are a reality that needs to be acknowledged.

The recurring themes of *experience* and *altered states* emerged from a brief view of social science methods in chapters 1 and 2. These themes have recurred in criticism of the methodologies of hypothesis testing by the use of psychometric measuring instruments alone. Inconclusive results from the use of psychometric methods point in the direction of the influence of *experimenter-effect*. The hypothesis that psychic phenomena and mental health are negatively correlated seems to be a hypothesis that sceptics are intent on supporting one way or another. However, there are studies that show a positive correlation between psychic ability and mental health, and I shall address this connection in Chapter 12. Research into these areas of belief in psychic abilities continues to raise questions regarding the nature of consciousness itself, and research needs to be pursued in those areas using a methodology that bypasses the contamination of expectation and experimenter intention, as well as contamination by expectation, suggestion and conformity of participants.

What I have discovered from my research into the methods used to investigate beliefs in spirit possession (or psychic phenomena) so far is corroboration of Kelly's statement below:

The science of the mind has reached a point where multiple lines of empirical evidence, drawn from a wide variety of sources, converge to produce a resolution of the mind-body problem along lines sharply divergent from the current mainstream view (Kelly, 2007b, p. 1).

Myers had faith in science to reveal hidden truths concerning the soul of man, and it would appear that modern scientific methods are pointing in the direction that he anticipated, despite the fact that mainstream modern science still has difficulty accepting their own findings.

What is clear is that the old scientific epistemology is difficult to dislodge because there are some influential scientists such as Richard Wiseman who are determined to remain sceptical in spite of evidence that challenges their world-view. On the other side of the coin, where attempts to explain beliefs in psychic abilities as potentially pathological, or to put it more kindly as Wiseman does, 'misattributed', there is evidence from experience and it is in the realm of experience that scientific scrutiny must venture.

Hypothesis testing by experimentation is just one methodology available to scientific enquiry, and as I asserted in Chapter 1 where I examined the methods of social science, there is another method, that of case-study quantification (which I discuss below) that can provide valuable evidence that can be used to identify trends in the occurrence of specific phenomena. This type of evidence is used extensively in epidemiology (Nassir Ghaemi, 2009), and can be used to bypass the influence of beliefs or expectations by simple observation of the data presented.

### **Case-Study Database Quantification**

It is in psychiatric and clinical psychology case histories where the subjective experience of clients (patients) suffering from all the maladies of the mind and emotions may be found and analysed. Edward Kelly, a modern supporter of Myers' pioneering work, suggests how cases histories can be used for scientific research:

Cases initially studied and reported individually can be encoded according to appropriate descriptive schemes and entered into cumulative databases which, when they become sufficiently large, afford important new opportunities for quantitative study of internal patterns, predictive relationships, and so on, governing the relevant domains (Kelly, 2007b, p. 583).

It may be anticipated that a database of case studies, that includes the coded experience of 'trance possession', would include cases where possession is reported according to belief in

possession, but a successful remedy reveals that the belief was false. Conversely, data could reveal instances where there was no belief in possession at all and yet a successful intervention reveals a case of genuine spirit possession. It is these cases that would provide the most valuable information on the 'experience' rather than the 'belief' if such cases could be reported. This proposition requires a more open-minded approach, and would demand that observers and therapists suspend their own disbelief, and simply allow the patient to explore, discover and report exactly what it is that they are experiencing.

Psychiatrist Shakuntala Modi (2000) sets the standard by offering her analysis of patients who had presented a wide variety of emotional, mental, behavioural and physical problems. Analysis of 100 patients revealed results that were surprising. 92 of the 100 were found to have earthbound spirits attached to them, 80 patients had more than one, 50 patients had spirits of relatives and 77 patients had spirits that were described by Modi as 'demonic' (ibid, p. 7). Modi's analysis also revealed that 80% of primary (acute) symptoms such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks and psychotic symptoms, and 30% of secondary (chronic) symptoms such as arthritis, sinusitis, back pain and headaches are caused by spirits, while 20% of primary symptoms and 70% of secondary symptoms were caused by past-life traumas (ibid, p.7). Modi reveals that contrary to her training as a medical psychiatrist and her non-belief in a spirit world, the experiences of her patients and her own experiences that were led by her patients, enabled her to accept the plausibility of an alternate reality and the ontology of spirit entities. I cite Modi's findings in order to illustrate the point that accurate case records can be used to provide useful descriptive statistics, and whether the patient or the therapist has a belief in an afterlife or not, the data can be left to speak for itself. To further illustrate the point that a belief in an afterlife, or a belief in the ontology of spirit entities is irrelevant, I shall now refer to the work of hypnotherapist Roy Hunter, who has no belief in a spirit world, and dismisses the concept in favour of working with the patient 'as-if' what they experience is real.

### ***Client Centred Ego-State Therapy with Hypnosis***

Hunter is a dedicated exponent of 'client-centred parts therapy' (2005), which operates on the model that the human psyche is comprised of 'parts' that can either work together as an integrated whole, or are in conflict with one another (ibid, p.1). When confronted with 'parts' that claim to be discarnate entities, Hunter, has gained clinical experience that enables him to facilitate entity release whilst suspending his own sceptical belief system and responding to what the client discovers from his/her own *subliminal mind*. Hunter is

critical of spirit release therapists, who he claims go looking for entities (ibid, p. 156). Unfortunately the only SRT practitioner he cites in support of his argument is William Baldwin (1995). Hunter writes:

William Baldwin considers them [negative parts that claim to be entities] to be entities that must be released through some sort of process that resembles an exorcism. Many religious people will immediately agree with Baldwin and assume that such a part would indeed be a demonic or negative entity, as do some hypnotherapists and psychotherapists (Hunter, 2005, pp. 156-157).

Hunter is unjustly critical of Baldwin because he fails to acknowledge the origin of Baldwin's approach that I introduced on page 15.

Below are quotations from Hunter's method of dealing with reported negative entities that may be compared with Baldwin's and other practitioners' techniques. They are essentially the same, as Hunter clearly demonstrates in his methodology:

There is a part of you that is most closely connected to God (or higher power). That part has access to wisdom that can provide great benefit right now. It is important for (client's name) that I speak with that part now. If it is permitted, please say the words "I am here" or move the 'yes' finger (Hunter, 2005, p. 157).

When Hunter receives a positive response to his question he engages the source: 'Do you serve the Light?' (ibid, p.158). Once again, with a positive response, he continues:

(Client's name) has a part that claims to be (entity name or title). Please tell us how to proceed.

From here I simply ask the higher power or higher-self part to give me step by step instructions on how to deal with the alleged entity. Sometimes it is simply a disowned part that needs a new and productive job, as well as acceptance by the client and his/her other parts. Occasionally Higher Power identifies it as an entity, and asks me to dismiss it. Such dismissal almost always involves asking the client if he/she wishes to release the alleged entity.

Frequently I am instructed to call on the name of Jesus before dismissing the part in his name. Sometimes Higher power tells the client to invite an archangel (Michael or Gabriel) to assist, or some other 'ascended master'. On one occasion a client was instructed to invite both Buddha and Christ. Occasionally, the client asks a higher Power to escort the alleged entity away. Often it is released into the Light, and goes on its own when told to do so or when escorted. Some call it exorcism (ibid).

Not only does Hunter's method easily compare with other SRT practitioners, it also has resonance with the method previously discussed in chapter 2 of Mercy Magbagbeola of the Celestial Church of Christ (2009). The difference between Hunter and Magbagbeola is that Hunter has engaged the 'higher-self' of the client whilst the client is in trance, whereas

Magbagbeola has invited the Holy Spirit into herself, whilst she is in the altered state (ibid, p.111). Experienced SRT practitioners are aware of the choices they have depending on the ability of the *client* to enter into an altered state, and depending on their *own* ability to enter the altered state and receive information from a higher source. See Louise Ireland-Frey (1999, p. 86) for one example from many.

Hunter is deserving of credit for taking an objective approach to dealing with inner conflicts through applications of ego-state therapy using hypnosis, and dealing with attached spirit entities in a way that suspends modern secular, materialistic beliefs. However, he gives the impression in his book that he is something of a pioneer in the discovery of hidden realms or knowledge with regard to what he calls the 'unconscious' and a 'Higher Power':

New frontiers of possibility exist in the undiscovered country of the subconscious, especially regarding our potential connection to a Higher Power. These are the voyages of the inner mind, to seek out new ideas, and to boldly go where few have gone before.

On numerous occasions over the years, I've used an application of parts therapy to access that part of the inner mind that is most closely connected to God, or the client's perception of Higher Power. Frequently the client obtains deeply encouraging insights, along with important information regarding the purpose in life. Whether or not one believes in God or a Higher Power, the subconscious (or unconscious) contains access to an inner wisdom that sometimes far surpasses that of ordinary consciousness (Hunter, 2005, p. 167).

Merely using these ideas as therapeutic tools, as Hunter does, is appropriate for as long as they are effective in helping the patient resolve issues and function as a healthy member of society. However, I will argue that sitting on the fence (as Hunter purports to do) is not conclusive; and real healing of the mental, the emotional, the spiritual and the physical is more likely to take place once the truth emerges of a continuing purposeful existence beyond the material. Contrary to Hunter's own naive discoveries, the conceptual frameworks of Frederic Myers - supported by the practical experiences of SRT practitioners - add credible evidence that the existence of a spirit world is a reality. These findings are in direct contradiction with writers and scientists such as Richard Dawkins (2006) and Carl Sagan (1996) when they reflect the prevalent world-view that, in spite of the evolutionary advances in our consciousness, when the individual brain dies, that is the end of it.

## ***Conclusions***

In this chapter it has been revealed, according to one theory (Midelfort, 2005), that the experience of one man, such as the exorcist Father Johann Gassner, can create beliefs and



expectations in many others. This theory could be used to explain the widespread success of Gassner, as an alternative for acknowledging the authenticity of genuine healing powers.

In researching beliefs in psychical abilities it has emerged that there are three theories that attempt to explain belief systems (a) the need for a sense of control, either through motivation or a religious world-view,<sup>59</sup> (b) psychic abilities are genuine, and (c) those who believe in psychic abilities have a predisposition to 'misattribution' (Wiseman & Watt, 2006). Effort is spent by sceptics in focussing on gaining evidence to refute the hypothesis that psychic ability is a reality. However, their task is made doubly difficult because they are trying to prove that something does not exist. Sir Karl Popper pointed out that empirical data, by its very nature, cannot be used to disprove a non-empirical belief (1963, pp. 33-34). Surely, therefore, greater rewards potentially remain to be found in researching how psychic ability does work, by using a revised empirical methodology, rather than trying to disprove it by using an empiricism that is rooted in physical principles. This is precisely what Myers did; supported by William James' philosophy of 'radical empiricism' that he insisted should be applied directly in the study of subjective experiences (James, 1912).

It has been revealed in this chapter that the beliefs and expectations of experimenters can affect the outcome of their experiments (Schlitz *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, the sceptical beliefs of therapists can be displaced by the experiences of their patients. This raises the question of whose beliefs are the most important – the patient's or the therapist's? Another important question has surfaced, yet again, surrounding the power of belief in the 'placebo' effect. In chapter 1, it was suggested by Cuneo that religious exorcism is an exotic form of placebo (Cuneo, 2001, p. 278). This explanation for the positive outcomes of a variety of healing practices is not sufficient, and it was for this reason that Myers insisted on finding experimental methods that bypassed the powers of belief, expectancy and suggestion.

This chapter has set out to introduce the scientific methodology of Frederic Myers in his determination to overcome the influence of beliefs and preconceived ideas that may contaminate the findings of objective scientific enquiry, and the one method that has emerged in this chapter as showing potential for revealing more is that of hypnosis. Hunter (2005) used hypnosis in his client-centred ego-parts therapy, and the findings of those

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<sup>59</sup> Ontological and existentialist philosophy are central to the debate concerned with our sense of being in the world, our anxieties surrounding the fear of death, beliefs in an afterlife and our control or otherwise of our ultimate destiny. These issues, although central to human experience and beliefs, are too complex to explore in detail here, and may detract from the objectives of this thesis.

researchers cited above (Lynn & Rue, 1988; Thalbourne & Delin, 1994; Thalbourne et al., 1997; Thalbourne, 2010b) who investigated beliefs in psychic ability, all point to the experimental use of hypnosis as a more fruitful method of investigation. Combining psychotherapy that is aided by non-directed hypnosis, and epidemiological research from her case files, Shakuntala Modi has set the standard for providing statistical data that not only strongly supports the possession hypothesis and contradicts the belief systems of patients and therapists, but also adds credence to Myers' evidence of an afterlife and the continuation of the human spirit after death.

The section that follows gives a detailed explanation of Myers' scientific theories and those research methods that led him to conclude that spirit possession (in the positive context) is validated.

## PART II

### MYERS' CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In Part I of this thesis I examined the methods and theories most often used in the fields of social science and anthropology in their attempts to understand spirit possession, and the subsequent deficiencies in such methods and theories. This enabled us to get a taste of the scale and complexity of the problems encountered with these methods. I shall now summarise those problems identified so that I can then begin to explain how the methods and theories of Myers can contribute to a more balanced and comprehensive approach to begin to solve these problems. I will show that Myers' work fills the gaps in scientific knowledge that were exposed by these attempts and subsequently provides a broader and more appropriate social understanding of possession.

Statistics compiled from clinical and social data on reported cases of possession could be used for cross-cultural and ethnic group comparisons and for the testing of some hypotheses regarding the efficacy of different forms of intervention. This could be a routine alternative to the costly process of conducting specific clinical trials, in addition to providing routine information on trends on the incidence of possession and associated social factors. The problem with this kind of scientific data collection, however, is that possession is no longer acknowledged as a common enough psychiatric or social problem that demands routine attention to data collection.

Social and cultural theories of spirit possession are developed from the observation of traditional religious rituals, and provide descriptions in accordance with their associated belief systems (Lewis, 2003; Turner, 1982). Although socio-cultural theories offer descriptions of possession phenomena, they offer no adequate explanation for the subjective experience. Furthermore, those incidences of possession that are not endorsed by the social group are explained by psychiatry as mental illness according to the World Health Organisation's definition of 'possession trance syndrome' (World Health Organisation, 1992, p. 347). As a consequence of this general perspective of Western anthropologists and psychiatrists, the efficacious healing practices of shamans, exorcists and healers tend to be explained away by the socially constructed placebo principle of expectation (Lewis, 2003, p. 160).

The above theories are grounded in the epistemology of the rationalism of the scientific enlightenment, and epiphenomenalism, meaning that all thoughts and mental impressions are created by the physical brain. This scientific paradigm ignores the possibility of a mystical dimension or an alternate reality in favour of a conception of reality that embraces only the physical. In contrast, it would appear that subjective experience, either as a participant observer or as a member of a religious or spiritual order adds authenticity to a fuller understanding of possession states, and helps to explain why people believe in possession and the influence of spirit entities as part of human experience.

To focus exclusively on those cases that challenge the known laws of physics reinforces incredulity and disbelief in the proposition of genuine spirit possession. Dramatic cases are used as inspiration for entertainment in popular culture, and are misinterpreted in their value as sign-posts to an alternate reality, which is still seen by Western societal consensus as superstition. But such cases draw our attention to the possibility that our knowledge of the laws of physics is incomplete, and that there are still laws to be discovered that enable interaction between an alternate reality and the physical universe that we are aware of through our sensory systems. Myers therefore sought to discover laws that reached beyond the known laws of physics.

The two key factors that have emerged from a critique of social science methods are (a) the influence of *experience* on belief systems, and (b) the significance of the *altered state of consciousness*. It is these two factors that I will scrutinise in my examination of the theories and methods of Frederic Myers.

## CHAPTER 5

### MYERS' SCIENTIFIC THEORIES

In this chapter I discuss the scientific paradigm of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Myers' approach to solving those dilemmas that the emerging science of psychology had created for itself. This chapter then serves as a foundation for developing a revised epistemology that can accommodate those research findings that gave Myers evidence for the phenomenon of spirit possession.

#### Unresolved Dilemmas of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Psychology

Materialistic determinism presented the emerging science of psychology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a difficult problem. The phenomena of psychology are unlike those of any of the physical sciences in that they are *mental* and not physical. Theoretical psychology raises such questions as: 'What are mental phenomena and what is their relation to physical phenomena? Is mind an elementary force in nature, as primary and fundamental a characteristic of nature as matter? And what of mental causality or volition? Can mental phenomena initiate changes in the physical world? If so, what are the parameters and laws of such mental causality, and what implications do they raise for the question of whether mind is a fundamental or a derivative aspect of nature? In short – is mind caused or causal?

The physical sciences had no reason to pose such questions, so they developed without recourse to, or acknowledgment of, a spiritual or mental causality (Kelly, 2007, pp.48-49). The notion of mental causality (or volition) was increasingly dismissed as a vestige of primitive, supernatural ways of thinking (ibid, p.55). The conflict facing psychology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was often portrayed as the conflict between science and religion, but it was in reality a question of epistemology, that is a conflict between *experience* and *knowledge* (Daston 1978). The dilemma facing psychology was either to narrow psychology to fit mechanistic, deterministic science as it was then understood, or to expand science to accommodate mental phenomena. Thus Boring asserts:

Historically science is physical science. Psychology, if it is to be a science, must be like physics. The ultimate abandonment of dualism leaves us the physical world as the only reality. Consciousness will ultimately be measured in physical dimensions (1933, pp. 6-8).

Myers' research was primarily concerned with the above mentioned conflict between *experience* and *knowledge*, which is an epistemological question, and he designed

experiments that enabled him to distinguish the difference between what was known by the developing science of psychology and what was yet to be known, and between what was *believed* to exist and what was *proved* to have ontological status through rigorous empirical studies.

## **Methodological Parallelism**

An attempted solution to the dilemma for 19<sup>th</sup> century psychologists was, according to Emily Kelly, 'methodological parallelism' (2009, p.56). Psychologists had set themselves an impasse with an implacable dichotomy between naturalistic (physical monism) versus super-naturalistic (dualistic) ideas about mind. Many psychologists sought to escape this dilemma by adopting a methodological parallelism that was based on a doctrine of mind-brain concomitance enunciated by such neurologists as Hughlings Jackson (1884).

Jackson adopted the position that states of consciousness are different in kind from nervous states; the two occur together in correlation, in such a way that there is no interaction or interference between them. Mental phenomena are physiological phenomena, in other words they constitute two parallel, completely closed, yet somehow correlated causal chains; but the relationship between the two chains (the nature of the concomitance) is a metaphysical, and not a scientific issue (Kelly 2009, p. 57).

Adopting a methodological parallelism of psychological and physiological processes allowed psychologists the luxury of ontological agnosticism while they got on with their work, because it freed them to study psychological processes in their own right, without needing to relate them back in any specific way to their physiological substratum. Although the nature and extent of mind-brain correlation should have become the major empirical problem for a psychology that sought theoretical understanding of its subject matter, it was instead avoided altogether.

Scientists instrumental in the development of 19<sup>th</sup> century psychology tended to conceptualise science not as a method with which to confront basic questions posed by contradictory aspects of human experience, but as a doctrine to which psychology (if indeed it was conceived as a science) had to conform. Because so many 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists refused to question or even critically examine the assumptions of the physical sciences and the world view derived from them, and thereby avoided the theoretical problems that psychological phenomena alone raised, those assumptions, that world view, and the pattern of avoiding basic theoretical issues became the foundation upon which

modern psychology was built. During its subsequent history, and despite its broad expansion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, psychology has for the most part remained within that epistemological framework (Kelly, 2009, p. 59).

## **Myers' Purposes and Principles**

Not all 19<sup>th</sup> century psychologists were content with this retreat from such major problems and theoretical issues in psychology. For instance, William James was aware that parallelism or the 'Jacksonian' doctrine of concomitance (James, 1890b, p. 136), avoided, and did nothing to resolve the basic problems of mental causality inherent in psychology. 'Concomitance, in the midst of absolute separateness is an utterly irrational notion', wrote James (ibid). Although James urged psychologists to adopt an empirical or methodological parallelism, he also cautioned that it was only provisional and that someday things should be more thoroughly thought out (Ibid, p. 182). Frederic Myers was one psychologist who attempted to do just that. For Myers, the assumption that mind was a secondary by-product of elementary material processes was a gratuitous assumption that required closer scrutiny. In order to examine this assumption along more novel lines of empirical research, Myers, along with other prominent scientists and intellectuals (including Arthur and Gerald Balfour, W.F. Barrett, W.E. Gladstone, Sir Oliver Lodge, Lord Rayleigh, John Ruskin, F.C.S. Schiller, Henry Sidgewick, Eleanor Sidgewick, Balfour Stewart, Lord Tennyson, and J.J. Thomson) joined together to form the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in order to approach these problems 'without prejudice or presuppositions of any kind' (Society for Psychical Research, 1882, p. 4).

Myers was one of the Society's most active investigators and prolific writers in the first two decades of its existence, and his model of human personality, which he began to formulate in the early 1880's, became the theoretical framework for psychical research, and remained so for decades to come (Kelly, 2009, p. 61).

Myers fought the prevailing tendency in late 19<sup>th</sup> century psychology to exclude its most fundamental problems and argued for an expansion of its empirical base, the development of its own methods, and an examination of the theoretical assumptions about mind and matter that were contributing to the narrowing of psychology. The central principles that guided Myers were precisely those of his scientific contemporaries, including ideas of continuity, conservation and evolution. His aim was to encourage the expansion of science

and scientific method in order to address the most fundamental questions about the nature of human personality.

Fundamental to Myers' thinking and to psychical research was the belief that conflicts between theories are best settled not by contentious debate, but by increased knowledge, and that knowledge advances not by the clashing of old antagonists but by the application of both new methods and new perspectives to old problems (1903, p. 1533). Behind Myers' work was a conscious and sustained attempt to move beyond the increasingly polarised, positions of 19<sup>th</sup> century thought and to seek broader perspectives in which aspects of both or all sides may have a place. For example, Myers could find no value in the methodological parallelism that allowed psychologists to avoid the important issue of mind-brain correlation (1903, p. 188). Instead, by adopting a *tertium-quid* approach where it is possible to construct a conceptual model of mind-body correlation whereby both mind and body would interact with each other in a symbiotic evolutionary relationship (1903, p. 36). To carry this concept to another level, we may hypothesise that there is a symbiotic evolutionary relationship between spirit and matter – between spirit and man, which would include interactions between non-corporeal entities such as the earthbound spirits of the deceased and the living. For modern science to adopt Myers' *tertium-quid* approach would enable contemporary science to construct a model that can accommodate spirit possession, spirit attachments and the influences of both beneficial and malign intent.

For Myers the continuity of nature was one of the most fundamental principles guiding scientific knowledge. Myers believed that *all* phenomena, mental and material, normal and abnormal, commonplace and rare, are in some sense continuous, coherent, and amenable to the empirical methods of science. He further believed that scientific knowledge would advance qualitatively only when scientists address *all* phenomena, and in particular those that did not fit readily into prevailing views:

If nature is to be intelligible to our minds she must be continuous; her action must be uniformitarian and not catastrophic (Myers, 1895, p. 22).

A corollary of this belief in the continuity of the universe was that the most reliable means of obtaining knowledge, not only about the physical world but also about mind, is scientific method. However, Myers did not believe that science was the *only* means of acquiring knowledge, but that contemplation, revelation, mystical experience and intuition can also produce profound truths that could be put to the test of rigorous scientific methodology (Myers, 1900, p. 114).



Despite his recognition that 19<sup>th</sup> century science had its limits, Myers objected to the growing segregation between science and metaphysics, science and religion, volition and determinism, or mind and matter. With *tertium quid* uppermost in his mind, Myers believed that the challenge to science does not end, but begins precisely when one comes up against two contradictory findings, positions or theories, and that breakthroughs occur when one continues to work with conflicting data and ideas until a new picture emerges that can put conflicts and paradoxes in a new light or a larger perspective (Myers, 1903, p. 75).

Myers protested against limiting science to the existing subject matter, methods and concepts of the physical sciences by conceding prematurely those questions about the nature of the relationship between mental and physical phenomena – going beyond the prevailing but ultimately vague assumptions of concomitance – are scientifically unapproachable. Instead, Myers writes:

The only line of demarcation that science can draw is between things which can, or which cannot, be cognised by our existing faculties, a line that is by no means permanent and immovable. On the contrary, it is the continual work of science to render that which is incognisable cognisable, that which is imperceptible perceptible (Myers, 1881, p. 103).

Myers would have also lamented the premature limitation of psychology's subject matter and methods. He resisted psychology's attempts to separate experimental method from subjective experience.

The challenge to psychology, as Myers saw it, was to bring scientific method to bear on highly personal *experiential* phenomena, and this approach became increasingly important in the study of mystical experience (Underhill 2002, p. 359). In sympathy with Myers' *tertium quid* approach to the study of the ecstatic state, Underhill declares that there are three ways to study mystical experience, the physical, the psychological and the mystical, and she states that:

Many of the deplorable misunderstandings and still more deplorable mutual recriminations which surround its [mysticism] discussion come from the refusal of experts in one of these three branches to consider the results arrived at by the other two (Underhill, 2002, p.359).

The most basic problem in Myers' time was to translate from metaphysical to empirical form the question of mind-body concomitance. Most scientists (then and now) concluded that the mind-body problem is no longer an open empirical question. This was because advances in physical science seemed to render it certain that mind is a product of the

nervous system and wholly dependent on it. But for Myers this was not only still very much an empirical question but the basic theoretical question at the very heart of psychology. Myers argued that the principle of concomitance which states that 'for every mental state there is a correlative nervous state' (Myers, 1891, p. 635) has not resolved the question because it is a neutral statement. Moreover, to continue merely to observe this parallelism will not advance our knowledge in any qualitative sense. 'We do not know whether the mental energy precedes or follows on the cerebral change, nor whether the two are somehow connected, but different aspects of the same fact' (ibid, p.635).

Myers believed that psychologists needed to single out for special attention those situations where the normal relationship between mental and physiological functioning becomes altered, or unsynchronised in some way. In particular he believed that the emerging field of the study of 'subliminal phenomena' (occurring within the subconscious) had enormous potential for increasing scientific knowledge about the relationship between mental and physiological processes (1903, p. 102). Such phenomena suggested to Myers that the correlation between mind and brain may not be quite as straightforward as it appeared under normal circumstances. The study of subliminal phenomena, which was expanding rapidly during the nineteenth century (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 313), increasingly turned up phenomena that were difficult to reconcile with the mechanistic theory of mind. For example, psychosomatic phenomena such as those associated with hypnosis and hysteria suggest that alterations in mental states or processes can have dramatic effects on physiological processes (ibid, p.39). Such phenomena could reveal the possibility of manipulating under experimental conditions such mental states as the independent or causal variable that could affect physical processes. Many subliminal phenomena, such as hysterical anaesthesia or hypnotic hallucinations occurring under conditions where physical pathology is unlikely, sometimes resemble phenomena that are clearly associated with neuropathology. These phenomena suggest that similar effects might not always have similar causes; a blister, for example, might have a physical cause such as a burn, or a hypnotic suggestion. Myers urged the importance of studying such phenomena to determine whether, and under what conditions, mind might be an active initiating factor. Finally, more extreme phenomena (such as telepathy) even more clearly suggest that the mental and physical processes do not always operate in the accustomed manner (Myers, 1903, p. 97).

Myers believed that hypnosis was potentially one of the most effective methods, and one of the most important sources of knowledge about psycho-physiological functioning, and he was critical of psychology for not exploiting this potential. 'We have to regret the lamentable scarcity of purely psychological experiments over the whole hypnosis field' (1903, p. 191). Myers believed that a comparison of hysterical and neurological disorders might reveal much about the nature and extent of psychological processes as causal, especially the degree to which they are dependent on neurological conditions, or, conversely, could themselves alter these conditions.

Just as subliminal phenomena were showing mind to be more extensive and of a different nature than was previously assumed, so late 19<sup>th</sup> century physics was showing that the physical universe was more extensive, and possibly of a different nature than was previously assumed. Science was beginning to reveal just how limited our sense perception really was. The discovery of *electro-magnetic radiation* and the concept of *ether*, a non-material substance that filled empty space and acting as a medium for the transmission of radiation and light,<sup>60</sup> had begun to reveal just how limited our sensory perceptions are. Science cannot 'conjecture beforehand how many distinct but coexisting environments may now surround us.... her own history has been one of constantly widening perceptions' (Myers, 1903, p. 195). Myers realised the importance to the mind-matter problem of this dawning realisation. He cautioned that we must be ready to conceive other invisible environments or co-existences, and to relax our rigidity in the concept of *space*, which he regarded as an obstacle to our understanding of communication (ibid, p.262).<sup>61</sup>

Myers repeatedly emphasised that such unseen environments must somehow be fundamentally continuous and interrelated with the one we know through our sensory perception. 'If an unseen world exists .... we must in some sense be in it' (1891, p. 634).

Myers was motivated by the expectation that a combined study of the unsuspected range of mind, and the previously unsuspected properties and extent of matter would begin to suggest novel and unprecedented ways of understanding the relationship between the

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<sup>60</sup> A mysterious substance, unknown to science, was the basis of Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism (Mesmer, 1766). See Chapter 10.

<sup>61</sup> Energy frequencies, both known and as yet unknown to science, may be detectable by the sensitive nature of some humans. 'Human detection capabilities in the average person are currently estimated to be less than 2% of the known wavelength spectrum. This means that most of us are not aware of over 98% of the currently known events that surround us at all times'. 'The body, with its complex electrical and chemical network of nerves and high moisture content, is not only the power source and transmitter, but also a sensitive antenna system capable of receiving signals from an unaccountable variety of sources' (Dorland, 1992).

two. Nineteenth century physics and the study of subliminal phenomena were showing that our conceptions of both were inadequate and incomplete, and Myers concluded that the old dichotomy of dualism and materialism were equally inadequate and incomplete. In agreement with Myers', his colleague Edmund Gurney commented:

The line between the material and the immaterial may mean little more than the line between what we can detect or register with our senses or instruments than the phenomena which they cannot (Gurney *et al.*, 1886, p. 290).

While accepting the validity of established scientific laws, Myers did not preclude the possibility of there being further laws that can be discovered and utilised in the spirit of rigorous investigation. The belief that the universe is naturalistic, cosmological and evolutionary, and not the result of a specially authorised interference such as God, did not, for Myers, exclude the possibility that there may be a scheme of laws which new sciences, such as psychology may yet discover (1890, p. 329). Although Myers was on the right track, it was a little too early for him to imagine the strides yet to be taken in the field of quantum mechanics, and it is in Chapter 10 that I examine Myers' theories in light of quantum theory.

Myers rejected both supernaturalism and the prevalent form of naturalism in favour of a different, expanded concept of scientific naturalism. He repudiated the distinction between the two and expressed his belief that it is possible to reconcile the conflict between science and religion, which too often assumes a barren contradiction, and Myers claimed that, in order to do so, we must reject such phrases as 'violations of the order of Nature' (Myers, 1881, p. 96). Myers subsequently rejected the word 'supernatural' altogether as meaningless, and maintained that everything in the universe is 'natural'. He thus claims:

When we speak of an abnormal phenomenon we do not mean one which contravenes natural laws, but one which exhibits them in an unusual or inexplicable form (Myers, 1885, p. 30).

In summary, the general purposes and principles on which Myers based his approach to psychological research were as follows: to maintain a belief in the ultimate rationality and continuity or interrelatedness of all phenomena, mental as well as physical; to attempt to establish a new and wider perspective on old problems concerning the nature of mind by extending psychology's range of observation and data beyond ordinary, familiar phenomena and by broadening its concepts through continually examining assumptions, hypotheses and views that run contrary to those that are accepted as definitive. On the basis of his *tertium quid* approach, Myers made two major contributions to psychology.

First, he developed a theoretical model of mind that was an important attempt to move beyond the two diametrically opposed views of monism and dualism and thereby provide a more comprehensive model. Secondly, he developed numerous lines of enquiry through which he thought that the mind-body problem could be approached and resolved empirically.

## **A Revised Epistemology**

Throughout this thesis I have made observations regarding the potential value of *personal experience* in scientific enquiry, and I shall now consider what value *experience* can contribute to scientific knowledge through a broader epistemology. By experience I mean the value of the experience of being possessed or influenced by non-corporeal entities one's self, and the experience of clinicians and researchers who have witnessed or provided effective remedies for the maladaptive outcomes of spirit possession and influence. I have hypothesised that those who have either experienced or witnessed possession phenomena will have a different perspective and a different epistemology in comparison with those who have not had or witnessed such phenomena. These are issues that involve the philosophical debate regarding the value of empirical knowledge in contrast with belief, the value of empirical data without a theory to accommodate it, and the value of a theory without empirical data to support it.

Epistemology, in essence, deals with the question: 'How do we know what we think we know?' (Harman 2001, p. 24). According to Willis Harman, former Director of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, there is no single epistemology of science. For example the epistemology of physics is very different from that of cultural anthropology. However, because the reductionist, positivist epistemology of the physical sciences has proven to be so powerful in terms of prediction, control and the generation of technologies, it has tended to dominate. In that dominant, mainstream epistemology, consciousness is considered to be epiphenomenal – that is to be explained in terms of its presumed physical causes. William James' (1912) scientific philosophy of *radical empiricism* implies a very different epistemology. Like any form of epistemology it admits data through the senses, but it also encompasses the broad spectrum of inner realities within the subjective life of the person. James defined the terms of his radical empiricism thus: 'To be radical, empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced' (ibid, p.4). For such a philosophy, the relations that connect experiences must themselves be

experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as *real* as anything else in the system, since its effects are real. The sensory and emotional effect on an individual of an experience can be profound and life-changing, and, as William James took such pains to illustrate in his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) religious experience should not be ignored by scientific enquiry. James went further than just asking scientists to not ignore religious experience – he advocated a ‘science of religions’ (ibid, p. 456).

Putting religion and metaphysics to one side, a revised epistemology for the study of consciousness that can incorporate the *experience* of possession by a consciousness other than one’s own is necessary if science has anything to contribute to our understanding of these phenomena, and Myers concept of the permeable Subliminal Self (which I explain in the next chapter) certainly seems to provide such a theoretical framework.

According to Harman (2001, p. 24), the many aspects of consciousness that need to be dealt with by psychology should include: intentionality (volition), attention, creativity, memory, and synchronicity. Harman wrote his suggestions in 2001, whereas Myers started his work in 1882, and this thesis will show how, as a pioneer in the study of consciousness, Myers’ methods and theories could have made a significant contribution to modern consciousness studies had his work not been ignored by so many research psychologists for so long.

## **Summary of Myers’ Conceptual Framework**

Myers’ findings indicate that materialistic determinism is not an adequate paradigm to accommodate or fully explain automatism (acts performed without volition).<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, not only does recognition of volition indicate a return to dualism, but the possibility of external psychic forces acting in contravention of volition indicates a pluralistic universe where many minds are able to interact with one another. This notion is supported by James’ *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), and Jung’s ideas on the *collective unconscious* (1902). (Myers’ influence on the ideas of these and other thinkers is considered in the following chapter).

Myers acknowledged science as providing the means of validating personal experiences, but only if it is used as a method rather than a doctrine that is imposed upon research by a restricted physicalist framework.

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<sup>62</sup> See page 32 for Myers’ definition of ‘automatism’.

Myers was critical of psychology in its methodological parallelism and sought to expand psychology as a science in its investigations into the nature of human personality, which must include what may be considered abnormal, paranormal and supernatural. He insisted that the abnormal and paranormal are normal and that the supernatural are natural. Myers argued that rather than separate theories between a dichotomy of either / or, science should find a unified theory that can accommodate all phenomena into a continuous unified whole.

With regard to the mind-body problem, Myers saw the need for a new physics that would discover new laws that would explain the mind-body connection, and would contribute to an expanded naturalism.

A new epistemology is called for according to Myers' scientific approach which would enable psychology to advance in its search for answers concerning the nature of human personality and how minds interact with one another at subliminal levels of consciousness.

In the following chapters I examine Myers' model of mind, together with a sample of the experiments that Myers and his colleagues conducted under the auspices of the Society for Psychical Research, many of which were conducted in collaboration with William James, Pierre Janet and others who had an interest in volition, inspired creativity, memory, abnormal psychology, automatism, mesmerism, spiritualism and telepathy. The experiments that I cite will effectively demonstrate how a discarnate mind can influence the mind of a living person in varying degrees from subtle influence to full possession when the entity takes over the body of the host.

## CHAPTER 6

### Myers' Model of Mind

As a continuation of the previous chapter where I positioned Myers' conceptual framework into context with 19<sup>th</sup> century psychology, this chapter explains Myers' *model of mind*, together with a summary of the ideas and theories of some of his supporters and of those whose theories were in conflict with his. An understanding of Myers' model of mind enables us to make sense of various related concepts such as sensory and motor automatisms, multiple personality, dissociation and hypnosis. These are all important factors in a revised epistemology that can accommodate and explain spirit possession.

#### ***Automatisms and Creativity***

A central element of creativity for Myers was the integration of ideas originating from the *subliminal* (sub-conscious) regions with the regions of the *supraliminal* (normal waking conscious) self. The outcome of the creative process is something intended and desired by the supraliminal, and the supraliminal thus plays a key role in the completion of what begins with a subliminal uprush. The heart of the creative process is an 'automatism', but its culmination and completion occurs in the realm of the supraliminal (the conscious awareness). Thus, creativity is a highly desirable integration of the two aspects of the psyche and an instance of superior functioning. It is also an indication of what the human soul is capable of, because there is a hint of something 'beyond', or something incommensurable with the results of conscious logical thought alone. Perhaps for that very reason the subliminal source does not usually present itself as a personality, as it often does in many other types of automatism. Although the result is intelligible, often brilliantly, and therefore attributable to an intelligent conscious source, that source usually remains unidentified (Crabtree, 2009, p. 354).

#### ***Sensory and Motor Automatisms and Mediumship***

Myers considered all products of automatic writing or non-volitional speaking to be psychological automatisms, whether they purported to originate from the spirits of the dead or expressions of some hidden part of the writer or speaker. He insisted that even if there were cases of actual communication with spirits through these automatic means, they must first be investigated as psychological phenomena that use the same mechanisms for emergence from the subliminal into the supraliminal that all other automatisms use. He insisted that if we receive messages from spirits, they are communicated firstly to some



subliminal (unconscious) level of the psyche, after which they rise to the level of the supraliminal (conscious). This means that it is very difficult to discern between messages produced entirely by inner resources and those that might originate from an external source from the individual. This seemingly impossible problem was to lead Myers to develop those research methods that could enable the problem to be solved, (as I go on to explain in subsequent chapters).

Myers arrived at a model of mind that consisted of multiple layers of consciousness where there existed secondary, or rather, multiple selves, each with its own memory chain (Myers, 1903, p.950. His views were commented on by many of his contemporaries such as William James, Pierre Janet, T.W. Mitchell, C.G. Jung and Morton Prince who found them stimulating and productive. There were others such as Sigmund Freud and William McDougall who opposed them in different ways. I will now examine each of these key thinkers in turn in order to expound on their reception and critique of Myers' model of multiples selves. This critique will help us to understand why Myers' theories have been forgotten or ignored by 20<sup>th</sup> century psychology.

## **Supporters and Critics of Myers' Model**

### ***Pierre Janet* (1859-1947)**

Janet is accredited as developing the concept of dissociation to describe those systems of 'fixed ideas' (Janet, 1976, p. 596) that exist within a subconscious centre of consciousness, but not connected with normal consciousness. He identified what he believed to be two laws of dissociation; first, that ideas can be conscious but not associated with that grouping of sensations and memories that make up the ordinary 'I'; and second, that every phenomenon attached to a hysterical secondary personality is withdrawn from the awareness of the ordinary personality (ibid, p.596).

Janet conducted experiments which showed that secondary personalities can influence the ordinary consciousness of an individual without the individual having any awareness of that influence. He said that they can operate in the background in such a way that in hypnotism for instance, an individual may, through post-hypnotic suggestion, carry out actions that do not engage the person's ordinary consciousness. He proposed a synthesising force that in normal people holds all their psychological experiences together in a unity, but in hysterics is excessively weak and fails in that task. The result is what he called 'psychological disaggregation', in which fairly sizeable numbers of psychological phenomena are allowed to escape outside of personal perception (Janet, 1889, p. 337).

Janet believed that where a person experiences traumatic events, a greater amount of synthesising energy is needed to preserve psychic unity (1889, p.336). In hysterics, with their congenitally low level of synthesising force (ibid), the experiences become dissociated and lead to other new subconscious personalities, or become assimilated into already existing secondary personalities. The therapeutic work of Janet therefore comprised the uncovering of hidden centres of consciousness and dissolving them into one coherent personality. Thus Janet was the first to develop a comprehensive and effective therapy for emotional disorders of the hysterical kind (Crabtree, 1993, p. 319). It was due to his exclusive work with hysterics that Janet came to believe that the presence of covert centres of consciousness was invariably pathological:

The power to synthesise being very great, all psychological phenomena, whatever their origin, are united in the same personal perception, and consequently the second personality does not exist. In such a state there would be no distraction, no anaesthesia (systematic or general), no suggestibility and no possibility of producing somnambulism, since one could not develop subconscious phenomena which could not exist (Janet, 1889, p. 336).

Myers agreed that Janet's work was important but incomplete because he worked exclusively with hysterics (1903, p. 141). Myers experiments were conducted with mentally healthy individuals who were able to demonstrate automatic writing, and as a result he was able to develop a wide ranging theory of the structure of human consciousness which he named the Subliminal Self.

### ***William James* (1842-1910)**

William James agreed with Myers and rejected the notion that automatism, as described by the physiologists, could adequately understand human psychology. He insisted that the subjective, or *introspective* (self-analysis) method, not only provided our most secure psychological knowledge, but also provided a basis for interpreting the facts of brain physiology. Although James promoted an introspective approach as the most promising available, he had not yet arrived at a model himself that comfortably embraced all available data. James came to acknowledge that Myers provided the framework that was needed by his psychologically based notion of automatisms. In his second Lowell lecture (Taylor, 1984, pp. 49-50) James defined automatisms in terms drawn from Myers, calling them 'sensory and motor messages from the subliminal' (ibid, p.50). He described them as physical or mental activity performed without the awareness of the conscious self, expressing a secondary and hidden dimension of personality (James, 1889, p.234). James

outspokenly expressed his admiration for Myers and the way he was able to provide a framework that could accommodate a variety of types of human psychological experience under one overarching umbrella:

Whatever the judgement of the future may be on Mr Myers' speculations, the credit will always remain to them of being the first to attempt in any language to consider the phenomena of hallucinations, hypnotism, automatism, double personality, and mediumship as connected parts of one whole subject (James, 1889, p. 234).

Prior to the development of Myers' and Janet's theories, cases had been reported in the literature of psychopathology suggesting the presence of more than one centre of consciousness operating in a single individual. The case of 'Mary Reynolds', reported by Rev. William Plumer (1860), manifested two separate personalities that were completely unknown to each other, and the case of 'Felida X' reported by Eugene Azam (1887) is an example of *alternating* personality, where one personality knew of the existence of the other but not vice versa.

Cases such as these were impressive evidence that one individual could have several distinct personalities, each with its own set of memories and personality characteristics. These cases demonstrated the concept of *alternating* states but provided little evidence of *concurrent* operation of two centres of consciousness at the same time. There was, however, one such case reported that William James described in an article on automatic writing (James, 1889). It concerned a woman, 'Anna Windsor', who from the age of 19 suffered outbreaks of bizarre behaviour and acts of self-destructive violence that made it impossible for her to live a normal life. Shortly after her treatment began her right arm became painful and suddenly went limp, hanging by her side. Anna looked at her arm in amazement, believing that it belonged to someone else and that her own right arm was drawn up behind her back. The limp right arm did not respond to pricking or other tests, and Anna viewed it as a foreign object and a nuisance. She considered it to be an intruder and tried to drive it away by biting it. She referred to it as 'Stump' or 'Old Stump'. The right arm appeared to be controlled by a secondary intelligence. When Anna, whilst in a delirium, tried to pull out her own hair with her left hand, the right arm stopped her. The right arm wrote poetry, partially in Latin (of which Anna had no knowledge), produced messages from allegedly deceased persons, made drawings and communicated in writing with those around her. All these activities strongly suggested an intelligence that was superior to Anna's. When Anna was raving, Old Stump was rational, asking and answering questions in writing. Old Stump seemed never to sleep, but watched over Anna during the

night, seeing that she remained covered and rapping on the headboard to awaken Anna's mother when Anna became distressed.

The case of Anna's 'Old Stump' clearly illustrates the concept of *concurrent* operation of two centres of consciousness in one individual, each manifesting its own ideas and intentions. Later work by both Janet and Myers indicated the co-temporal status of multiple centres. Myers' automatic writing subjects often wrote from a second centre whilst reading or conversing concurrently with their primary consciousness. Janet's experiments with 'Leonie' demonstrated the simultaneous activity of several centres (Janet, 1886b). Myers cites the case of a man who could use two planchettes<sup>63</sup> simultaneously, one with each hand, dealing with two different subjects and purporting to originate from two distinctly different personalities (1903, p. 420). A similar case of co-consciousness in the case of 'Spanish Maria' was reported later in 1919 by Charles Cory (1919).

James was interested in a further issue discussed by Myers, that of patterns of *mutual awareness* between the concurrently active members of a group of sub-personalities. Myers held that the consciousness of a subliminal personality could have knowledge of the thoughts of another personality. Myers did not speculate on whether this kind of inclusivity could also occur between two or more subliminal consciousnesses. However, he did indicate that the Subliminal Self (in the sense of the all-embracing and ultimate source of unity beyond the multiplicity of an individual) encompasses all that occurs in the supraliminal and multiple subliminal centres (Myers, 1903, p. 35).

Where Myers was intent on conducting experiments to unravel the mysteries of secondary selves, automatic writing and related phenomena, James grappled with the philosophical issues raised by the scientific investigation of human experience. His focus was on reconciliation between scientific methods and religious beliefs, and his major work *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) sought to tackle this problem. James was not alone, and American psychologist Morton Prince was among the foremost of Myers' contemporaries who investigated issues relating to automatism and co-consciousness.

### **Morton Prince (1854-1929)**

Prince coined the term 'co-consciousness' (1907) in order to highlight the reality of hidden centres of mental activity and to convey the co-temporality of the multiple centres

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<sup>63</sup> A planchette is a device often used in Victorian times that enabled spirits to communicate by spelling out words with the letters of the alphabet, similar to the 'Ouija' board.

involved. Prince pointed out that two centres of consciousness need not be unaware of each other. As in the case of Old Stump, there may be one-way or even mutual awareness without affecting the fact of separateness. Like Myers, Prince emphasised that secondary centres show signs of intelligence and cannot be explained in purely physiological terms, and he suggested that each should be treated just as one would treat any separate intelligent person.

Prince's study of the case of 'Miss Beauchamp' reported four alternating personalities (1907). Prince was particularly interested in the *inclusivity* aspect of co-consciousness that was demonstrated by the Miss Beauchamp case. Prince coined the term 'co-conscious' in order to avoid confusion:

Thus a "doubling" of consciousness results of a personal self and the subconscious ideas. I prefer myself the term co-conscious to sub-conscious, partly to express the notion of co-activity of a second co-consciousness, partly to avoid the ambiguity of the conventional term due to its many meanings, and partly because such ideas are not necessarily *sub*-conscious at all; that is, there may be no lack of awareness of them (Prince 1907, pp. 67-68).

Prince pointed out that all conscious states, 'belong to, take part in, or help to make up a self' (ibid, p. 76). He added that it is difficult to conceive of a conscious state that is not associated with a self-conscious self. Prince stated that it would seem 'queer' to think of a state of consciousness or sensation or perception, or idea, as 'off by itself' and not attached to anything we call the self. By emphasising the psychological, Prince insisted that he was not dismissing the physiological, and held that all thought is correlated with physiological activities. He believed that all mental phenomena would require both a psychological and a physiological explanation (ibid, p.68).

Although Prince was in agreement with Myers' concepts of secondary selves, together with a psychological explanation in addition to a physiological one, it is difficult to reconcile his notion that all secondary centres of consciousness are to be considered a part of the self.

Prince's report made no claim that outside intelligences were responsible for any of the alternating personalities, and yet personality number 3, 'Sally', insisted that she was not of Miss Beauchamp. Sally reported that she remembered Miss Beauchamp as a very small child learning to walk and talk (Wickland, 1924, p. 29). This implied that Sally had been with Miss Beauchamp from a very early age, but Sally herself was not of such a young age. <sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The inconsistencies of the Miss Beauchamp case prompt the question, was Sally a discarnate conscious spirit that was attached to Beauchamp?

## **T.W. Mitchell (1869-1944)**

Thomas Walker Mitchell, physician and editor of the *British Journal of Medical Psychology* supported Myers' concept of a threshold of consciousness and found Myers' term *subliminal* useful because it included every possible kind of mental phenomenon occurring outside of ordinary conscious awareness (Crabtree, 2009, p. 319). Mitchell also found Janet's concept of *dissociation* useful in explaining centres of consciousness, and he wanted to reinforce an argument for a difference between what is conscious, what is unconscious and what is dissociated (in Janet's use of the term). He believed that Prince's term *co-conscious* was best used to describe the splitting of consciousness into dissociated parts, and the terms *conscious* and *unconscious* to be used to describe the splitting of the mind into what is and what is not of conscious awareness (Mitchell, 1921, p.61). By *unconscious* Mitchell meant what was happening in the subliminal outside of conscious awareness. He was in agreement with Freud in this sense, but felt that Freud's theory of the structure of the mind was incomplete (ibid, p.62-63).

Mitchell was able to use his schema of dissociated ideas to successfully treat cases of multiple personality, now known as Dissociative Identity Disorder. He explained the formation of dissociated ideas thus:

A complex formed in relation to some event accompanied by great emotion may become dissociated from the personal consciousness, so that all recollections of the event and of the feelings and actions connected with it becomes impossible. A complex so dissociated does not cease to be capable of functioning .... Many separate experiences may have taken part in the formation of a dissociated complex, but they are all bound together by some common element of feeling or emotion. The dissociated mental complex must somehow still form part of the structure of the mind. Did it not do so, it could never *take possession of the bodily organism* [my italics] so as to manifest as a secondary personality. Just as we speak of a man being possessed by an idea, so may we speak of an idea developing to such an extent that it arouses a new personality (Mitchell, 1921, pp. 105-114).

What Mitchell is describing here is an accurate depiction of what has now become known as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), and this term has become the diagnosis and explanation for what used to be known as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). Mitchell distinguished the difference between the alternating and the co-conscious forms of MPD, and further sub-categories have been identified in more modern literature, such as 'detachment' and 'compartmentalisation' (Holmes, 2005). But what is interesting to note from Mitchell's quotation above is his use of the term 'possessed' that I have italicised. Embedded in Mitchell's observation of the functionality of dissociated parts he implies, by the use of the term 'possessed' that the consciousness of an individual is the possessing

agent of the material body, and although he does not express this idea openly, it does support Myers' concept that the spirit of a man takes possession of his body. This implication leaves open the possibility that the spirit of another discarnate entity can also take possession of a person's body, if the soul (or ego) of that person is weak.

In all of these early theories on the structure of the mind, the notion of spirit possession is never openly explored as a viable hypothesis, and all phenomena relating to alternate personalities are explained by the theories of multiple selves or dissociated parts of the subliminal self. In keeping with Myers' theory of the existence of a human soul, Mitchell attempted to account for multiplicity in terms of an overarching soul:

If, as the interactionists maintain, we have to postulate a soul as the ground for a unity of any consciousness, we must of course postulate a soul as the ground of the unity of each of the consciousnesses met with in multiple personalities of the co-conscious or hypnotic type. But there is no good reason why we should not regard one and the same soul as the effective ground in each and all of the phases of consciousness occurring in one individual (Mitchell, 1921, p. 234).

In cases of DID the above would certainly apply. However, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when Mesmer's theories challenged the religious exorcisms of Gassner, the notion of spirit possession has been progressively replaced by positivistic scientific theories to the point that in today's modern world the notion is virtually eradicated from psychological thought. It is my own contention that there are very distinct differences between MPD and DID. I further contend that all previously reported cases of MPD should not have been exclusively attributed to divisions of subliminal consciousness, without considering the hypothesis of earthbound spirit possession. Where Mitchell accommodated the theories of Myers and Janet, he represents an important stepping stone on the progressive journey from pre-enlightenment acceptance of spirit possession to DID and the scientific explanation for multiplicity. Although Mitchell was in agreement with Myers' model of mind, he also represents a significant stepping stone along the pathway that eventually dismissed, forgot or ignored Myers conceptual framework in modern times.

### ***William McDougall (1871-1938)***

Not all of the distinguished members of the Society for Psychical Research were supporters of Myers and his theories. William McDougall repudiated the views of Myers, Mitchell, Prince, James and others on the principles of co-consciousness and made his alternative views explicit in his book *Body and Mind* (1911). Although McDougall acknowledged the phenomenological facts demonstrated in cases that suggested that the consciousness had

been divided into two or more parts, he insisted that 'we are compelled to conceive our conscious mental life as the activity of a unitary being endowed with the faculties of knowing, feeling and striving, the ego, soul or self' (McDougall, 1920, p. 110). Later, he had become involved with cases of nervous disorder that seemed to make the notion of a unitary ego untenable. These cases suggested that the Self had become divided into two or more parts each endowed with 'the fundamental faculties of mind, conscious knowing, feeling and striving, a striving that expresses itself in part in the control of bodily movements'. McDougall's criticism of the supporters of the co-consciousness theory was that they concluded that consciousness was a kind of stuff that could be combined, broken up, and recombined in a variety of ways. He insisted that this conclusion was unjustified and that the arguments for the unity of mind were as strong and conclusive as ever (ibid, p. 111).

McDougall posited a model of mind that maintained hierarchical control from the top down with normal conscious awareness as the controlling factor and all that goes on in the unconscious as the activities of lower elements that collectively make up the unity of the Self or ego. In the following statement he makes this model clear, but he also gives a clue as to why the concept of multiple selves was so difficult to accept. In the following quotation, the implication that a fragmented self can lay a person open to possession, is probably the reason why the notion of multiple selves is so threatening to McDougall and other positivistic scientists:

If my former conclusion holds good, it follows that each of such distinct streams of purposive effort is the activity of a unitary self or ego. Are we then to fly to the ancient theory of possession whenever we observe evidence of such multiplicity of distinct mental activities with a single organism? By no means! There are many purposive activities within my organism of which I am unaware, which are not my activities but those of my associates....My subordinates serve me faithfully in the main, provided always that I continue to be resolute and strong. But, when I relax my control, in states of sleep, hypnosis, relaxation and abstraction, my subordinates, or some of them, continue to work and then are apt to manifest their activities in the forms we have learnt to call sensory and motor automatisms. And if I am weak irresolute, if I do not face the problems of life and take the necessary decisions for dealing with them, then conflict arises within our system, one or more of my subordinates gets out of hand, I lose my control, and division of the personality into conflicting systems replaces the normal and harmonious co-operation of all members in one system (ibid, p. 111-112).

The above quotation encapsulates the fear that many must hold: the fear of loss of control, the fear of madness, and the fear of spirit possession. For such people it is imperative to maintain control of one's own organism by conscious will and reject any notion of the possibility that one's control could be violated by an invading spirit entity.



McDougal agreed that multiple centres of consciousness exist, that they can function concurrently, they can display awareness of each other, and that they underlie psychological automatisms. But he insisted that these centres of consciousness are under the hierarchical control of a strong and healthy individual in a unity of self, and the loss of conscious control means mental breakdown.

The views of McDougal are supported by empirical evidence, but he and Myers provide strongly contrasting depictions of the organisation of the human personality. Where McDougal insisted on a hierarchical organisation of mind from the top down, Myers maintained that subliminal centres of consciousness can often show greater intellectual capacity and resources than the supraliminal. Elements of these two opposing formulations can be found in other theories that developed during the twentieth century. Sigmund Freud for example posited the importance of the unity of the ego and argued the case for his 'ego defence mechanisms'. However, Freud opposed the concept of co-consciousness and alternating selves, and proposed a completely contrasting model of mind that captured the imagination of 20<sup>th</sup> century psychological thought.

### ***Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)***

Freud saw consciousness as unitary and ruled out any notion of multiple consciousness centres. In a paper entitled *A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-Analysis* (1912), Freud went into the matter of the unity of consciousness. He made it clear by what he meant by conscious and unconscious:

Now let us call "conscious" the conception which is present to our consciousness and of which we are aware, and let this be the only meaning of the term "conscious". As for latent conceptions, if we have any reason to suppose that they exist in the mind ... let then be denoted by the term "unconscious". Thus an unconscious conception is one of which we are not aware, but the experience of which we are nevertheless ready to admit on account of other proofs or signs (Freud, 1912, pp. 312-313).

Freud's meaning of the word conscious was what we might call *awareness*, and that which may be hidden below the threshold of awareness can be brought forward into our awareness (conscious awareness). He was unable to acknowledge consciousness as a much wider entity, as Myers did.

Myers demonstrated that our normal waking consciousness (the supraliminal) reflects those relatively few elements and processes that have been selected from the more comprehensive consciousness (the Subliminal Self) in our adaptation to the demands of our present environment. Furthermore, he sought to show that the biological organism, rather

than producing consciousness, is the adaptive mechanism that limits and shapes normal waking consciousness from the larger, mostly latent Self. Myers writes:

The “conscious Self” of each of us, as we call it,—the empirical, the supraliminal Self, as I should prefer to say,—does not comprise the whole of the consciousness or of the faculty within us. There exists a more comprehensive consciousness, a profounder faculty, which for the most part remains potential only so far as regards the life of earth, but from which the consciousness and the faculty of earth-life are mere selections, and which reasserts itself in its plenitude after the liberating change of death (Myers, 1903, p. 92).

Much of the confusion created in discussions of theoretical models arises from the meaning of words to describe those abstract concepts contained within those models. This debate concerning the relationship between mind and body begins with an interpretation of the word *automatism*. Further confusion is created with definitions of what constitutes *conscious* and *unconscious*. Some words used by these early psychologists, such as consciousness, mind, self, personality and ego may be interchangeable with each other, and each theorist will have an interpretation of what a term means to him. This individual interpretation of the meaning of labels is the first obstacle at arriving at a consensus, and much of what has been written concerning the evolution of psychological thinking has centred on these difficulties. What Myers was trying to do was to reconcile the abnormal, the supernatural and the normal into a continuum of human experience, but his own use of terms such as *subliminal* and *supraliminal* did little to support his ideas in the minds of many. As William James said of Myers’ terminology:

I think the words subliminal and supraliminal unfortunate, but they were probably unavoidable. I think, too, that Myers's belief in the ubiquity and great extent of the Subliminal will demand a far larger number of facts than sufficed to persuade him, before the next generation of psychologists shall become persuaded. He regards the Subliminal as the enveloping mother-consciousness in each of us, from which the consciousness we wet of is precipitated like a crystal. But whether this view get confirmed or get overthrown by future inquiry, the definite way in which Myers has thrown it down is a new and specific challenge to inquiry. For half a century now, psychologists have fully admitted the existence of a subliminal mental region, under the name either of unconscious cerebration or of the involuntary life; but they have never definitely taken up the question of the extent of this region, never sought explicitly to map it out. Myers definitely attacks this problem, which, after him, it will be impossible to ignore (James, 1901-1903, p. 17).

The real dispute between psychological theories of the nature of consciousness was between Freud and Janet who were both working from their experiences with disturbed patients.

On the view that consciousness can be split in such a way that some ideas or psychical acts could be said to constitute a consciousness which has become estranged from the bulk of

conscious activity, Freud acknowledge that such a view might be supported by cases of dual personality such as those proposed by Azam (1887). However, it would not be appropriate to extend the term conscious so far that it includes a consciousness of which the owner is not aware. Freud believed that it made more sense to say that we are dealing with a 'shifting of consciousness' (Freud, 1912, p. 315).

Freud distanced himself from the theories of Janet, Myers and others, such as Azam, and rejected any view of unconscious mental activity that could be called co-conscious with ordinary everyday awareness. This theoretical stance made it difficult for psychoanalysis to deal with dissociative disorders, and in 1926, Bernard Hart, in his presidential address to the *British Psychological Society*, took Freud and his followers to task for failing to account for the phenomena of dissociation in their theoretical constructs (Hart, 1926).

The Viennese physician Joseph Breuer (1842-1925) can be situated within the stream of psychological thinking that emerged from the tradition of *animal magnetism*, and he was one of the pioneers in the development of the alternate-consciousness paradigm (Crabtree, 1993, p. 351). During his treatment of Bertha Pappenheim (subsequently reported as 'Anna-O' for client confidentiality reasons), Breuer discovered that whilst Bertha was in her spontaneous somnambulistic states he was able to get her to relate the actual incident that precipitated the formation of a specific hysterical symptom. One by one Breuer succeeded in treating each symptom, including her eye spasms, contracture of the right leg, inhibition of ability to drink, and others. Breuer had discovered a new therapeutic framework, which involved uncovering the precipitating circumstances by taking Bertha back in time to discover the nucleus of the problem. With this discovery, Breuer began to artificially induce the somnambulistic state to aid the process.

In 1882, Breuer introduced Freud to the concept whilst treating his patient, but Freud did not attempt the use of hypnosis until 1889 (Crabtree, 1993, p. 354). Freud and Breuer seemed to agree on the main issues involving their emerging methods of treatment, but they failed to agree on what Breuer called the 'hypnoid' state (Crabtree, 2009, p. 327). Freud took issue with Breuer's description of cases of hypnoid hysteria in which an idea becomes pathogenic because it has been attached to a hypnoid state and remains outside the ego. Freud said that he never encountered a genuine hypnoid hysteria.

Breuer agreed with Janet that the memory of a psychic trauma can exist within a person, rather like a foreign body affecting waking life (Breuer & Freud, 1895). However, there were differences in what Breuer envisaged and Janet's theory. Janet and Binet had

described a splitting of consciousness involving the presence of two portions of psychic activity that alternate with each other. Breuer pointed out that Bertha experienced this kind of double consciousness when her hypnoid state alternated with her normal state (ibid, p. 217). But he also called attention to a split-off portion that was 'thrust into darkness and, like the Titans imprisoned in the crater of Etna, can shake the earth but can never emerge into the light of day'(ibid). What Janet and Breuer discovered was that when a traumatic event occurs, the person is thrown into an altered state. Janet called this altered state 'disagregation' (Janet, 1889), (which became known as 'dissociation'), and Breuer called it a hypnoid state (Breuer & Freud, 1895). The theory according to Breuer states that whenever the traumatic event is recalled, the person re-enters the state of hypnoid fright. After a time the intensity of the state diminishes, and the hypnoid state no longer alternates with normal consciousness but exists side by side with it. At this point the hypnoid state is continually present below the surface, and the somatic symptoms that previously arose during the alternating hypnoid states acquire a permanent existence. This process occurred with Bertha when the alternation between the waking state and the hypnoid state was replaced by a coexistence of the normal and hypnoid complexes of ideas (ibid, p. 229). Freud later distanced himself from Breuer and developed his own ideas surrounding the phenomena of pathological states in hysteria.

Freud's explanation was that an incompatible idea becomes repressed from consciousness as a means of ego defence. The repressed ideas persist as a weak memory trace, whilst the effect, which has been separated from the idea, manifests as a somatic symptom. Freud called this condition, 'defence hysteria' (ibid, p. 285). Later, in describing his work with 'Dora', Freud completely rejected Breuer's view that hypnoid states had an important role in the generation of hysteria, and noted that the term 'hypnoid' was a term created by Breuer (Freud, 1964). He considered the term to be superfluous and misleading.

Breuer's discovery of the healing benefits of spontaneous somnambulism and artificially induced hypnotic states could be regarded as a repeat of the discoveries made by earlier magnetisers such as the Marquis de Puységur (1784), and a reinforcement of the notion that the dissociative mental state, as well as being a contributor to psychological distress, is also the gateway to the cure.

Freud's rejection of the roots of psychoanalysis in the hypnosis/mesmeric tradition were stated and confirmed in *A Note* (1912), and his opposition to Myers' concept of a Subliminal Self had dramatic effects on the development of psychology and dynamic psychiatry. Freud's psychoanalysis came to dominate modern clinical psychological thinking

and in the process squeezed out both the hypnosis tradition and the concept of dissociated selves (Crabtree, 2009, p. 332).

Despite his criticism of psychoanalysis, Hart contended that Freud and Janet were operating on two entirely different levels, and what appeared to be two different theories were in fact two different stages of enquiry (Crabtree, 2009, p. 330). Had he lived long enough to contribute further to the debate I have no doubt in my mind that Myers would have been able to reconcile the differences between the theories of Janet and Freud and assimilate them into a cohesive and more comprehensive model of mind. Applying Myers' *tertium quid* approach to Janet's patients and those of Freud and Breuer would have placed them on a continuum of pathological experience rather than separating them according to different theories.

### ***Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961)***

The founder of *Analytical Psychology*, Jung studied for a time with Janet and was familiar with Myers' writings (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 691). In his doctoral thesis on spiritual mediumship, Jung gives reference to Myers' work on automatic writing with his subject 'Clelia' (Jung, 1902, pp. 3-88), where he acknowledges the relevance of the co-consciousness theory. Jung's own developed theory of *complexes* includes the concept that human beings are comprised of many fragmentary personalities. He saw complexes as a collection of ideas and images which cluster around a core that embodies one or more archetypes that are characterised by a common feeling (Jung, 1937), and he wrote of the fact that the psyche can have a tendency to split:

Although this tendency is more clearly observable in psychopathology, fundamentally it is a normal phenomenon. The tendency to split means that parts of the psyche detach themselves from consciousness to such an extent that they not only appear to be foreign, but lead to autonomous life of their own. It need not be a question of hysterical multiple personality, or schizophrenic alterations of personality, but merely of so-called "complexes" that come entirely within the scope of the normal (Jung, 1937, p. 121).

Jung stated that there is no difference in principle between a fragmentary personality and a 'complex' and that experience had showed him that complexes are really splinter psyches (ibid, P. 97). Jung's ideas were in many ways compatible with those of Myers and were not subject to the objections levelled against Freud's single-consciousness theory. Like Myers, Jung connected the activity of fragmentary personalities with creativity on one hand and mediumship on the other (Crabtree, 2009, p. 334).

Jung's *Analytical Psychology* provides both a link and a divergence between Myers' model of mind and those of more modern theorists by the use of the term *dissociation*. According to Jungian scholar Lucy Huskinson (2010b), analytical psychology does not differentiate between the many cultural or anthropological variations of spiritual experience, but reduces them into one general kind of psychological experience that is referred to as 'dissociation', or the experience of being 'in a dissociated state' (ibid, p.71).

According to Huskinson, dissociation operates within the context of a consciousness that is multi-faceted into what may be called ego-states or streams of consciousness that are dynamic in their relationships with each other and the environment. This model presents the mind (or personality) as divided into parts that interact with the environment according to immediate circumstances and demands (ibid, p. 72). Dissociated parts become problematic when they develop an autonomy that challenges the functioning of the core self (ibid). The dysfunctional operation of dissociated parts is known in psychiatric diagnostics as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) which is a diagnosis that has evolved from Janet's theory of 'psychological disaggregation' (Janet, 1889, p. 337).

Huskinson draws a parallel between dissociation and spirit possession in accordance with anthropologist M.J. Field (1969), who states that 'the possessed person is in a state of dissociated personality whereby a split-off part of the mind possesses the whole field of consciousness, the rest being in complete abeyance' (Huskinson, 2010b, p. 73). The parallel is where spirit possession and dissociative ego-states are similarly described as a situation where the individual loses their sense of identity and the personality becomes another person altogether. Huskinson suggests that the obvious question to ask is whether these experiences of possession are pathological, but argues that this question is inappropriate. She argues that, in terms of Jungian analytical psychology, spirit possession defies diagnostic criteria and cannot be explained in terms of pathology or health (ibid). She poses a different question: whether the ego of the possessed person can tolerate and integrate the possession experience into the personality as a whole. She offers the proposition that possession is an experience that facilitates mental health according to the disposition of the ego and it is therefore the disposition of the ego and not the phenomena of possession that leads to the possibility of pathology diagnosis.

I would argue that possession of the ego by a dissociated part according to ego-state theory is a symptom of a fragmented personality, and possession by an external discarnate intelligence is a completely different kind of possession experience altogether. Where there

is a connection between the two is in the phenomenon of *dissociation*. Whether the normal waking consciousness is displaced by a part of the self that emerges from within the unconscious, or whether the self is displaced by a possessing entity, it could be said that the legitimate ego, self, or conscious awareness has *dissociated* from the immediate circumstances and demands of the environment when the possessing entity takes control. Dissociation may therefore be seen as an altered state of consciousness where the focus of attention is disconnected from the environment. Dissociation from the normal waking consciousness is therefore the facilitator to a wider range of experiences including mystical, spiritual and religious experiences. It can also be seen as a facilitator to a range of unwelcome intrusions from what Jungians would describe as the 'collective unconscious' or from what Myers and James might call a 'spirit realm'.

Moving on to Jung's own experience in his personal life, we are able to gain another perspective of possession. Jung discovered that his house was filled with earthbound spirits of the deceased, and over the course of three days he engaged them in dialogue and assisted them in moving on (Jung, 1995, p. 339; Ebon, 1974, pp. 258-267; Hoeller, 1982). With particular relevance to the serious student of SRT on what the earthbound spirit 'knows' Jung writes:

Apparently, however, the souls of the dead "know" only what they knew at the moment of death, and nothing beyond that. Hence their endeavour to penetrate into life in order to share in the knowledge of men. I frequently have a feeling that they are standing directly behind us, waiting to hear what answer we will give them, and what answer to destiny (Jung, 1995, p. 339).

Although not generally recognised as such, Jung can be regarded as the pioneering psychologist practitioner of SRT, where he successfully assisted the earthbound spirits of deceased persons to move on to a more appropriate realm of existence. It is in the difference between the theories of Jungian analytical psychology and Jung's personal experience that we can see the divergence between the methodological atheism of modern psychology, the methodological agnosticism of Frederic Myers and the Gnosticism of Jung.<sup>65</sup>

Freud's model became the accepted foundation for modern therapeutics and has been a dominating influence in psychological thought right up to the present. Subsequently, the

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<sup>65</sup> Jung's *Seven Sermons to the Dead* (Hoeller, 1982; Pagels, 1979) is a rich source of debate into his mysticism and Gnosticism for Jungian scholars, students of Gnosticism, Jungian depth psychotherapists and students of SRT alike.

use of hypnosis as an experimental tool and as a therapeutic approach has been sidestepped in favour of methods that are centred more on cognitive processes. This has resulted in research into those areas that continue to be considered as 'paranormal' being conducted without the expressed aid of hypnosis.

## **Automatism and Experimental psi Research**

Large amounts of experimental work on sensory and motor automatisms have been carried out since Myers' death, largely along the lines that he initiated, and continue to provide high quality evidence to support the hypothetical link between automatisms and supernormal phenomena (Crabtree, 2009, p. 361).

The older style of *psi* experimentation involved forced choice guessing of ESP cards<sup>66</sup> and provided little scope for the operation of automatisms, as they were defined by Myers. But significant results have been found in similar experiments, when conducted with gifted individuals who are able to alter their state of consciousness at will. This type of experiment with a random selection of undergraduates has little chance of success, but using persons with the innate gift of mediumship, or those who fall on the susceptibility end of the schizotypal personality continuum (Claridge, 1990)<sup>67</sup> would ensure a high degree of success. For example Kelly, Kanthamani, Child and Young (1976) showed in the case of their gifted subject 'BD' that the target-related information was delivered primarily in the form of spontaneous, involuntary visual imagery, confirming a central feature of that subject's self-description. This and other studies with gifted subjects showed strong tendencies to obtain hits in bursts of unusually high scoring when accompanied with mild alterations in mental state suggestive of automatism (Crabtree, 2009, p. 363). These studies reinforce the proposition that what has become known as ESP in modern psi research is in fact what Myers referred to as a function of the Subliminal Self, and in order for such tests to show significant results then the subject must have the ability to access the subliminal realm, either spontaneously or through artificially induced hypnosis.

In my conclusion to this chapter, I would argue that Frederic Myers proposed a model of mind that may prove to be of value in helping to explain, in simple terms, what modern consciousness research is uncovering with reference to states of mind, intuition and creativity. Furthermore, a revised understanding of the nature of consciousness is central

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<sup>66</sup> Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) cards are packs of simple diagrams depicting squares, circles, triangles, etc, and are used to test a person's extra sensory perception by 'guessing'.

<sup>67</sup> Discussed in Chapter 12.



to the conceptual frameworks of SRT, and the process of learning and accommodating valuable information through expanding consciousness and intuition.

Myers' model of mind, as expounded in his collective work *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903; 1903b), provided a foundation for his formulation of theories regarding what he called 'psychological automatisms' and a variety of issues related to them. These issues surrounding psychological automatisms are central to our understanding of methods of discernment between psychopathology and veridical spiritual manifestations. The central features of Myers' theory of psychological automatisms are summarised as follows:

1. Myers argued that phenomena such as automatic writing, hysteria, spiritual mediumship, lucid dreams, hypnotic states, and creative imagination force investigators to look beyond accepted psychological explanations and to position alternative centres of consciousness outside of normal, or primary conscious awareness as sources of a variety of complex automatic actions and perceptions.
2. He insisted that these conscious centres must be regarded, at least in well-developed cases, as personalities or selves – intelligent sources of thoughts, feelings and actions that possess their own memory chains and exhibit a psychological cohesiveness. He indicated that these centres are not necessarily merely alternating states, but may operate concurrently with what he called the *supraliminal* self and with each other. Myers noted that the secondary or subliminal conscious centres sometimes display an awareness of each other. He also wrote about a kind of *inclusiveness* in which subliminal centres may sometimes be aware of the thoughts and actions of the primary or supraliminal consciousness, as well as the environment in which the supraliminal consciousness exists. This awareness is however not always reciprocal.
3. Myers recognised that there is a strong linkage between automatisms and those psychic phenomena (what we now call 'psi' capabilities) that are associated with spiritualist mediumship, somnambulism and spontaneous sleep-waking. Beginning with his study of automatic writing in the 1880's, Myers demonstrated that information produced by the communicating consciousness was sometimes veridical and could not be accounted for in terms of knowledge gained through sense experience and other so-called 'normal' means. Indications of supernormal faculty were discovered throughout the range of sensory and motor automatism he studied (Crabtree, 2009).

4. Myers further hypothesised that an 'I' or ultimate Subliminal Self, that embraces both the subliminal and the supraliminal consciousness and is aware of all activity that occurs in each. This Self has roots in a transcendental environment of some sort, accounting for its supernormal capabilities. It provides the over-arching unity of the psyche, reconciling its 'colonial' versus 'unitary' aspects, and it survives the shock of physical death (Crabtree, 2009, pp. 363-364).

We have seen during the course of Part I that the *altered state of consciousness* (ASC) emerged as a recurring theme in possession phenomena. We have also seen in this chapter that hypnosis has played a significant role in the development of Myers' theory on his model of mind. Hypnosis has also been a significant factor in both experimental research and in therapeutics with an understanding of ego-states, dissociated parts, multiple personality and the possibility of spirit possession. In the next chapter I shall explore hypnosis more fully in its relationship with ASCs and why Myers insisted that this was the avenue to use in the testing of hypotheses relating to the nature of the human psyche. As this thesis develops I shall demonstrate how the ASC contributes to a revised epistemology that enables Spirit Release Therapy to accommodate the experience of spirit possession according to Myers' conceptual framework.

## CHAPTER 7

### Hypnosis as Experimental Method

In the course of developing Part I of this thesis I made the observation that the *altered state of consciousness* (ASC) was a recurring theme in relation to both positive and negative spirit possession, and to soul loss. In Chapter 2 we learned that both Christina Harrington (2009) and Mercy Magbagbeola (2009) experienced an altered state in their positive possession of the Wicca Goddess and the Holy Spirit respectively. In Chapter 3 we learned how Peck (2005) used hypnosis to communicate with Jersey's demons, without considering the possibility that they may have been attached earthbound spirits, and in Chapter 4 we learned how Hunter used hypnosis to release ego-parts that purport to be spirit entities from his patients (2005). Then in Part II, in Chapter 6, I drew parallels between Janet's 'dissociation hysteria' (1976), and Jung's process of 'active imagination' and non-pathological dissociation (1916/1958). All of these examples provide indications that they are all connected under the umbrella of 'altered states of consciousness' (ASCs), and it is in this chapter that I present Myers' contention that artificially induced hypnosis is the key in the scientific investigation of them all.

This chapter is the central pillar of this thesis for three reasons. Firstly, it discusses the relationship between ASC's and possession, and secondly it discusses how and why Myers developed his use of hypnosis as his preferred experimental method. Thirdly, and most important of all, is its explanation of Myers' discovery of the phenomenon of *telepathic hypnosis*. These three concepts come together in this chapter to form a cohesive whole that explains the experiences and methods of SRT practitioners within the conceptual framework of Myers' discoveries.

Of all the many methods he used, hypnosis is the method chosen by Myers as the one that produced the most significant results, and the one that he recommended *all* psychologists use in their investigations into the nature of mind, consciousness and personality (1903, p. 53). And yet, it is my contention that it is still the most little used, misunderstood and misrepresented concept by mainstream psychology to this day.

On the importance of hypnosis in relation to the evolution of consciousness, Myers writes:

First among our experimental methods I must speak of hypnotism. We see here the influence exercised by suggestion and self-suggestion on higher types of faculty, supernormal as well as normal, on character, on personality. It is on this side, indeed that the outlook is the most deeply interesting. Man is in course of evolution; and the most pregnant hint which these nascent experiments have yet given him is that it may be in his power to hasten his own evolution in ways previously unknown (Myers, 1903b, p. 29).

Myers was critical of 19<sup>th</sup> century psychology for viewing hypnosis and related phenomena as subjects of curiosity, instead of integrated factors of human experience. Thus he writes:

Hypnotism is too often presented as though it comprised a quite isolated group of phenomena. Until it is more definitely correlated with other phases of personality, it can hardly occupy the place which it merits in any psychological scheme (Myers, 1903, p. 115).

Myers' decision to use hypnosis as an experimental method was based on his observations of the unusual phenomena exhibited by some spontaneous somnambulists, sleep-wakers<sup>68</sup> and hysterics. He observed that in several cases of hysteria there was, what he called, 'an aspect from the deepest stratum of the subliminal self' (Myers, 1903b, p. 115) that demonstrated 'beneficent subliminal powers' (ibid, p.359). He further observed that these therapeutic interventions from a hidden part of the personality became manifest during the somnambulistic state or 'hypnotic-trance' (ibid, p.359). He acknowledges that whilst observing the therapeutic phenomena, he paid little attention at the time to the nature of the trance state, other than to assume that it was some kind of spontaneous, artificial or induced somnambulism 'which seemed to facilitate the beneficial control of the organism which spontaneous sleep-waking states had exercised in a fitful way' (ibid, p.359). In his observations of hysterics, spontaneous somnambulists, sleep-walkers and spiritualist mediums, Myers could see that there was a similarity, or connection between them all that needed to be researched and acknowledged as a part of normal human experience.

In order to avoid being influenced unduly by others' interpretations of the phenomena of hypnotic trance, Myers chose to place himself in a position of naiveté in which he had no more knowledge of the phenomena of trance states than anyone else. As an experimental psychologist Myers stated that he knew what he wanted to do, but had no idea how to go about it. This is how he summarised his perspective on the use of the hypnotic trance:

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<sup>68</sup> There are similarities between the contemporary meaning of the term 'sleepwalking', and the term 'sleep-waking' that Myers used to describe the state of mind where the normal waking consciousness is in sleep state, but another part of consciousness is controlling the actions of the body and '*seeing*' without the normally recognised functioning of the senses of sight and sound.

We desire to summon at our will, and to subdue to our use, those rarely emergent sleep-waking faculties. On the physical side, we desire to develop their inhibition to pain and their reinforcement of energy; on their intellectual side, their concentration of attention; on their emotional side, their sense of freedom, expansion, joy. Above all, we desire to get hold of those supernormal faculties – telepathy and clairvoyance – of which we have caught fitful glimpses in somnambulism and dream (Myers, 1903b, p. 115).

Mesmerism and hypnosis had been investigated as both a scientific curiosity and a metaphysical phenomenon since Mesmer proffered his theory of *animal magnetism* in 1766, but at the time of Myers it was still in its infancy as a psychological method. It had been used with great success by surgeons such as James Esdail (1846) and John Elliotson (1843) prior to the discovery of anaesthetics, but its theoretical implications remained largely unexamined (Myers, 1903, pp. 22-23).<sup>69</sup> Myers emphasised that the usefulness of hypnosis as an experimental method depended largely on an adequately broad conception of the nature and the phenomena of hypnosis. Although the terms ‘mesmerism’ and ‘hypnosis’ are often used interchangeably, the former simply being used as an earlier form of the latter, there is in fact a distinct difference between the two. Two schools of thought not only emphasised different interpretations of the phenomenon, but even radically different associated phenomena. Myers and Gurney felt the need to keep both interpretations alive and arrive at a better, more comprehensive view. They believed that the mesmeric hypothesis (magnetism) and the hypnotic (suggestion) hypothesis had merit, since they both had empirical observations to support them. But they also believed each of them to be inadequate. Myers thought that the mysterious force that Mesmer called *animal magnetism* probably does not exist in a material form as Mesmer had hypothesised (1766), but rather as a psychological one. Likewise the concept of *suggestion* is inadequate because suggestion itself remains wholly unexplained. Myers and Gurney warned against abandoning the Mesmer hypothesis completely in a too-eager readiness to adopt the suggestion hypothesis as a dogma (1903, p. 317). Myers was fearful that the true value of experimental hypnosis would be lost if researchers abandoned it because it was explained away as the power of suggestion, auto-suggestion, or the suggestibility of vulnerable persons. For Myers, the words ‘suggestion’, ‘self-suggestion’ and ‘suggestibility’ are ‘mere names which disguise our ignorance’ (Myers, 1903, p. 153).

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<sup>69</sup> Non-acceptance of hypnosis for surgery on the grounds that it cannot be accommodated within a physicalist framework in favour of chemical anaesthetics that demand high risk management expertise may seem illogical to many who view hypnosis as a natural and non-invasive method of healing.

Myers thought that all the phenomena of suggestion or hypnosis are, in the final analysis, phenomena of self-suggestion, because self-suggestion is a process that activates the subliminal consciousness, or at least a portion of it (Myers, 1903, p. 169). Although Myers saw the definition of suggestion as inadequate, he also felt that it had the potential to help advance our understanding through empirical research by making hypnosis and suggestion part of a larger problem of psychology, namely, the activation of subliminal functioning in general (ibid, p.356). As his experiments developed, Myers was able to demonstrate that although suggestion did have a significant part to play under certain conditions, it was not a comprehensive answer to all hypnotic phenomena.

Gurney held the view that the main distinction of kind between his 'alert' and 'deep' stage of hypnosis was to be found in the domain of memory, while memory also afforded the means for distinguishing the hypnotic state as a whole from the normal one (Myers, 1903b, p. 126). As a general rule, the events of ordinary life are remembered in the trance, while the trance events are forgotten on waking, but tend to return to the memory on re-hypnotisation (ibid, p.126). But the most interesting part of his observations consisted in showing alternations of memory in the alert and deep stages of the trance itself; the ideas impressed in the one state being almost always forgotten in the other, as invariably again remembered when the former state recurs (ibid, .126). Experiments illustrating this were presented in detail in a paper presented to the Society for Psychical Research. Myers cites from Gurney some of the details of the experimental method used:

The trials were conducted with a considerable number of subjects in different parts of the country and with three different hypnotists. The method of inducing trance and affecting the passing from one stage of trance to the next usually consisted in gentle passes over the face, without contact.<sup>70</sup> In these experiments, downward passes over the face resulted in deeper levels of trance, whilst upward passes resulted in shallower stages. At each stage the hypnotist would make statements of information for the subject to remember and then test to see whether the information could be recalled in a different stage of hypnosis. These experiments demonstrated that at each stage or depth of hypnosis a memory chain was established that was discrete and separate from the stage above or below it in most cases (Myers, 1903b, p. 126).

Myers commented on the similarities between artificially induced hypnotic stages with their separate memory chains, and the phenomena of the morbid alternating personalities

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<sup>70</sup> The method of making passes with the hands over the subject to facilitate trance induction was the method used by *Mesmerists*, otherwise known as *magnetisers* (Crabtree, 1993, p. 38). This was the method used as an alternative to the Nancy school that used voiced suggestion (Janet, 1976, p. 172).

that were observed in cases of disintegrated personality. Learning from these experiments, Myers writes:

The hypnotic stages are in fact secondary or alternating personalities of very shallow type, but for that very reason all the better adapted for teaching us from what kinds of subliminal disaggregation the more serious splits in personality take their rise (Myers, 1903b, p. 132).

Myers' contention that there was a relationship between the concept of memory chains and dual or multiple personality was not the only value derived from using hypnosis as an experimental tool. He saw hypnosis not only as a gateway to the deeper recesses of the Subliminal Self, but he pondered the possibilities of hypnosis as a gateway to other worlds beyond the physical:

Deeper still lies the stage of highest interest – that sleep-waking in which the subliminal self is at last set free, is at last not only able to receive but to respond; when it begins to tell is the secrets of the sleeping phase of personality, beginning with directions as to the conduct of the trance or of the cure, and going on to who knows what insights into who knows what world afar? (Myers, 1903b, p. 133).

The above statement, if valid, has far-reaching and profound implications; the possibilities for psychology to discover 'who knows what world afar', as Myers put it, ought to be motivation enough for the curious scientist.

## **Spontaneous Somnambulism and Sleep-waking States**

Myers' saw the hypnotic trance as a relative of what he called spontaneous 'sleep-waking' and cites the case of 'Rachel Baker' presented by Mitchill, Priestley & Douglas (1815) to demonstrate this relationship. Rachel Baker was born in Pelham, Massachusetts in 1794 and gained a reputation as a 'sleeping preacher'. The biographical account of Rachel Baker presented by Mitchill *et al* describes how she was a melancholic child, who fell into a religious crisis at the age of 17, which became increasingly acute until she fell into a somnambulist condition, wherein she talked incoherently of her fears of hell (ibid, p.15). These spontaneous trance states recurred for about six months, until in the waking state she experienced a conscious crisis of despair, which in turn was succeeded by a kind of 'conversion', which produced a happy and calming effect (ibid, p.19). From then onwards the trances continued, but she spoke in a more rational and regular way. It is reported that people came from miles around to hear her give religious addresses and prayers, and according to witnesses her intellectual faculties increased dramatically whilst in these trance states. Two similar cases of sleeping preachers were reported by Mitchill *et al* in the

same book, that of 'Job Cooper', a Pennsylvanian weaver in 1774, and 'Joseph Payne', a 16 year-old boy in Reading, England in 1759 (Mitchill *et al.* 1815).

Myers refers to similar cases of what appear to be supernormal powers of telepathy and / or clairvoyance to demonstrate what he described as a 'sleep-waking' state. He cites the case of 'Theophile Janicaud' as an example (Myers, 1903b, pp. 118-119) to illustrate the supernormal psychic powers of a sleepwalking somnambulist. This case demonstrates the ability to enter into a spontaneous altered state and provide accurate information about events and situations that are distant spatially. It also demonstrates that the mind can accurately perceive without the use of sensory organs such as the eye, providing evidence that the mind is not brain dependent for perception.

## **Experimentally Induced Somnambulism**

From the spontaneous subliminal phenomena associated with sleep and sleep-waking states, Myers moved on to what he called 'that great experimental modification of sleep – hypnotism' (Myers, 1903, p. 115). Gurney and Myers had long argued that hypnosis is far more important than a curious anomaly for stage entertainment (Gurney *et al.*, 1886; Myers, 1903, p. 158). The method that had evolved from Mesmer's original discovery had been the first really intimate, really penetrating method of psychological experiment and could provide a cornerstone of a valid experimental psychology. Its psychological importance lay for Myers and Gurney in its potential as an experimental method in reaching the subliminal self (Kelly, 2009, p. 104). On the power of suggestion, Myers writes: 'In the meantime I define suggestion as successful appeal to the subliminal self' (Myers, 1903b, p. 122). However, there is an alternative theory that I subsequently expound upon below, where the consciousness of the individual dissociates from its connection with the brain, thus allowing (without conscious volition) another consciousness to take control of the organism.

For Myers, artificially induced experimental hypnosis was the key to unravelling a series of what appeared at first glance to be unconnected phenomena:

I can show that this puzzle is part of a wider problem, which meets us in all departments of subliminal operation. In split personalities, in genius, in dreams, in sensory and motor automatisms, we find the same fitfulness, the same apparent caprice (Myers, 1903b, pp. 125-126).

On the continuum of human experience Myers made the connection between hysteria (ibid, p.361) and other associated pathologies at one end of the continuum with



enhancements of human function such as super-normal cognitive abilities and creative genius (ibid, p.382) at the other extreme.

### ***Supernormal Powers***

The phenomena of hypnosis observed by Myers often included enhancements of cognitive processes as was demonstrated above in the case of Theophile. Experiments in post-hypnotic suggestion by Gurney showed that some level of subliminal consciousness can conduct complicated arithmetical calculations or keep track of a specific, often lengthy lapse of time (Myers, 1903, pp. 502-510). From Myers' conception of hypnosis as a means of accessing subliminal strata of consciousness, it follows that phenomena suggestive of super-normal modes of perception, such as telepathy and clairvoyance, would also be observed in connection with hypnosis. In the century since Myers' early experiments, many studies have supported his prediction that hypnosis can sometimes elicit or enhance super-normal functioning (Kelly, 2009, p. 109).

In my view, the most significant discovery from my research into the work of Myers is the concept of *telepathic hypnosis*. This is, I believe, the core concept in the influence of discarnate spirit entities on consciousness, and must stand out as probably the most important of all discoveries in psychology.

### **Telepathic Hypnotism**

The concept of hypnosis at a distance, or *telepathic hypnosis*, was first recorded by the Marquis de Puységur (1785). He agreed with Mesmer that the influence of what they then perceived as magnetic fluid was not impeded by physical obstacles. This meant that the magnetiser could magnetise through walls and from one dwelling to another. Puységur was not content to accept the theories of others and commented:

This is the kind of thing that is impossible to prove by rational arguments and for which experience alone can provide certainty. For that reason, it is to men who are aware of this small part of their power that I now direct some recommendations about the best way to use it (Puységur 1875, p.112-113).

Puységur was aware of the possible detrimental effects of inducing somnambulism at a distance, and he records cases where some patients, whilst on their way to visit him for a consultation, actually arrived already in a somnambulistic state. Puységur was also aware of other possible dangers:

Apart from this inconvenience, there is another one very much to be feared – the risk that some extraneous factor will interfere with the effect produced at a distance. If, for example, the effect one produces is somnambulism, one must know very well how susceptible this peaceful state is to being disturbed by the least extraneous circumstance, which can then cause truly miserable confusion (Puységur, 1784, p. 113).

In other words, the somnambulist who was not being guarded or directed by the magnetiser would be vulnerable to all kinds of circumstance that could cause problems. Two important factors emerge from Puységur's observations regarding telepathic hypnosis: the importance of *experience* in contrast to rational argument in determining its credibility; and the *vulnerability* of the unsupervised subject. The importance of experience is a recurring theme throughout my thesis and the foundation of a revised epistemology, and so too is the problem of vulnerability to the unprotected and uninformed in all matters concerning possession and other forms of spirit influence to the vulnerable mind.

According to Crabtree's research, the French magnetiser, Baron Jules de Sennevoy Dupotet attempted to produce a state of somnambulism from a distance under controlled conditions in 1820 (Crabtree, 1993, p. 45). Other researchers who investigated this phenomenon in the 1880s include Janet (1886b), Richet (1886), and Hericourt (1886). Distant mesmeric effects have also been reported by James Esdail (1846) in India, and by John Elliotson (1843) and Chauncey Hare Townsend (1844) in England.

Frederic Myers, like Puységur one hundred years before him, was not content to leave such phenomena to rationalist argument, and he sought to gather evidence to demonstrate that suggestion was not an adequate explanation for all hypnotic phenomena:

The evidence for telepathy – for psychical influence from a distance – has grown to goodly proportions, for a new form of experiment has been found possible from which the influence of suggestion can be entirely excluded. It has now, as I shall presently try to show, been actually proved that the hypnotic trance can be induced from a distance so great, and with precautions so complete, that telepathy or some similar supernormal influence is the only efficient cause which can be conceived (Myers, 1903b, p. 140).

Pierre Janet arranged for a series of experiments with his well-known subject, Madame B. ('Leonie'), and the first experiments were carried out with her at Le Havre with the assistance of Dr. Gibert, a leading physician there. These experiments are described in the *Bulletins de la Societe de Psychologie Physiologique*, (1886) Tome I., p. 24, and in the *Revue Philosophique*, August (1886).

Myers expressed his good fortune to be invited to witness the experiments of Janet with Leonie, and was impressed with the precautions taken by Janet to avoid any influences that could be attributable to the power of suggestion:

These experiments are not easy to manage, since it is essential at once to prevent the subject from suspecting that the experiment is being tried, and also to provide for his safety in the event of its success. In Dr. Gibert's experiment, for instance, it was a responsible matter to bring this elderly woman through the streets of Le Havre. It was needful to provide her with an unnoticed escort; and, in fact, several persons had to devote themselves for some hours to a single experiment (Myers, 1903b, p. 140).

Myers uses extracts from Janet's report (1886a) to emphasise the simple fact that the subject was being hypnotized from a distance by Dr. Gibert, not only with no influence from the power of direct suggestion, but against her will:

October 3, 1885. M. Gibert tries to put her to sleep from a distance of half a mile; M. Janet finds her awake; puts her to sleep; she says, "I know very well that M. Gibert tried to put me to sleep, but when I felt him I looked for some water, and put my hands in cold water. I don't want people to put me to sleep in that way; it puts me out, and makes me look silly." She had in fact held her hands in water at the time when M. Gibert willed her to sleep.

October 9. M. Gibert succeeds in a similar attempt; she says in trance, "Why does M. Gibert put me to sleep from his house? I had not time to put my hands in my basin" (Myers, 1903, p. 973).

Myers was never content to depend on just one case to support his hypotheses, and he collected accounts from other reliable sources for evidence of telepathic hypnosis. He further cites an account, contributed by a Dr. E. Gley that was published in *Tribune Medicale* in May 1875, of a 14 year-old girl that initiated a series of over one hundred experiments conducted under a variety of conditions (Myers, 1903b, p. 143).

It could be argued that had modern theorists been aware of the outcomes of these experiments, and Myers' theories to explain them, then the course of experimental hypnosis would have taken a very different path. Furthermore, I very much doubt that the seemingly magical phenomena exhibited by professional stage hypnotists would prove so fascinating to a gullible and uninformed public.

It is at this stage of my thesis that the wider implications of Myers' theories begin to impinge tentatively on our most commonly held beliefs about the nature of mind and our subliminal influences on each other – for good or for ill. When a spiritualist medium 'listens' to those spirits that communicate through her it is called 'channelling' (Neate,

1997) and is an act of *telepathic communication*. When the spirit wants to take control of the mediums faculties in order to effect a more direct communication, and the medium agrees to that and goes into a trance, then that is positive or 'invited' possession. In such instances, the medium's mind 'dissociates' and steps aside, so to speak, and permits the spirit entity to take control of her communication infrastructure (brain and voice box). When this is done without the knowledge or consent of the subject then it is 'uninvited' possession. When the discarnate spirit wants to induce a trance in the subject without her consent then this is achieved by 'telepathic hypnosis'. Thus, it is my contention that the concept of *hypnosis at a distance* is the very core of the concept of possession, and the remainder of this thesis will argue further in support of this hypothesis.

## **Inadequacies of Modern Theories**

There is no consensus between modern theorists to explain the concept of hypnosis and all associated phenomena. For medical students, William Kroger's *Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* (1977) identifies no less than 13 theories that attempt to explain what hypnosis is and how it operates (ibid, pp. 26-32). *Hartland's Medical and Dental Hypnosis* compiled by David Waxman (1989) offers 10 theories (ibid, pp.19-37). There are two principle reasons for the inability to arrive at a consensus. Firstly, hypnosis is a theoretical *mental* construct that theorists are trying to fit into a *physicalist* conceptual framework, and secondly, they do not have an adequately comprehensive model of mind that can accommodate *all* hypnotic phenomena.

Neither of the two text books referenced above, that are required reading for medical and dental practitioners of hypnosis in the UK, have references to the work of Myers. They are devoid of any notion that may seek to explain, or answer any of those questions that Myers argued were of primary importance with regard to human consciousness and personality, such as the debate between cerebral automatism and volition. The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis' *Handbook of hypnotic Suggestions and Metaphors* (Hammond, 1990), is a compendium of literally hundreds of hypnotic suggestions for the treatment of a catalogue of distressing conditions, including multiple personality, and other emotional and psychiatric disorders (ibid, pp.309-348). The entire collection is built on the premise that individuals are able to respond to the power of suggestion in varying degrees. But, as we have seen, Myers argued that suggestion was not an adequate explanation for all 'automatisms'. This would explain why many of the suggestions contained in the *Handbook* have limited efficacy. For example, the suggestions for the treatment of multiple

personality only offer an 'fusion' solution (Hammond, 1990. P.339), without considering the possibility that any of the sub-personalities may be not of the self.

Like its UK counterparts, the American manual offers no references to the work of Myers, or the concepts of telepathy and spirit possession. They therefore offer no link between hypnosis and those phenomena that occupied much of Myers experimental work into the nature of the human personality.

It is my contention, in agreement with Myers, that it is of the utmost importance, not to determine precisely what hypnosis is, but how it can best serve the serious scientific enquirer into the nature of human personality and consciousness. As comprehensive as the three authoritative texts cited above are, they all fail to acknowledge or explain telepathic hypnosis or spirit possession.

Physicalist theories cannot explain or accept the concepts of supernormal powers of clairvoyance and telepathy, or the phenomena of those cases cited above of the sleeping preachers. Nor can they explain or accommodate the concept of spirit possession or soul loss. In modern hypnosis research, all theories share a common foundation of suggestion and auto-suggestion, and the mysteries of mesmerism (animal magnetism) are consigned to the history of the development of hypnosis as a psychological phenomenon.

All forms of altered state, including meditative and mystical states could be labelled as a form of dissociation (Kroger, 1977, p. 28). Janet's theory of dissociation (1976, p. 676) explains how an individual escapes trauma by dissociating and forming a secondary self that seeks to protect the core self from traumatic experience. The trauma, therefore, is the stimulus for the dissociation experience. Where there are similarities in the trance phenomena that characterise what has become known as 'dissociation', in artificially induced dissociation the name given to the induction procedure is 'hypnosis' (Heap et al 2004, p.5).

Bernstein & Putnam (1986) found there to be a correlation between high hypnotisability and pathological dissociation. However, although this may mean that those who are prone to pathological dissociation may be highly hypnotizable, it does not mean that those who are highly hypnotizable are prone to pathological dissociation. To relate hypnotisability exclusively to pathological dissociation was the mistake that Janet made. Myers asserted that the ability to enter into a trance state is not purely pathological as Janet asserted, but that healthy people, including spiritualist mediums, have the ability to dissociate into the

altered state. Commensurate with Kroger's assessment of dissociation theory, is the idea that dissociation as a meditative state could be initiated either by religious ritual or a spiritual discipline, or a spontaneous mystical experience. The person who is highly hypnotizable would find it very easy to dissociate into an altered state and thus initiate a 'religious experience', but those who are not easily hypnotized would need to learn the spiritual or religious discipline for achieving a similar meditative state; for example, Zen Buddhism or yoga.

All modern theories of hypnosis are based on behavioural, psychodynamic or neurological precepts, and all of them are founded on epiphenomenalism, where consciousness is brain dependent. Another very important difference between the theories of modern hypnotists and of Myers is that modern theories cannot accommodate the phenomenon of hypnotic induction at a distance. Where the experiments of Janet with 'Leoni' are mentioned in the literature they ignore the concept of hypnosis at a distance, but focus rather on the power of suggestion to create alternate personalities and to access hidden abilities (Taves, 2004, p. 52). Adam Crabtree, on the other hand, has provided an excellent reference to this phenomenon in his history of psychological healing entitled, *From Mesmer to Freud* (1993). Again, in contrast, Pintar and Lynn in their more recent *Hypnosis: A Brief History* (2008) neglect the topic altogether.

To ignore the importance of telepathic hypnosis is misleading to the student of hypnotic phenomena as Myers' experiments will testify, and it is equally important that the evidence for hypnosis at a distance is presented in order to support the argument that hypnosis is a gateway to a vast array of psychological and spiritual domains.

Modern theories of hypnosis, being predominantly based on the power of suggestion, cannot explain the hypnotic power of silent hand passes (mesmeric technique), neither can they explain hypnosis at a distance. But telepathy does open one alternative avenue of enquiry. I shall attend to the hypnotic power of silent hand passes (mesmerism) in Chapter 10.

## **An Alternative Theory**

To accommodate *all* hypnosis phenomena, including hypnosis at a distance, the epiphenomenal concept needs to be augmented with its opposite, that is, a mind that is not brain dependent.

When in a hypnotic trance, the subject's mind disengages (dissociates) from the body (brain) to a sufficient degree to allow the brain to respond to suggestions delivered. Degrees of dissociation progress from mild daydreaming, at one end of a continuum, to complete out of body experience at the other end. Whilst the mind has dissociated, the brain continues to function on 'automatic pilot' and the organism reacts to the immediate environment automatically (without conscious direction).

It is my contention that the brain, being a physical organ like the heart or the liver, has no intelligence (that is a decision-making capacity) of its own. It, therefore, has no ability to discriminate between what is real and what is imagined or suggested to it. It is the *mind* or *consciousness* that has the power to interpret what the brain sees and hears. When a hypnotist delivers a suggestion to the brain, it does not discriminate; it simply carries out the instruction. What is suggested to the brain is what it *believes* to be true. A practical example of this is found in Grinder and Bandler's *Trance-Formations* (1981), an instruction manual on NLP and Ericksonian methods of hypnosis induction:

I once told a man who came to me, "I want to speak to the brain. As soon as the brain is ready to talk to me, and no conscious parts know anything about what is going on, then the mouth will open and say 'Now'. He sat there for twenty minutes and then he said, "Nowwww." I said, "All right Brain, you fouled up. Pain is a very valuable thing. It allows you to know when something needs to be attended to. This injury is already being attended to as well as it can be. Unless you can come up with anything else that needs to be done, it is time to shut off the pain." It said, "Yessss!" I said, "Shut it off now, and turn it back on only when it is needed; and not before." Now, I have no idea what all that means, but it sounds so logical, and presupposes that the brain can do what I ask. After that he had no pain whatsoever (Grinder & Bandler, 1981, p. 192).

In cases of deliberately induced hypnosis, the volitional mind of the person agrees to cooperate, but in a way that allows it to step aside and suspend its discriminatory powers (Barnett, 1989, p. 36). In this sense, it could be argued that the person is participating in an agreement to allow the body to perform certain tasks, and to this degree the social conformity or 'role-play theory' of hypnosis proposed by Barber (1958) has validity. However, in the case of hypnosis at a distance, where the percipient is unsuspecting of the intention of the agent, this theory fails. Furthermore, this theory does not take into account the ability of the mind to *dissociate* from the body. In order for the participant to agree to this kind of interaction with a hypnotist he must agree to *trust* the *integrity* and the *intentions* of the hypnotist. Without this trust there can be no agreement and the experiment, the entertainment or the therapy, will fail. The agreement between subject and hypnotist, whether or not this agreement is exercised by the conscious waking self (the

supraliminal), depends solely on the subconscious (the Subliminal Self), which, according to Myers is the greater authentic self, and with the additional approval of the highest level of the greater self which is the 'Higher Self', or Hilgard's 'hidden observer' (Baldwin, 1995, p.9).

The above theoretical model may help to explain the ability to communicate telepathically and use the power of suggestion at a subliminal level. It can also take into account the validity of behaviourist, psychodynamic, neo-dissociation, social cooperation and neurological theories that are outlined by Kroger (1977, p.26-32). However, it can also accommodate the neo-dissociation theory (ibid, p.28), soul loss (Villoldo, 2005), spirit possession and all other psychic phenomena investigated by Myers with respect to clairvoyance and telepathy.

Myers asserted that a fuller understanding of human personality could be gained from discoveries using hypnosis. Understanding how hallucinations are created in the hypnotic subject by suggestion gives insights into how persons can become delusional and reinforce their own false beliefs by auto-suggestion. But Myers was not satisfied with explaining hypnotic phenomena in terms of suggestion, or auto-suggestion; and he insisted that there was more to discover. With the creation of perception, or ways in which it can be influenced, it is important to consider other aspects such as the creative power of the *imagination*, and the *inability* of the organic brain to interpret and differentiate between what is real and what is imagined.

Myers' experiments with hypnosis teach us that what can be achieved in hypnosis is commensurate with what happens to our perception, imaginings, hopes and fears in everyday living. Our own delusions and false beliefs can be reinforced by auto-suggestion and imagination, in defence of a fragmented or fragile ego or sense of self. Our own creative imagination can shape our interpretations to reinforce our own false autogenic (self-created) sense of self, rather than accept our true Self and authentic spirit nature. On man's spirit nature Myers writes:

In my view each man is essentially a spirit, controlling an organism which is itself a complex of lower and smaller lives. The spirit's control is not uniform throughout the organism, not in all phases of organic life. In waking life it controls mainly the centres of supraliminal thought and feeling, exercising little control over deeper centres, which have been educated into a routine sufficient for common needs. But in subliminal states – trance and the like – the supraliminal processes are inhibited, and the lower organic centres are retained more directly under the spirit's control. As you get into the profounder part of man's being, you get nearer to the source of



his human vitality. You get thus into a region of essentially greater responsiveness to spiritual appeal than is offered by the superficial stratum which has been shaped and hardened by external needs into a definite adaptation to the earthly environment (Myers, 1903b, p. 160).

Taking the above statement at face value, and assuming that Myers is correct, probably the best example of the concept of possession, as we shall see, is provided by the stage hypnotist.

### ***Stage Hypnosis – a Form of Possession?***

In some instances of stage hypnosis, I contend that the hypnotist takes possession of the subject by imposing his will on the organism, whilst the conscious-self dissociates from the body and observes itself. I am not aware of any published works on this hypothesis as it applies to stage hypnotism, but my own questioning of some subjects who have participated in stage performances confirm that they perceived themselves as if they were outside of their bodies and watched what they did in response to the hypnotist's suggestions. This is a form of out-of-body experience (OBE) that supports the hypothesis that the mind is not brain dependent. Other subjects reported having no memory of what they did in response to the hypnotist's suggestions at all. It may be hypothesised that those with no memory of the experience were dissociated to the degree that they created a sub-personality with its autonomous memory chain of the event that could only be recalled with re-hypnotisation. This hypothesis prompts us to question what memories the dissociated self might have. A similar question could be asked of the consciousness that becomes dissociated at the time a real possessing entity is in full and complete control.

Yet other participants in stage hypnosis, experienced themselves as remaining within their bodies, and believed what the hypnotist told them was real, when in reality what was happening in their mental perception was imagined. In other words, the hallucination was perceived as real according to *belief* but not in fact. The experience of this kind of hallucination is subjectively very real, and it is this notion of *experience* that is extremely important in our appreciation and understanding of these concepts. It is not possible to understand such notions until they are experienced personally. Intellectual understanding is not sufficient and is not a substitute for actual experience. In these situations, the belief remains intact until such time as the hypnotist delivers a suggestion to cancel the hallucination, and it is only after the suggestion is cancelled, or overcome, that the reality of the situation convinces the subject that he / she has been given a hallucination by suggestion. This can be a profound and sometimes deeply disturbing experience.

Modern hypnosis theories ignore our spiritual nature and are therefore unable to acknowledge the spiritual nature of hypnosis. It is therefore no surprise that modern theorists are unable to explain the full range of hypnotic phenomena and the mechanisms that underpin them.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion to this chapter it is clear that hypnosis is a huge subject that has attracted the curiosity of philosophers, metaphysicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, psychologists and healers since the time of Mesmer. But the aspect of hypnosis that is most important to Myers' concerns is *telepathic hypnosis*, which is the one that modern researchers have chosen to ignore at the expense of our understanding of human consciousness. It is to Myers that psychology owes a great debt in the formulation of a conceptual framework that accommodates a more holistic appreciation of human psychic experience, and yet to ignore the concept of telepathic hypnosis is to deny the debt altogether.

This chapter gave some reasons why Myers' found hypnosis such a fruitful experimental method, with particular regard to the concept of telepathic hypnosis as it relates to spirit possession. In the following chapter I shall explore how Myers used experimental hypnosis to explain the phenomena of hallucinations according to his concept of 'sensory automatisms' in conjunction with what he concluded as the 'law of telepathy'. These experiments proved that sensory perceptions can be transmitted from person to person by telepathy whilst the percipient (receiver) was in a hypnotic state. Other experiments cited in the next chapter include those where one person's mind can be 'projected' to another in a process that enabled the 'viewer' to see another person at a distance. This process can be named *astral projection*, and is a precursor to Chapter 10 where I examine modern scientific experiments in *remote viewing*. All of these concepts are important components for an understanding of how SRT recognises and treats spirit possession in the very real subjective experiences of those who become affected by discarnate entities.

## CHAPTER 8

### Hallucinations – Sensory Automatism

There is a difference between what is veridical (originating from a verified external source), that which originates in the subliminal (unconscious) and what is created in the imagination (autogenic). The question that this chapter raises, and attempts to answer is: 'How can we tell the difference?' But first we need to ask: 'Why is it important?'

It is important because the SRT practitioner (or any other healer, doctor or psychologist) needs to be able to treat a person with an appropriate remedy for their distress. Putting it simply, if a person is diagnosed with mental illness on the basis that they are hallucinating, but the sensory impression of their hallucination is the result of an event that is external in origin (veridical), then the diagnosis is incorrect and the therapy that is based on that incorrect diagnosis will inevitably fail. This raises the further question of whether an external source for what may be diagnosed as a hallucination can be verified scientifically. It further raises the question: 'Why do so many attempts at healing auditory hallucinations fail?'

In this chapter I cite examples of experiments conducted by Myers and his colleagues on the transfer of taste sensations from one person to another, which provide convincing evidence that sensory perceptions can be induced in a person from an external source. These simple experiments provide valuable support for the hypothesis that an external mind (including discarnate entities) can influence the sense perceptions of an individual. In addition I cite experiments that provide evidence that the *intention* of one person to project their conscious observation to another person at a distant location, or 'astral travelling', as it may alternatively be known, is supported. This technique of projecting one's conscious observation to another is used by SRT practitioners to 'scan' a patient for signs of external influence (Baldwin, 1995, p. 365).

The evidence presented in this chapter examines Myers' and his colleagues' attempts to demonstrate that an external agent can bypass the expectations of a subject and that the power of suggestion is not a sufficient explanation for all phenomena associated with 'automatism'.

Myers used the term 'automatisms' to provide the link a between a range of automatic phenomena and hysteria, and argued that automatic writing is just one facet among many others including hallucinations, hypnosis, double personality, and mediumship – that is that they are all connected facets of the one subject. William James referred to this collectivisation of similar facets as a *great simplification*, - one that places hallucination and impulses under the common theme of 'sensory and motor automatisms' (James, 1902, p. 233). 'Automatisms' gave these phenomena a unifying conceptual term and Myers suggested that a positive connection between them is 'an introduction into a realm where the limitations of organic life can no longer be assumed to persist' (1903b, p. 162).

Myers suggested that messages that are not initiated by an automatist's own volition come into consciousness from some form of intelligence, whether from within the subliminal (what he called the unconscious) or from an external source (Myers, 1903, p. 115).

As pioneers in the study of eye-witness testimony, Myers, Gurney and Podmore first attempted to fit hallucinations into a general scheme of perception in 1884 (pp. 77-82). They argued that 'visual perceptions' and 'hallucinations' are produced by the same neurological sensory apparatus, but in the former the primary stimulation has come from the sensory mechanism of the eyes, whereas in the latter the stimulus has come from mental processes directly activating the relevant cortical areas of the brain.

Hallucinations therefore fall on a continuum with all other perceptual processes, including normal sight and hearing, but also after-images, illusions, memory images and dreams (Myers, 1903, pp. 224-231). In other words, the brain does the 'seeing' irrespective of whether the stimulus is external or internal. But this does not mean that all so-called hallucinations are internally created.

In two surveys Gurney and colleagues presented statistical evidence, where 10% of respondents reported that they had experienced a hallucination whilst in a state of good health and wide awake (Myers, 1903, p. 431). These early estimates have proved to be remarkably accurate according to a review by Richard Bentall (2002, pp. 94-95).

Myers' studies and surveys demonstrated that hallucinations are not always purely subjective in origin, but that some are veridical; that is, they involve seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing some event happening at a physically remote location. For example, many of the experiences reported to Gurney and Myers involved seeing apparitions of someone who was experiencing some kind of crisis (usually death) at about the same time

(Gurney & Myers, 1884). According to Myers scholar Emily Kelly (2009), although no recent study of veridical hallucinations has approached the scope or thoroughness of Myers and Gurney's investigations, such experiences have continued to be reported (ibid, p. 109). An on-going study at the *University of Virginia* has identified more than 200 cases of dreams or telepathic impressions occurring to a person at a distance, usually at the time of someone's death (ibid, p.109).

## **Telepathy as a Spirit Law**

As a direct consequence of discoveries from his and the experiments of others, Myers came to believe that, in addition to the known laws of the physical universe there are laws that govern the spiritual nature of man. He further concluded that the first law of the spirit world is the law of thought-transference, or 'telepathy' (1903, p. 86).

Myers' recognition of what he called 'the law of telepathy' has, arguably, had far reaching significance in modern research into the nature of consciousness (Radin, 2006, p.249). The concept of telepathy has been supported by some modern research into psi phenomena (Targ *et al.*, 2000) and distant healing practices (Sicher & Targ, 1998). The law of telepathy is fundamental in SRT practice, as it enables the SRT practitioner to communicate with a patient at a subliminal level of consciousness and with those spirit entities that are influencing him (Baldwin, 1995, p. 207). Telepathy is hypothetically one means by which a spiritualist medium interacts with those spirit entities that provide information (Myers, 1903, p. 64).

## ***Classification of Telepathic Phenomena***

Myers' concept of the continuum of all psychic phenomena is applied in his early work, *Phantasms of the Living*, with Edmund Gurney and Frank Podmore (Gurney *et al.*, 1886). In his introduction to their work, Myers writes:

*Thought* must here be taken as including more than it does in ordinary usage; it must include sensations and volitions as well as mere representations or ideas. This being understood, the name serves its purpose fairly well, as long as we are on experimental ground. It will not be forgotten, however, that our aim is to connect an experimental with a spontaneous class of cases; and according to that view it will often be convenient to describe the former no less than the latter as *telepathic*. We thus get what we need, a single generic term which embraces the whole range of phenomena and brings out their continuity – the simpler experimental forms being the first step in a graduated series (Myers, 1886).

The first series of experiments by Myers and Gurney in *thought-transference* were based on the observations of the early mesmerists who theorised that there must be some kind of 'rapport' between the magnetiser and the patient. On what they sometimes referred to as 'mesmeric rapport' or 'community of sensation' Gurney writes:

This special feature took the form of community of sensation between the operator and the patient. The transference of impressions here depended on a specific *rapport*<sup>71</sup> previously induced by mesmeric or hypnotic operations.... To us now, this mesmeric rapport (in some, at any rate, of its manifestations) seems nothing more than the faculty of thought-transference confined to a single agent and percipient, and intensified in degree by the very conditions which limit its scope (Gurney et al., 1886, p. 11).

### ***The Community of Sensation Hypothesis***

In the series of experiments, cited below, to test the 'community of sensation' hypothesis, there were two percipients, and a considerable group of agents, each of whom, when alone with one or other of the percipients, was successful in transferring his thought impression to a percipient. In the earlier experiments the ideas (thoughts) transferred were of colours, geometric shapes, cards and visible objects of all kinds, which the percipient was asked to name. In some of the experiments the perception of motion was tested, and it was found that the movement of objects could also be discerned by percipients (Myers, 1903b, p. 170). In 1883 the reproduction of diagrams was introduced to the experiments and about 150 trials were conducted. The results showed that the hypothesis of chance or guesswork was out of the question, but that some sensory impression of the original must have been presented to the mind of the person who reproduced the diagram.<sup>72</sup>

Since these early experiments, hundreds of trials have been conducted in similar studies and in psi experiments, and in a comprehensive review, Dean Radin, Director of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, concludes that:

... results reported by individual laboratories have produced strikingly successful results. But however good these experiments may be, they tend not to be convincing to other scientists (Radin, 2006, p. 97).

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<sup>71</sup> I have explored Myers' understanding of rapport more fully in Chapter 10 where I examine Mesmer's animal magnetism and emotional sympathetic resonance from the perspective of modern quantum theory.

<sup>72</sup> Copies of some of the diagrams and their reproduction by percipients are illustrated on pages 172-176 in the edited version of *Human Personality*. Additional examples are reproduced on pages 39-48 of *Phantasms of the Living* (vol 1).

Some of the most fascinating (and convincing) experiments conducted by Myers and Gurney in thought-transference involved the transmission of taste and touch sensations from one person to another (Gurney *et al*, 1886, pp. 52-59).

### ***Sensory Transmission of Taste***

In the taste sensation experiments, the taste to be discerned was known only to the experimenters, and the sensations experienced were verbally described by the subjects (not written down), so that all danger of involuntary muscular guidance by the experimenter was eliminated. Gurney describes in great detail the nature of the experiment and the precautions taken in order to avoid any risk of fraud or collusion between agent and percipient. Below are extracts from his precautions published in *Phantasms of the Living*:

A selection of about twenty strongly tasting substances was made. These substances were enclosed in small bottles and small parcels, precisely similar to one another, and kept carefully out of the range of vision of the subjects who were moreover blindfolded, so that no grimaces made by the tasters could be seen. The subjects had in fact no means whatever of knowing, through the sense of sight, what was the substance tasted (Gurney *et al.*, 1886, p. 52).

Smell had to be guarded against with greater care. When the substance was odoriferous the packet or bottle was opened outside the room, or at such a distance, and so cautiously as to prevent any sensible smell from escaping. The experiments moreover were conducted in the close vicinity of a very large kitchen, from whence a strong odour of beefsteak and onions proceeded during almost all the time occupied. The tasters took pains to keep their heads high above the subjects and to avoid breathing with open mouth. One substance (coffee) tried was found to give off a slight smell, in spite of all precautions, and an experiment made with this had to be omitted (*Ibid*, p. 53).

I have constructed a table, shown below, from the data presented by Myers (Gurney *et al.*, 1886, p. 53) to show the relationship between what the agent tasted and what the percipient perceived. I have added a column to my table to accommodate an operational variable to signify a degree of accuracy of the sense impression. I have used a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing a null accuracy and 5 representing 100% accuracy.

**Table of taste transfer. Adapted from Gurney et al. 1886 p. 53.**

	<b>Taster</b>	<b>Percipient</b>	<b>Substance</b>	<b>Answer Given</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>
1	M	E	Vinegar	A sharp and nasty taste	4
2	M	E	Mustard	Mustard	5
3	M	R	Mustard	Ammonia	3
4	M	E	Sugar	I still taste the hot taste of the mustard	1
5	<b>E.G. &amp; M</b>	E	Worcestershire sauce	Worcestershire sauce	5
6	<b>M. G.</b>	E	Worcestershire sauce	Vinegar	4
7	<b>E.G. &amp; M</b>	E	Port wine	Between eau de Cologne and beer	4
8	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Port wine	Raspberry vinegar	3
9	<b>E.G. &amp; M</b>	E	Bitter aloes	Horrible and bitter	5
10	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Alum	A taste of ink, of iron, of vinegar. I feel it on my lips, it is as if I have been eating alum	5
11	<b>M.G.</b>	E	Alum	E perceived that M.G. was not tasting bitter aloes, as E.G. and M. supposed, but something different. No distinct perception on account of the persistence of the bitter taste.	3
12	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Nutmeg	Peppermint – no – what you put in puddings – nutmeg.	5



13	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Nutmeg	Nutmeg	5
14	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Sugar	Nothing perceived	1
15	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Sugar	Nothing perceived. (Sugar should be tried at an earlier stage in the series, as after the aloes, we could hardly taste the sugar ourselves).	1
16	<b>M.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Cayenne pepper	Mustard	3
17	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Cayenne pepper	Cayenne pepper. After the cayenne we were unable to taste anything further that evening.	5
18	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Carbonate of soda	Nothing perceived	1
19	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Caraway seeds	It feels like meal – like a seed loaf – caraway seeds. (The substance of the seeds seemed to be perceived before their taste).	5
20	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Cloves	Cloves	5
21	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Citric acid	Nothing perceived	1
22	<b>M.G.</b>	E	Citric acid	Salt	2
23	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Liquorice	Cloves	3
24	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Cloves	Cinnamon	3

25	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Acid jujube	Pear drop	5
26	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Acid jujube	Something hard, which is giving way – acid jujube.	5
27	<b>E.G. &amp; M.</b>	E	Candied ginger	Something sweet and hot	4
28	<b>M.G.</b>	R	Candied ginger	Almond toffee. (M.G. took his ginger in the dark and it was some time before he realised it was ginger.	5
					101

A 100% result would have produced a total of 140 points. A score of 70 is 50%, which might reasonably be expected from guessing, if the range of possible flavours were known in advance. But this was not the case, and participants had no idea of what flavours to expect. A score of 28 would suggest a total failure for the experiment. The score of 101 indicates a 72% success rate.

Gurney comments on the accuracy of what may appear to be mistakes in some percipient's interpretation of their taste sensation:

..it will perhaps be thought that even some of their mistakes are not much wider of the mark than they might have been had a trace of the substance been actually placed upon their tongue (Gurney et al., 1886, p. 55).

Another factor that ought to be considered is the effect that a preceding strong bitter taste would have had on the inability of percipients to taste sugar which followed. Discounting the sugar results would have reduced the total to 98 divided by 3 less items, giving a success rate of 78.4 %.

## **Classification Typology of Sensory Impressions**

Gurney and Podmore gave classifications to the types of sensory impression that influenced a percipient: Class (a) is where the impression is sensory and externalised, and where the perception of the person seems to see, hear, or feel that which he instinctively refers to the

outer world (Gurney *et al.*, 1886, p. 186). The above cited experiments on the transmission of taste sensation would fall into this class.

Class (b) is where the impression is not sensory or externalised. The impression is of an inward or ideal kind – either a mental image or an emotion, or a blind impulse towards some sort of action. This class of impression is relevant to cases of compulsion and obsession which I shall deal with in more detail in the next chapter on motor automatisms. Class (c) is where the perception is sensory without externalisation. For example; a physical feeling of illness when there is sympathetic resonance or physical rapport between a healer and his sick patient, which I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 10. Other types of impression that Gurney and Podmore classify include: class (d) dreams; class (e) in the hypnogogic state between sleep and waking; and class (f) where the impression is reciprocal and each of two persons exercise a telepathic influence on each other. Class (g) are collective cases where more than two people experience the same telepathic incident as in the case of Peck's exorcism of 'Beccah' that I introduced in Chapter 3.

There is another class of telepathic communication where the percipient is not influenced or affected in any way, but where the agent projects a part of his consciousness to see the percipient. I cite examples of this type because they are relevant to SRT practice when the practitioner needs to be aware of the spiritual health of the patient whilst in the patient's absence. In SRT practice this type of one-way interaction (often called 'scanning') is useful if there is suspected resistance on the part of the conscious awareness of the patient, or if an attached entity is avoiding detection (Baldwin, 1995, p. 365).

Where the above experiments on taste sensation were conducted with the knowledge and agreement between all participants, the experiments that I cite below were conducted without the knowledge or agreed participation of the recipient. Gurney's use of the term 'spontaneous' when he refers to these experiments (1886, p. 114) is misleading and contradictory to the fact that these were planned experiments. An experiment, by its very nature, is planned whereas something that is spontaneous is unplanned and unmediated. Perhaps a better term that would avoid confusion would be an experiment where the percipient was *uninformed* of the objective or protocol. In modern psychological research it is known that if participants are accurately informed of the experimental hypothesis it can,

under some circumstances, contaminate the findings due to participant's expectations and desire to comply with the experimenter.<sup>73</sup>

## **Intended Astral Projection**

To illustrate the principle of astral projection, the case cited below is taken from an edited version of Myers' *Human Personality* (Myers, 1903b, p. 204), where he reports that the experiment succeeded on the first trial. The agent was Miss 'Edith Maughan' (who later became Mrs. G. Rayleigh Vicars), and the account is taken from the *SPR Proceedings*, (vol x. P. 273).

One night in September 1888 I was lying awake in bed reading. I had recently been studying with interest various cases of astral projection in *Phantasms of the Living*, and I distinctly remember making up my mind that night to try whether I could manage to accomplish a projection of myself by force of will-concentration.

The room next to mine was occupied by a friend of mine [Miss Ethel Thompson], who was an old acquaintance, and not at all of an excitable turn of mind. I perfectly recall lying back on my pillow with a resolute but half-doubtful and amused determination to make Miss Thompson see me. The candle was burning on a chair at the side of my bed, and I heard only the ticking of a clock as I "willed" with all my might to appear to her. After a few minutes I felt dizzy and only half-conscious.

I don't know how long this state may have lasted, but I do remember emerging into a conscious state and thinking I had better leave off, as the strain had exhausted me.

I gave up and changed into an easy position, thinking I had failed and needlessly fatigued myself for an impossible fancy. I blew out my candle; at the instant I was startled by hearing an indistinct sound from the next room.

It was Miss Thompson's voice raised slightly, but I could not distinguish more than the actual sound, which was repeated, and then there was silence. Soon after, my clock struck two a.m., and I fell asleep.

Next morning I noticed that Miss Thompson looked rather tired at breakfast, but I asked no questions. Presently she said, "Had I gone into her room to frighten her during the night?" I said I had not left my room. She declared that I seemed to her to come in and bend over her and disappeared immediately thereafter. From what she said I concluded it must have been between one and two a.m. Her own account is in the possession of the Psychological Society. All I have to add is that I was in my ordinary state of health, and not at all excited, but merely bent on trying an experiment (Myers, 1903b, p. 204).

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<sup>73</sup> Zimbardo's controversial experiments were conducted to test Nazi war criminals' claims that they were 'following orders'. Participants were told that they had to conform to orders despite causing harm to others, when in reality no harm was caused to anyone during the experiments (Zimbardo, 2007).

The second example was first reported in the *SPR Journal*, (vol. VII. P. 99). This case is especially interesting in terms of being *reciprocal* as well as *experimental*. The main objective of the agent was to discover something of the recipient's condition, and the intention to manifest an apparition of his self was only secondary.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1887, I left my home in Lakewood to go to New York to spend a few days. My wife was not feeling well when I left, and after I had started I looked back and saw her standing in the door looking disconsolate and sad at my leaving. The picture haunted me all day, and at night, before I went to bed, I thought I would try to find out if possible her condition. I had undressed, and was sitting on the edge of the bed, when I covered my face with my hands and willed myself in Lakewood at home to see if I could see her. After a little, I seemed to be standing in her room before the bed, and saw her lying there looking much better. I felt satisfied she was better, and so spent the week more comfortably regarding her condition. On Saturday I went home. When she saw me she remarked, "I don't know whether I am glad to see you or not, for I thought something had happened to you. I saw you standing in front of the bed the night (about 8:30 or before 9) you left, as plain as could be, and I have been worrying myself about you ever since. I sent to the office and to the depot daily to get some message from you." After explaining my effort to find out her condition, everything became plain to her. She had seen me when I was trying to see her and find out her condition. I thought at the time I was going to see her and make her see me (Myers, 1903b, p. 205).

These early experiments show what appears to be the extraordinary ability of one person to *access* another from a distance, and this is precisely what SRT practitioners do when helping those patients or clients who may be troubled by spirit entities (Baldwin, 1995, p. 365). In their search for explanations for the presentation of how a phantasm can present itself to another person, and how that person (the percipient) can perceive it, Myers, Gurney and Podmore demonstrated that these are not extraordinary abilities at all, but something that ordinary people are capable of.

In their search for explanations regarding the presentation of phantasms (apparitions) of discarnate entities with these experiments, Myers began to identify two unknown variables: the agent's *capacity* to manifest to the percipient, and the percipient's *sensitivity* to receive. Myers continues to note:

It is a function of two unknown variables – the incarnate spirit's sensitivity and the discarnate spirit's capacity of self-manifestation. Our attempt, therefore, to study such intercourse may begin at either end of the communication – with the percipient or with the agent. We shall have to ask; how does the incarnate mind receive the message? And we shall have to ask also, how does the discarnate mind originate and convey it? (Myers, 1903b, p. 210).

The first of these questions may be answered by examining in greater detail two important concepts, namely the psychic sensitivity or vulnerability of the percipient, and the

emotional rapport between the agent and the percipient. The psychic sensitivity or vulnerability of the percipient is relevant to the probability of being influenced by negative spirit entities that would cause harm to a person,<sup>74</sup> and the second factor, that of sympathetic resonance, could be a prime factor in attracting entities with a similar *emotional vibration*.<sup>75</sup> The answer to the second question posed by Myers could simply be a matter of strength of volition and determination in the *intention* of the agent, as was suitably demonstrated in the above cited experiments.

It was Myers' and Gurney's intention to understand the psychological mechanisms that enabled persons and spirits to communicate with each other. However, before that considerable task could be attempted they first needed to verify that the visual manifestation of an apparition was due to a verifiable external source. In experiments such as those cited above, the originator of the automatism is known, and it can be ascertained that the will and intention (volition) of the agent was the causative factor. The experiments served their purpose in showing that the concentrated intention of a person can influence the sensations of another, even to the extent that they could present a vision of themselves, or what Myers and Gurney called a 'phantasm' (Gurney *et al.*, 1886). But what Myers and Gurney needed to prove was whether an external influence, such as a discarnate consciousness of a deceased person could achieve the same result. They needed a rigorous methodology to determine the veridical authenticity of the existence of a discarnate entity, or what they called 'Phantasms of the Dead' (Myers, 1903b, p. 211).

Where *telepathy* is the transmission of thoughts from one person to another through channels other than the recognised channels of the senses, *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) includes cases which seem at first sight to involve more than mere transference of thought. The use of the term 'Phantasms of the Living' by Gurney, Myers and Podmore, actually alludes to what we would normally call 'visual hallucinations' or what may alternatively be described as 'apparitions' (Gurney *et al.*, 1886, p. 2).

In Gurney's and Myers's studies they addressed two important issues. First, the reliability of the evidence, and second whether the hallucination and the crisis could have occurred simultaneously by chance. Using statistical analysis they concluded that these incidents occurred too frequently to be attributed to chance (Gurney *et al.*, 1886; Myers, 1903, p. 71). On the first issue of reliability of evidence, Myers identified three possible criteria:

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<sup>74</sup> Vulnerability is explored in Chapter 12 where I examine the relationship between pathology and spirit possession.

<sup>75</sup> Sympathetic resonance is explored in Chapter 10.

There remain three conditions which might establish a presumption that an apparition or other immediate manifestation of a dead person is something more than a mere subjective hallucination of the percipient's senses. Either (1) more persons than one might be independently affected by the phenomenon; or (2) the phantasm might convey information, afterwards discovered to be true, of something which the percipient himself had never known; or (3) the appearance might be that of a person whom the percipient himself had never seen, and of whose aspect he was ignorant, and yet his description of it might be sufficiently definite for identification (Myers, 1903b, p. 211).

Myers believed that it is necessary to examine both sides of a case, that of the receiver (recipient) and that of the sender (agent) of information or that person undergoing a crisis, including the state of consciousness of each and the emotional relationship between them. Myers particularly warned against the error of attributing too much importance to the person who sees the phantom, given that this person's account is the only one we can access in cases where the agent is deceased (Kelly, 2009, p. 110). However, in cases where both percipient and agent are still living, we have the opportunity to examine evidence from both perspectives, as evidenced in the examples above.

### ***Hallucinations in Relation to Time and Space***

Telepathic communication challenges those laws of physics pertaining to time and space, and one of Myers concerns was that his theoretical concepts - rather than contravene the known laws of physics - contributed to a broader naturalism. The spatial concept was therefore important to him.

The spatial concept arose in Chapter 3 of this thesis when I introduced the eye witness testimony of Peck and his colleagues in the case of the exorcism of 'Beccah'. I drew our attention to the reliability of eye witness testimony when it appears that more than one person experience the same visual anomaly. Now we are in a position to see that, for Myers, it is because collective cases suggest some kind of objective stimulus for the hallucination that they raise the perplexing problem of the relationship between psychic phenomena and their location in three-dimensional space (Myers, 1886, p. 302). In his early theorising on the phenomenon of apparitions appearing to more than one person, Myers proposed that subliminal elements of one person's mind may be drawn to a particular place, perhaps by some kind of psychic 'rapport' with one or more persons there (Myers, 1903, p. 1276). These subliminal elements, in some unknown way, modify an actual point in space, but not in a material way that is perceptible to the senses. His hypothesis was a *spatial* one without being a sensory one. Myers was attempting to find a more satisfactory theory than that which suggests apparitions are some kind of 'ghost' that

multiple persons will see. Alternatively, Gurney hypothesised that apparitions are hallucinations produced by a telepathic impression, with collective cases involving further telepathic transfer of the impression from the primary percipient to others in close proximity. According to Emily Kelly there is still no consensus on this theoretically important phenomenon (2009, p. 110).

Myers later developed his theory on the relationship between psychic events and space as a result of the evidence that his experiments with trance states uncovered. He believed that trance can be developed in two directions (Myers, 1903, p. 217). It may involve a possession, by either a part of the automatist's own subliminal mind, or the mind of another person, living or deceased; and it may involve some sort of excursion out of one's own body into a larger environment, which could in some cases lead to an experience of 'ecstasy' (Myers, 1903, p. 259). Although Myers used such spatial terms as 'enter' and 'go out', 'inside' and 'outside' he emphasised that the unknown processes behind these phenomena, and others such as clairvoyance, 'need not be spatial' (ibid, p.1991). Myers' theory that the mind (or a part of it) can dissociate from the body and go off on excursions supports the theory of soul-loss and shamanic journeying, as well as mystical experience.

### **Real or Imagined? – Veridical or Pathological?**

Myers argued that not all hallucinations are pathological, and more recently Bentall (1990) offers support for this in his assertion that several authors have questioned the inherent pathology of hallucinations. Bentall notes that in cross-cultural studies, hallucinations do not always indicate pathology, but rather are regarded as having positive value (Bentall, 2004, p. 356).

In keeping with Myers' assertion that sensory automatisms or hallucinations are not necessarily pathological, Kelly *et al* offer their own definition of hallucinations:

We define "hallucinations" as a perceptual experience in the absence of corresponding sensory input. Following Myers' approach, we propose that the word hallucination should be understood more broadly as a psychological process that can take non-pathological as well as pathological forms, depending on the circumstances in which the experiences occur. Unfortunately, the association of the word "hallucination" with pathology and delusion is so ingrained that Stevenson (1983) has suggested that we need a new word, "idiophany", to refer to non-pathological hallucinations. Until this or some other word becomes widely adopted, however, we will continue to use the word "hallucinations" to include the large number of experiences that go beyond sensory perception but that seem to have more in common with ordinary sensory experiences than with illusions or delusions (Kelly et al., 2007a, pp. 368-369).



I do not agree with Kelly or Stevenson (1983) above, on their assertion that the term 'hallucination' needs a new definition or new terminology. In agreement with their observations that the term hallucination has become so far ingrained to imply pathology, I believe that it would be futile to try to change the perceptions of its value within clinical psychology and the general public. I would suggest that the term *hallucination* be kept as an indication of pathology or the creative power of the imagination, but in order to distinguish pathology from veridical experience I would use the terms *visual manifestation* or *apparition* in place of visual hallucination, and I would use the term *hearing voices* in contrast to *auditory hallucination*. In agreement with Myers and William James, it is my contention that the task of psychology is to discern accurately and precisely what the subject is experiencing; that is to say, to determine whether the subject is experiencing either an auditory hallucination *or* hearing voices; either visual hallucination *or* seeing an apparition. Clearly our current lexicon is perfectly capable of enabling us to distinguish the difference. Myers' term *sensory automatism* encapsulates *all* varieties of hallucination and veridical sensory experience without any discernible sensory input, and it was his intention to distinguish the difference between autogenic and veridical sensory automatisms by use of his experiments and his three validation criteria.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter I have cited experiments that provide evidence for the transmission of taste from one person to another, where the influence of expectation and the power of suggestion were effectively bypassed. These experiments offer evidence that what the percipient is experiencing is *not* the result of hypnotic suggestion, but a genuine transmission of sense impression from one person to another. Additional experiments demonstrated how one person can project their consciousness to 'see' another person at a distance and on some occasions can actually present themselves as an apparition or vision to another person.

Gurney's classification of telepathic phenomena, when integrated into Myers' expanded naturalism provide a conceptual framework that acknowledges the ability of the human sensory apparatus within the central nervous system to receive and process visual and auditory information from external sources without the use of the ears, eyes or taste buds. All this strongly suggests that the brain, with its complex apparatus for processing information received from sensory organs and its ability to create images and impressions without sensory input, is also a receptor device for receiving information that is not

received through the recognised sensory organs. These findings have monumental implications for psychology, as William James remarked whenever he made references to the work of Myers (James, 1901-1903).

Conventional medicine does not recognise telepathy as a psychological phenomenon and neither does it recognise astral projection. It is therefore unable to accommodate mind-to-mind communication as a cause of mental or emotional distress and neither can it use mind-to-mind communication as a remedy. In comparison with SRT, conventional medicine is therefore restricted, and consequently less able either to diagnose or to treat spirit possession. However, if medical science were able to expand its conceptual framework in order to recognise spirit possession phenomena as a reality of human experience and treat it accordingly, then SRT principles and therapeutic techniques could be taught to medical students.

In the next chapter I build on Myers' research into how one person can influence the sensory perception of another, and how a person can project their consciousness or an apparition of themselves to another, by discussing how a person can influence the body, actions and behaviour of another. The mind-body problem, which continues to stretch the methodologies of modern science, is examined within the context of Myers' theory of 'motor automatisms'. Inspired by his observation of somnambulistic *automatic writing* and other physical phenomena that became manifest without conscious will, Myers tackled the problem of how an external entity could influence the physical actions and behaviour of an individual.

## CHAPTER 9

### Motor Automatism and the Mind-Body Connection

In the previous chapter, I showed that Myers' experiments were used to demonstrate how the mind of one person can influence the mind of another through mental and sense impressions. I cited examples from Myers' and Gurney's experiments where strong taste sensations were experienced between taster and percipient. It could be argued that these experiments demonstrate the transfer of *physical* sensations, and that a very fuzzy line may be drawn between what is a physical sensation and what is a purely mental impression. Where the line is drawn is not as important as the evidence that one person's mental *intention* can affect the sense impressions of another, and this creates an imperative that the mind/body problem needs to be addressed with closer scrutiny.

In this chapter I examine Myers' concept of 'motor automatism' that are experienced as a physical reality without any possibility of a false perception created by suggestion or an illusion. If it can be shown, scientifically, that the mind of an identified agent can affect the physical body, or the spontaneous actions of another person, then there remains the possibility that an unidentified discarnate mind can too.

'Motor automatism' are those impulses and actions that occur automatically without the conscious will (volition) of the subject. They can include physiological processes, such as changes in the autonomic nervous and endocrine systems, and they also include physical actions and behaviours, such as compulsions to act in non-characteristic ways. The varied phenomena of motor automatism represent invitations to investigate the mind-body problem, and by so doing, to follow a continuum from those theoretical concepts that are acceptable to modern medical science, through to those that are of interest to the parapsychology researcher, and eventually to possible solutions discovered through modern clinical hypnosis and high energy quantum physics.

#### Spontaneous Inhibition and Compulsion

It was Myers' opinion that some automatic responses in humans are possibly the results of possession by discarnate entities, and are therefore highly significant phenomena to observe (Myers, 1903b, p. 265). For Myers, the primary question to be answered was

whether the impulse to act originates within the automatist's own mind, 'or in some mind external to him?' (ibid, p. 267).

Myers gives examples of sudden unaccountable desires to be somewhere else with no accountable reason other than a 'dread or fear' (ibid, p. 268), of something terrible happening, and 'sudden arrests or incapacities of action' (ibid, p. 270).

One such example, published in *SPR Proceedings* (vol. ix. P. 33), is a case cited by Myers that illustrates the effect of the conscious desire of the agent, 'Elizabeth,' on the percipient 'Mrs. Hadselle' of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, to attend to her as her own sister lay dying. Mrs. Hadselle had boarded a train and was about to commence her journey when she had an inexplicable impulse to get off the train and change her ticket for a different destination, to where her friend Elizabeth lived, without knowing why. She arrived at her friend Elizabeth's house just one hour before Elizabeth's sister died. She was therefore there to comfort her friend in her grief (ibid, p. 268).

The central hypothesis to be tested is whether the impulse, or obsession, originates in the subject's own mind, from the wishes, desires or intention from another human being as illustrated in the above case of Mrs. Hadselle and Elizabeth, or from a discarnate entity. This is relevant to the wider debate insofar as the SRT practitioner needs to know the source of the stimulus in order to be able to discern whether a person is being influenced by an external entity or whether the person's own intuition or precognitive abilities are at work. One of the most effective ways for Myers to test the hypothesis was to examine the validity of messages conveyed through the medium of automatic writing (Myers, 1903b, p. 277).

## **Automatic Writing**

Myers used somnambulists who conveyed messages through automatic writing, either by using paper and pencil or by use of the *planchette*, which is a device similar to the Ouija board where the *control* (that is the controlling spirit influence), spells out the message.

Myers comments on an experiment where the volition of the medium was put to the test:

An interesting experiment was tried, of writing with two planchettes, "F" having one in each hand. I suggested this in order to elucidate the connection between left-handed writing and "mirror-writing," and fully expected that the two hands would write the same communications. To my astonishment, however, the communications, though written simultaneously, were different and proceeded from different "spirits" (Myers, 1903b, p. 286).

Myers concluded that each hand was being controlled by a different spirit, considering that for a person to be able to manipulate two planchettes independently of each other and write two completely different messages would take a great deal of practice. The answer to the second question lay in the *content* of the messages received. If the information received could not possibly be known before hand by the automatist, and could be verified by additional external means then it was evidence of information from an external source.

## **The Problem of Mind over Body**

The consensus of nearly all contemporary scientists and philosophers is that all aspects of mind and consciousness are by-products of an evolving nervous system. This widespread presumption is based on the observations, both scientific and every-day, that the evolution of mind is correlated with the evolution of the nervous system and that changes in / or damage to the brain result in changes or even dissolution of consciousness. It is easy to forget, however, that correlation does not mean causation. The assumption that the correlation implies a unilateral dependence of consciousness on the brain has been exacerbated and entrenched because observations of the mind-brain relationship have been limited primarily to situations in which a change on the side of the brain is the independent variable, and changes on the side of behaviour is the dependent variable. What happens when we expand our observations to phenomena in which a change in mental state clearly seems to be the initiating cause, and a change in physiological or physical state is the result? In brief, relevant to a problem that has long been neglected by psychology, is the problem of *volition* or the exercise of the *will* over the body (Kelly, 2009, pp. 117-118). To put it another way – what power does the mind have over the body? More to the point of my thesis is: ‘What power does one mind have over another’s body?’

Frederic Myers identified a wide variety of phenomena that had to be addressed, because they challenged the prevailing scientific model of epiphenomenology. Some of these phenomena that were resisted or denied by 19th century scientists, because they resisted a ready physiological explanation, are now being more fully explored by mainstream scientific and medical thinking. This has happened because these phenomena continue to be observed, and because scientists have been able to identify neurobiological processes that seem to bring them within the framework of the prevailing physiological model. But the question remains - how complete is this physiological model? How does it explain the enormous variety of phenomena where a mental state has triggered a physiological

reaction? Moreover, many phenomena identified by Myers remain outside of mainstream scientific and medical thinking, and are still ignored, derided or denied even though they continue to be observed, and in some instances have continued to increase in number and quality (Kelly, 2009, p. 118).

In keeping with Myers' concept that all phenomena are on a continuum, there is a continuum of phenomena that are suggestive of mental causation on physiological processes. These phenomena range from those that are increasingly accepted by mainstream science and may appear to be explainable by physiological mechanisms and there are those that continue to be dismissed by most scientists as outside the explanatory framework of science.

There is an extraordinarily wide range of documented phenomena of psychophysiological influence which seems to originate in, or to depend upon a person's beliefs or expectations however those beliefs or expectations happen to be generated. In addition to these expectation or belief driven phenomena, the more unusual or extreme they may be - so the more they challenge conventional physiological models. The first group of documented phenomena that appear to be belief or expectation driven, and challenge the physiological model of causality, are those phenomena that may be classified under the labels of faith healing, spiritual healing and Christian Science mind-cure (Kelly, 2009, p. 119). These cures can all be grouped together with 'miracle cures', such as those experienced by pilgrims to sacred sites such as Lourdes, and such cures could all be explained away as placebo. In this chapter I shall be addressing the scientific research that challenges the religious belief or 'faith' driven hypothesis. The science of *psychoneuroimmunology* (PNI) is becoming increasingly accepted by mainstream science, and now provides a solid foundation for the notion that the mind *does* affect the body.

### ***Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI)***

Lipowsky (1986) described modern psychosomatic medicine as emerging in the early decades of the twentieth century as a reaction against biological reductionism in medicine. Psychosomatic medicine focussed around two concepts: firstly 'psychogenesis', the notion that psychological factors can cause and influence physical disease, and 'holism', the notion that mind and body are an indivisible unity.

Resistance to the idea that mental factors can influence physical states has primarily been rooted in the lack of any theory to explain the interaction, but the most important impetus

to the re-admittance of the idea that mental factors influence the body has come from the developing field of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) which has its roots in the work of Walter Cannon (1929) and Hans Selye (1956), who found that the body maintains its proper state of functioning through a processes called 'homeostasis' (maintaining balance). In homeostasis, stress is an important factor in upsetting the normal balance, because by reflecting the body's reaction to environmental changes, it has widespread biochemical and neurophysiological effects (Kelly, 2009, p. 122).

The scientific literature on PNI is vast, and even the greatest sceptic must now acknowledge that a wealth of evidence exists to prove in the most scientific terms that the functions of the mind *do* influence the health of the body. Thus Sternberg acknowledges the importance of this mind-body connection:

By understanding these mind-body connections in modern terms, in the language of molecules and nerve pathways, electrical impulses and hormonal responses, scientists can finally accept that such effects are real (Sternberg, 2001, p. 7).

Unfortunately there comes a point where known PNI connections cannot provide an adequate explanation, and that point is in the physical manifestation of wounds without any obvious physical cause.

### ***Stigmata***

Moving along the continuum of psychophysiological phenomena from PNI, and among the most well-known and hotly debated phenomena of psychophysiological influence, are cases of stigmata, in which a person develops marks, and even bleeding, corresponding to the sites of the wounds that Christ is thought to have suffered at his crucifixion. Hundreds of cases have been reported from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, right up to the present time. Most of the reported cases, but not all, have occurred in young, single females, usually Catholic and highly religious (Thurston, 1922). The marks are usually on the hands and the soles of the feet, corresponding to the sites where nails were thought to have pinned Christ to the cross. Another common site is the side of the body corresponding to a spear wound. They frequently appear when the stigmatic is in some kind of altered state or trance. However severe the nature of the wounds and bleeding appear to be, no sepsis or inflammation occurs and the wounds rapidly disappear, leaving little or no marks until the next recurrence (Thurston, 1952).

Myers suggested that people usually react to reports of stigmata with one of two polarised views: either as fraud or miracle (1903, p. 492). Although fraudulent cases have been

reported, many others have been studied, and have shown symptoms of hysteria (Thurston, 1952, p. 124), causing the dichotomy of opinion to shift to pathology or miracle. For many years hysteria was held to be the explanation for stigmata (Kelly, 2007, p. 155). In recent years, however, scientists have looked to psychophysiology for explanations, particularly in the wake of our increasing awareness of the relationship between emotions and the immune system.

Certain psychological characteristics seem conducive as precursors to stigmata, including symptoms of hysteria (Thurston, 1952, p. 122). But the essential factor does not seem to be pathology *per se*, but rather a trait that may manifest as suggestibility, absorption or intense concentration, a capacity for vivid imagery, hypnotisability or dissociation (Murphy, 1992, p. 500). It has been observed that stigmata often occur when the person is in some kind of altered state of consciousness, such a religious ecstasy or trance (Margnelli, 1999, pp. 466-467).

Another important factor is the intense emotion accompanying stigmata. The fundamental question that remains unanswered for science is how can emotional experience activate specific psychophysiological mechanisms?' (Kelly, 2007, p. 161). Myers attempted to go beyond the usual polarised positions of pathology or miracle and find a more comprehensive explanation, and he examined experimental evidence to find a solution to the dichotomous explanations. His conclusion was that, like many other anomalous phenomena that remained unexplained by 19<sup>th</sup> century science, stigmata fell into the same continuum that could be explained by experimentation with hypnosis:

This phenomenon, which was long treated by both savants and devotees as though it must be either fraudulent or miraculous, is now found (like a good many other phenomena previously deemed subject to that dilemma) to enter readily within the widening circuit of natural law (Myers, 1903b, p. 138).

### ***Experiments with Stigmata***

Experiments with stigmata involve the intention of the experimenter to inflict physical phenomena onto the subject using the power of direct suggestion, but avoiding any prior expectation of the nature of the experiment on the part of the subject:

The delicate responsiveness of the vasomotor system has given rise to some curious spontaneous phenomena in the form of stigmatisation, and has suggested some experiments, which are probably as yet in their infancy. The main point of interest is at this point spontaneous self-suggestion, and subsequently suggestion from without, having made a kind of first attempt at the modification of the human organism in what may be called 'fancy directions' (Myers, 1903b, p. 138).



In Myers' view stigmatisation is a form of suggested 'vesication' (a form of blisters) (Myers, 2003, p.31), with the quasi burns and real blisters which obediently appear in any place or pattern that is ordered by a direct suggestion (ibid, p.31). Three cases of the production of cruciform marks by hypnosis reported by Dr. H.M. Biggs of Lima appeared in the *SPR Journal*, vol 3, p. 100, and Myers cites one of them below. This case is important because it is representative of a method whereby the hypnotist did not give the subject any indication of his specific intention prior to hypnotising her, using the Mesmeric method of magnetic passes:

Without her knowing what I intended to do, I tried magnetism; she fell into a deep magnetic sleep within minutes (Myers, 1903b, p. 139). You will have a red cross appear on your chest, only on every Friday. ... In my vest pocket I had a cross of rock crystal. I opened the top button of her dress and placed the cross on the upper part of the manubrium, a point she could not see unless by the aid of a looking glass, saying to her, "This is the spot where the cross will appear." ... When Friday came I unbuttoned the top part of her dress, and there, to my complete and utter astonishment, was a pink cross, exactly over the place where I had put the one of crystal. It appeared every Friday and was invisible on all other days (Myers, 1903b, pp. 139-140).

Having evidence that physiological phenomena that are commensurate with the phenomena of stigmata can be induced in a hypnotised subject by suggestion from a hypnotist offers the possibility that similar phenomena can be imposed onto a subject by another without their knowledge from a distance. Myers used the phenomenon of stigmata in his authoritative case for experimental hypnosis and went on to cite cases of hypnosis at a distance where it was proven that an outside agency that may be unknown to the percipient could be causing the reported phenomena to occur.<sup>76</sup>

For contemporary science, the search for an adequate theoretical model to explain hysterical symptoms has been hampered by the fear of having to return to an outmoded dualism. In order to avoid this problem, modern scientists have called for a reconceptualization of the phenomenon that offers instead a more embracing concept that integrates rather than separates the organic and the psychological (Kelly, 2007, p. 167). In Emily Kelly's view such holism brings us no closer to a real understanding of psychophysiological phenomena, but leads to such suppositions as; a hysteric's symptoms correspond to his / her own ideas about what his / her own symptoms should look like. According to Kelly, what is needed is a holism that is dualistic or even pluralistic to the

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<sup>76</sup> I have cited Myers' cases of hypnosis at a distance in Chapter 7, *Hypnosis as Experimental Method*.

extent that Myers' observations and experiments with motor automatisms can be accommodated into a more complete naturalism (ibid, p.167).

In the previous chapter we have seen that one person's taste sensations can be transmitted, telepathically to a hypnotised subject, whilst bypassing any prospect that expectation or suggestion has any influence. This confirms Myers' theory that suggestion is not the complete answer to hypnotic phenomena. It further reinforces the theory of telepathy as a spiritual law, and it supports the theory that the mind of one person can influence the perceptual senses of another.

In this chapter we have seen that Myers' own observations of automatic writing and his study of detailed accounts of spontaneous behavioural impulses support the hypothesis that external entities have the power to influence the *actions* of persons from a distance. Further experiments with stigmata demonstrate how suggestions implanted in the mind can cause physical reactions in the body. Modern research in the field of psychoneuroimmunology confirms the mind-body connection and this is beginning to open new avenues for research in this difficult area. As we move further along the continuum of mind-body connection phenomena, the ability of modern science to accommodate them becomes more problematic, and this strongly suggests that a broader naturalism is called for to accommodate them. Against the resistance of science to adopt a return to dualism Myers' findings were pushing at the boundaries of scientific epistemology. The same resistance is encountered today as science still grapples with these phenomena.

Myers urges us to pause and consider the evidence that leads us to consider the possibility that discarnate minds can possess the living, and on this he writes:

The examination of "possession" is no longer to us, as to the ordinary civilized enquirer, a merely antiquarian or anthropological research into forms of superstition lying wholly apart from any valid or systematic thought. On the contrary, it is an inquiry directly growing out of previous evidence; directly needed for the full comprehension of known facts as well as for the discovery of facts unknown. We are now aware that we are obliged to seek for certain definite phenomena in the spiritual world in order to explain certain definite phenomena of the world of matter (Myers, 1903b, pp. 343-344).

Myers' own scientific investigations into *motor automatisms* led him to conclude that spirit possession is a reality of human experience. It now leaves us to review the evidence for a spirit world under the new microscope of quantum theory and present the case for possession from more recent research in Part III.

## **PART III**

### **MYERS' CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND MODERN SCIENCE**

Myers' conceptual framework was developed over one hundred years ago at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the purpose of this third and final section is to reconcile his framework with modern scientific research in those areas that I have begun to explore that are relevant to the phenomenon of spirit possession in modern times. I use the term *relevant* because research into spirit possession is not conducted by modern scientists, with the exception of psychiatrists in Brazil (Bragdon, 2012). However, it is my contention that all modern research into psi phenomena, esoteric healing practices, and the fundamental nature of consciousness are all relevant areas of enquiry to the concept of spirit possession. This third section examines the relationship between the above mentioned concepts with some of the research findings in the field of quantum mechanics.

In Chapter 10 I take a closer look at Myers' investigations into Mesmer's theory of 'animal magnetism' and how it relates to his theory of 'psychological rapport'. This examination is conducted in conjunction with quantum theory, which gives a completely new perspective on what Myers envisaged, thereby bringing his theories into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Chapter 11 examines recent research findings into the concepts of out-of-body (OBE) and near-death experiences (NDE), together with other evidence to support Myers' theory that consciousness survives the death of the body.

Chapter 12 revisits the relationship between mental health and spirit possession in light of the evidence from contemporary scientific research that supports Myers own findings.

## CHAPTER 10

# Magnetic Rapport, Sympathetic Resonance, Intention, and the Zero-Point Field

### The Physics Enigma of Animal Magnetism

Several references have been made in this thesis to the phenomenon of ‘magnetic sleep’ and its connection with ‘silent had passes’, which is a method of inducing the magnetic sleep by passing the hands over the subject’s face and body without making contact (Myers, 1903, p. 24). This was the common method of induction practised by magnetisers until voiced suggestions became the method espoused by Liebeault and Bernheim of the Nancy School (Janet, 1976, p. 172). In my introduction, on pages 22-25, magnetic sleep was mentioned in relation to levels of consciousness. It was noted in Chapter 7, on page 162, that the absence of a theory to explain Mesmer’s animal magnetism was one of the principle factors that led Myers to develop his model of mind. On page 196, in Chapter 9, experiments with stigmata were conducted with ‘magnetism’ being the trance induction method employed.

In this chapter I explore the nature of animal magnetism as a possible form of physical energy in the healing process. The ‘laying on of hands’ is a practice that is mentioned in the *Bible*: ‘And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying’ (Acts 19: 4-6). It is an integral act in the Catholic rite of exorcism (Martin, 1976, p.464) and is used by many Anglican clerics in the treatment of their parishioners who present themselves for healing. The laying on of hands is applied by Spiritists in Brazilian hospitals (Bragdon, 2012, p.85). It is my contention that these practices are closely connected with the ‘mesmeric’ method of trance induction.<sup>77</sup> This is important to SRT practice, because it provides a complementary technique for rebalancing energy within the individual, with a view to inducing an altered state of consciousness to facilitate the release of spirits that may be detrimentally interacting with the subject.

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<sup>77</sup> It may be hypothesised that Mesmeric hand passes and the laying on of hands are related to Reiki and other so-called ‘energy’ healing systems.

Myers insisted that 'mesmerism' had a very important contribution to make to psychology, and he writes:

The history of the first sporadic attempts at this form of experiment in the early days of mesmerism, ..., must, I think, be regarded as one of the most important chapters in psychology (Myers, 1903b, p. 168).

It is unfortunate that Myers' sentiment regarding the potential value of Mesmerism has not been followed by subsequent researchers. Both clinical experience and more recent experimental research into hypnosis has shown that some kind of psychological *rapport* is a necessary prerequisite to the successful induction of hypnosis (Kroger, 1977, p. 164; Waxman, 1989, p. 130), but the mechanisms of mesmeric passes and the nature of the force known as 'animal magnetism' have been ignored by modern hypnosis researchers. Myers hypothesised that Mesmer's animal magnetism was not caused by a physical force, as Mesmer believed, but was psychological in nature (Myers, 1903, p. 1027). I propose that Mesmer was correct in his theory that the influence is physical, but incorrect in the nature of the magnetic force.

Following the observations of the Marquis de Puységur, on the characteristics of magnetic sleep (1785), certain phenomena, which included, thought reading and mental commands, medical and general clairvoyance, precognition, inducing the magnetic trance state from a distance, and ecstasy were so commonly reported during the first eighty years of the practice of animal magnetism that they were taken for granted (Crabtree, 1985, p. 172).

Another phenomenon that was accepted without question was the ability of some somnambulists to discern the presence of the magnetic fluid visually. Tardy de Montravel's cited case of 'Mile N' was the first in a long line of somnambulists to claim she could see the magnetic fluid (ibid, p.172) and Joseph Deleuze reported that many could see and sense magnetic emanations (Deleuze, 1813, p. 1:163). The German experimenter Meyer noted that the fluid was most often seen radiating from the fingertips and toes of healers (Meyer, 1839, p. 86).

During the 1830s, John Wilson, a physician at the Middlesex Hospital, undertook research to discover whether animal magnetism was a physical fact. He began with his own patients and found the therapeutic outcomes of magnetism to be beneficial, but he wanted to arrive at a conclusion as to its nature through a method that he thought would provide absolute proof that magnetism was physical and not the result of any expectation of the

patient or suggestion from the magnetiser (1839). Wilson conducted a systematic study of the effects of magnetism on a variety of animals, including cats, ducks, geese, fish, dogs, chickens, turkeys, horses, macaws, pigs, calves, leopards, elephants and lions (Crabtree, 1993, p. 149). Wilson's magnetic passes produced a deep sleep from which the animal could often only be aroused with difficulty. Additional phenomena often included catalepsy, convulsive movements, abnormal activity, or non-typical reactions such as repeated yawning or sweating (ibid, p.149). Wilson was not the first to conduct experiments on magnetism with animals. The Marquis de Puységur's brother treated a dog in 1784, and in the same year magnetisers in Lyon treated a horse (ibid, p.149).<sup>78</sup> Although Wilson's results were striking, his work was generally ignored and no one has ever attempted to replicate his experiments.

In their search for answers to the animal magnetism enigma, theorists considered the existence of invisible sources of energy in the environment. The discovery of radiation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the concept of *ether* had led many scientists to postulate a homogeneous, frictionless, non-material substance filling what we perceive as 'empty' space and serving as the transmitting medium for light and electromagnetic forces. Although 20<sup>th</sup> century physics abandoned the concept of ether it nonetheless added significant support for the larger idea behind the concept – and the one that was of special interest to Myers (2003, p.110).

In parallel with advances in the physical sciences and the discoveries of unseen forces such as electromagnetism, radio waves, microwaves, etc., psychological interest in the unseen physical forces that influence the relationships between human beings has waned, creating a dearth of experimentation in this area that has lasted for more than a hundred years since the experiments with animals by Wilson, cited above, and the experiments of Myers under his theories of *motor automatism*, (which were discussed in Chapter 9). Thus, human beings are regarded by mainstream science as independent, autonomous and energetically disconnected from their material environment and from each other. Mesmer's concept of animal magnetism has thus been forgotten and discarded from contemporary theories of psychology and psychological healing.

Although there is discontinuity between Myers' research, modern psi research, and the experiments conducted with animals by Wilson, cited above, some contemporary

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<sup>78</sup> It is not known what these animals were treated for, only that they must have been sick in some way.

researchers have been interested in whether there is an unseen energy that connects the healer with those that are healed. In the following section I examine some of those experiments that were used to test this hypothesis. This line of enquiry was initiated in experiments with plants by biologist Bernard Grad, of McGill University in Montreal.

### ***Magnetism and Water***

During the 1960's, Grad was interested in determining whether psychic healers actually transmit energy to patients (1965). He began by using plants, which he made ill by soaking them in salty water, which retards growth. He divided seeds into two groups: one soaked in salt water that had been exposed to the laying-on of hands of a healer and the other that was soaked in salt water that had not been exposed to the healer. The experiment showed that the seeds soaked in the water exposed to the healer grew much taller and healthier than those that were soaked in water that was not exposed to the healer. In later experiments, Grad chemically analysed the water by infrared spectroscopy and discovered that the water treated by the healer had minor shifts in its molecular structure and decreased hydrogen bonding between the molecules: similar effects to that which happen when water is exposed to magnets. These experiments signify that Mesmer was right: that there is a healing energy similar to magnetism. Unfortunately for Mesmer, he did not have the luxury of the technological advances in science that provide infrared spectroscopy.

Grad moved on to mice, which had been given skin wounds in the laboratory. After controlling for a number of factors, even the effect of warm hands, he found that the skin of his test mice healed far more quickly when healers treated them (1979, p. 199). He also showed that healers could reduce the growth of cancerous tumours in laboratory animals, and those animals with tumours which were not treated by the healer died more quickly (ibid, p.199). Other scientific studies have shown that people can influence the growth of yeast (Haraldsson & Thorsteinsson, 1972), fungi (Barry, 1968), and even isolated cancer cells (Snel, 1980).

The application of quantum theory has the potential to explain the results obtained by the research cited above, and more specifically, Myers' findings in his experiments with automatism and the implication that discarnate entities influence the living. But first we need a basic introduction to some of the concepts that differentiate quantum theory from classical Newtonian physics.

## The Basic Tenets of Quantum Mechanics

I am not an atomic physicist, and quantum mechanics is far too complex a subject for me to explore in depth.<sup>79</sup> However, I believe that I have been able to extract from published research those concepts that can be applied in relation to Myers' theories, and to the results obtained from contemporary research into psi phenomena. Furthermore, the concepts being discovered in the field of sub-atomic particle physics open new avenues of enquiry that may help us to understand the relationship between an alternate reality and its relationship with our physical world (Jahn & Dunne, 1986; Samanta-Laughton, 2006; Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2007; Radin, 2006, p.7).

The first of these concepts is *non-locality* (Bohm, 1980), which refers to the ability of a quantum entity, such as an individual electron or proton, to influence another quantum particle instantaneously over any distance despite there being no exchange of energy or force. Non-locality suggests that quantum particles, once in contact, retain a connection even when separated, so that the actions of one will always influence the other, no matter how far they may be separated in three-dimensional space. Albert Einstein disparaged this 'spooky action at a distance' concept, and it was one of the major reasons why he initially distrusted quantum theory (Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2007, p. 6). However, non-locality has been verified by a number of scientists since it was first proven by experiments conducted by Alain Aspect in Paris (1981).

Non-locality shattered the foundations of classical Newtonian physics (Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2007, p. 53). Matter could no longer be considered separate, and actions did not need an observable cause across an observable space (ibid, p.189). Einstein's axiom that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light was challenged by non-locality (Radin, 2006, p. 221). In quantum reality, sub-atomic particles had no need to travel at all if they were in two places at the same time. In a purely classical scientific sense Einstein was right, but the discovery of non-locality demanded a physicalist re-think at a fundamental level. Sub-atomic particles had no meaning in isolation but could only be understood in their *relationships*. The universe, at its most fundamental, was a complex web of interdependent *relationships*, forever indivisible (ibid, p.221). I have italicised *relationships* in order to reinforce the importance of an understanding of relationships in all aspects of psychology,

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<sup>79</sup> Rosenblum and Kuttner (2007) provide an excellent introduction to the relationship between quantum theory and consciousness for the non-technical reader.



and this is fundamental to William James' scientific approach in radical empiricism (James, 1912).

The second concept concerns the relationship between matter and empty space. Einstein believed that space was a true void until he developed his general theory of relativity, reduced to his famous equation  $E = MC^2$ , that shows how energy relates to mass (1921) and showed how space was not a vacuum, but a plenum of activity. Since Einstein's general theory of relativity, it has been discovered that all elementary (sub-atomic) particles interact with each other by exchanging energy through other quantum particles, which are believed to appear out of nowhere, combining and annihilating each other in less than an instant, causing fluctuations in energy without any apparent cause (Puthof, 1990, p. 52).

The third concept is that of *coherence* and *wave resonance*. Fritz Albert Popp, a theoretical biophysicist from the University of Marburg in Germany, experimented with light in biological systems. He discovered that some chemical substances can cause cancer by absorbing UV light and changing its frequency. These carcinogens reacted to light only at the specific frequency of 380 nanometres.<sup>80</sup> It has been established from biological experiments that if you can blast a cell with UV light so that 99% of the cell is destroyed, including its DNA, you can almost entirely repair the damage in a single day just by illuminating it with the same wavelength of a very weak intensity. This process is known as *photo-repair* (Popp, 2000, p. 507). Popp was surprised to learn that photo-repair works at precisely 380 nanometres wavelength. He concluded that a cancerous compound causes cancer by blocking the light and scrambling it, thereby inhibiting the photo-repair self-healing process.

Popp, and his research student Bernhard Ruth, built a machine called a *photomultiplier* that could measure light in biological systems by counting it photon by photon. They found that photons in living systems had more *coherence* than anything they had ever seen in non-living systems. In quantum physics, *quantum coherence* means that subatomic particles are able to *cooperate*. These subatomic waves or particles not only seem to be aware of each other, but are also interlinked by bands of common electromagnetic field, so that they can communicate synchronistically together (ibid, p.507). They are like a multitude of tuning forks that all begin to resonate together. As the waves get into phase, or synchronicity, they begin to act like one giant wave and one giant subatomic particle. Something that is

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<sup>80</sup> One nanometre is one billionth of a metre, and is used as a unit of measure in wavelengths at super-microscopic levels.

done to one of them will affect all the others. This effect is known as *wave resonance*. Popp was witnessing the highest level of quantum order, or coherence, possible in a living system. Popp concluded that health was a state of perfect subatomic communication, and ill health was a state where this subatomic communication breaks down. We are ill when our waves are out of synchronicity. Popp also came to realise that light emissions from *wave resonance* had a purpose outside the body. Light was not simply being used to communicate inside the body, but between living things, and he began to postulate that this could be the mechanisms that attracted like to like, or how schools of fish and flocks of birds create perfect and instantaneous coordination. A corollary of this is that two healthy beings are engaged in photon exchange. For humans this means that if we could take in the photons of other living things, we might also be able to use the information from them to correct our own Light<sup>81</sup> if it went wrong (McTaggart, 2008, p. 55).

In summary, Popp's research gives an avenue of enquiry to investigate several mysteries concerning the health of individuals and how healers and their patients communicate with each other at the quantum level. Quantum wave resonance and coherence could be a foundation for observations and theories with particular regard to animal magnetism in the physiological sphere, intention (volition) in the mental sphere, and sympathetic resonance in the emotional sphere.

Zero Point Field theory is one of the first attempts to synthesise the disparate research conducted by each independent group of scientists into a cohesive whole. In the process, it also provides a scientific validation of areas that have been the domain of religion, mysticism, alternative medicine or New-Age spirituality (McTaggart, 2008, p. xxii).

## **Quantum Theory and the Mystical Connection**

The pioneers of quantum physics, Erwin Schrodinger, Werner Heisenberg, Niels Bohr and Wolfgang Pauli had some inkling of the metaphysical dimension that scientific enquiry was leading into. If an electron could be everywhere at once then it implied something very profound about the nature of the world at large. They turned their attention to the classical texts of religion and spiritual philosophy. Pauli examined psychoanalysis, archetypes (Miller, 2009), and the Kabala (Gustafson, 2004). Bohr turned to the *Tao te Ching* (Bohr, 1958, p. 39), Schrodinger to Hindu philosophy (Melgar, 1988, p. 54), and Heisenberg to the

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<sup>81</sup> The term 'Light' (with a capital L) is commonly used by healers to signify the healing power of the divine. A journal entitled, *Light*, is dedicated to matters of esoteric healing. See Powell (2006).

Platonic theory of ancient Greece (Heisenberg, 1989). But there was more practical work to be done. Bohr and his colleagues had conducted experiments in the science lab with non-living sub-atomic particles (Bohr & Wheeler, 1939). From that point onwards, a new breed of scientist took on the task of experimentation with living systems, which has led to research that I previously referred to as '*psi*' (Thouless & Wieser 1947).

### ***The Mystical Connection and psi Phenomena***

Ed Mitchell, an astronaut on the Apollo 14 moon landing, had a profound mystical experience as he looked upon the earth from space. During his moon flight, Mitchell participated in J.B. Rhine's psi experiments in telepathy at Duke University with startlingly accurate results (Radin, 2006, p. 76). Mitchell's experiments with Rhine add support for Myers concept of telepathy, on the grounds that the results were beyond the probability of chance.

Mitchell's experiences of a profound mystical nature and the outcome of his participation in the psi experiment prompted him to initiate the founding of the Institute of Noetic Sciences in California. Dean Radin, Director of the Institute, has compiled the findings of research conducted at the Institute, together with the findings of other scientific institutions around the world that have investigated psi phenomena (Radin, 1997; Radin, 2006). All of these findings support Mesmer's contention that there is a universal energy that connects all things, planets and people (Mesmer, 1766), and Myers' contention that through the greater Subliminal Self, interactions between people are telepathic and interconnected (Myers, 1903, p. 26).

Hal Puthoff, a laser physicist, realised that the concept of the *Zero Point Field* was nothing less than a unifying concept of the universe, which showed that everything was in some sort of connection and balance with the rest of the cosmos (Puthof, 1990). Puthoff postulated that the universe's very currency might be *learned information* (ibid, p.53), as imprinted on this fluid, mutable field of information. If the Zero Point Field demonstrated that the real currency of the universe, the very reason for its stability, is an exchange of energy, and if we are all connected through the *Field*, then it might just be possible to tap into this vast reservoir of energy and extract information from it (McTaggart, 2008, p. 36). Puthoff's conceptualisation of a universal currency of information gives Myers' observations that somnambulists can access information from beyond the field of everyday conscious awareness the credibility that it originally deserved. Further support for this

hypothesis is presented by Erwin Laszlo in the form of the *Akashic Field* (Laszlo, 2009), which is purported to be a universal record of all that has ever happened in conscious thought. According to Stanislav Grof:

An Akashic experience comes in many sizes, forms, and flavours, to all kinds of people, and all its varieties convey information on the real world – the world beyond the brain and the body (Grof, 2009, p. 1).

For an understanding of Laszlo's concept, Grof, a psychiatrist with more than fifty years of experience in research of non-ordinary states of consciousness, offers this statement:

Laszlo's Akashic field is an excellent model for the historical aspect of Jung's collective unconscious (Jung, 1959). However, Jung's collective unconscious also encompasses another domain, which is radically different from the former – the archetypal realm with its mythological beings and abodes of the Beyond. And yet, in holotropic altered states, visits to archetypal regions and encounters with archetypal figures often appear on the same continuum and in various combinations with experiences reflecting phenomena from the material world. This suggests that, in some unexplained way, traces of the archetypal world are part of the Akashic field, and the Akashic field also mediates experiential access to this domain (Grof, 2009, p. 211).

In the above statement, Grof adds support for Myers' concept of the continuum of human experience in an expanded naturalism. He also supports Myers' contention (although not explicitly with reference to Myers) that access to other realms, is facilitated through altered states of consciousness. Jung's 'active imagination' and access to archetypes that exist in symbolic form within a 'collective unconscious' help to bring all of these concepts together in a conceptual framework that is in keeping with Myers' theories. It is apparent that the theorists cited above are arriving at the same conclusions that Myers postulated, despite the discontinuity between Myers' research and that of modern thinkers.

A similar concept to that of the Akashic record is proposed by Karl Pribram, a neurosurgeon, who presented his notion of the 'holotropic brain' (Pribram, 1991). Pribram proposed that when we observed the world, we do so on a much deeper level than the nuts and bolts of the world 'out there'. Pribram postulates that our brain primarily talks to itself and to the rest of the body not with words or images, or even with chemical impulses, but in the language of 'wave interference': the language of phase, amplitude and frequency - what he called the *spectral domain*. In Pribram's theory we perceive an object by *resonating* with it, getting in sync with it. To know the world is to be on its wavelength – literally. Applied to Mesmer's *animal magnetism*, Myers' *community of sensation*, the more

modern hypnotic recognition of *rapport*, and the SRT observation of *sympathetic resonance* (which I discuss below), Pribram's holotropic brain, provides a mind-body link in the form of 'energy frequency synchronistic resonance'. This theory can contribute to an understanding of how a telepathic impression can cause the brain to accept anything that is suggested to it, by acknowledging that thoughts can be imprinted on the brain's receptor mechanisms by energy resonance. Recent research postulates that the brain's receptor 'antenna' is the pineal gland (Landoli, 2012, p.238).

Theoretically, the psi field, or Akashic field, is a sub-quantum field in which everything that has ever happened remains permanently holographically recorded (Laszlo, 2009). These theories lend support to Myers' concept of an expanded naturalism and help to explain his observations of spiritualist mediums' abilities to access information from beyond conscious awareness by way of entering into an altered state of consciousness.

In this chapter so far, I have introduced modern theories on the transfer of physical energy and information through ideas that are emerging from quantum theory. In the section that follows, I take a closer look at the concept of *emotional* energy transfer between living systems, which, through a series of historical events, brings us to the subject of 'remote viewing' which, I contend, is closely associated with Myers' and Gurney's experiments with phantasms of the living (1886).

## **Emotional Sympathetic Resonance**

Following Grad's successful experiment with the effect of healers on plants growing in salt water (Grad, 1979) cited above, he hypothesised that negative feelings might have a corresponding negative effect on the growth of plants. Grad had several psychiatric patients hold containers of ordinary water, which were to be used to sprout seeds. One man, being treated for clinical depression, was noticeably more depressed than the others. Later, when Grad tried to sprout seeds using water from the depressed patients, the water that had been held by the more depressed man actually suppressed growth (Grad, 1965). Grad's experiment with negative emotions provides a clear insight into why experiments that do not account for the emotions of the participants and the experimenter are subject to a serious methodological error. Furthermore, and far more importantly, Grad's findings provide support for the hypothesis that the synchronicity of emotional energy frequency between a subject and another agency, such as a negative spirit form, is one of the ways in

which a person with a volatile negative emotional energy will attract destructive spirit entities. It has been suggested by psychiatrist Andrew Powell (2006), that people with a negative view of the world, and those who are unable to take control of powerful negative emotions, will attract negative spirit attachments. This synchronicity of emotional energy is known as *sympathetic resonance*. Just as a person with negative emotions will attract negative entities, so too will a person who views the world with love and compassion attract spirit entities that are disembodied energies of love and compassion.

According to Powell (ibid), mediums dedicated to working with 'the Light', receive help from spirit that is uplifting and inspiring. Prayer, likewise, brings an infusion of peace and love. In contrast however, where a person's mental state is fragmented or in disarray, then the door is open wide to influences of a disturbing or even dangerous nature. For example, anthropologist Frederico Sal y Rosas (1957), from 1935 to 1957, discovered 176 cases of 'susto' (the Spanish word for 'fright') in the Quechua Indians of Peru. Sal y Rosas emphasised that susto is not merely a superstition, but a medical condition that can be understood scientifically. According to Sal y Rosas, the Quechua Indians believed that the soul or part of it can leave the body or be forced out of it by fright. The susto disease can occur in one of two ways: either the soul is frightened by something in the environment, like a loud clap of thunder, or it can be forced out by a malevolent spirit. For the Quechua Indians, the cure for susto is soul retrieval by the Shaman.

Separating out from each other the concepts of physical energy, mental energy and emotional energy, can offer a partial answer to any hypothesis that involves the mysterious phenomena surrounding non-medical methods of healing. Experiments cited below give insights into the energetic connection between living systems that can be measured by instrumentation.

### ***Physiological Resonance and the Zero-Point Field***

Cleve Backster, a New York polygraph expert, had been conducting experiments, to see if plants could register emotion, in the form of electrical signalling, in the same way that humans do in response to stress on standard lie detector equipment (Backster, 1967). Backster measured the galvanic response of a plant when one of its leaves had been burned. The plant registered the same polygraph stress response as a human would if his hand had been burned. Even more interesting was the fact that a neighbouring plant that was not being burned showed the same levels of distress to the one that was being burned.

Backster burned a leaf of a plant that was not connected to the equipment. The original plant was still connected to the polygraph and registered the same pain response that it had when its own leaf had been burned. This suggested that the plant that was still connected, but not burned, had received information via some kind of extrasensory mechanism and was demonstrating empathy that had a physical effect. This seemed to point to some sort of interconnectedness between living things.

The 'Backster-Effect' has been seen between both plants and animals. When brine shrimp in one location died suddenly, this fact seemed to register instantly with others in another location, as recorded on a psycho-galvanic response instrument (PGR). Backster conducted similar experiments with plants and animals, including paramecium, mould cultures and blood samples, with several hundred miles separating them. In every case some mysterious communication occurred between these plants and animals. These early experiments of Backster's led to further research to investigate this mysterious connection between living organisms that eventually culminated in the modern concept of *remote viewing*, which helps to explain the outcome of Myers' experiments in the projection of phantasms of the living and astral projection which I examined in Chapter 9.

## **Remote Viewing, Astral Projection and Myers' Theory of Sensory Automatism**

Hal Puthoff, a physicist at Stanford University Research Institute, was interested in Backster's experiments to see if there was some quantum effect at work. He built a device called a Superconducting Quantum Interference Device (SQUID) that was designed to act as a shield against all electromagnetic interference, in order to hear the infinitesimal language of a subatomic particle.

Puthoff looked upon this device as the ultimate test of whether there was such a thing as psychic ability. He was given the opportunity to use the SQUID to test the psychic ability of a medium, Ingo Swann, who had been working on ESP experiments with Gertrude Schmeidler,<sup>82</sup> Professor in Psychology at City College, New York (McTaggart, 2008, p. 145).

Puthoff asked Swann if he could deliberately stop the fluctuation on the machine's output tape, which was indicated by a regular s shaped curve? Swann closed his eyes and

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<sup>82</sup> Gertrude Schmeidler was one of the most influential pioneers in psi research during the 1940's (Carpenter, 2010).

concentrated for 45 seconds. For the same length of time the machine's output device stopped creating equidistant peaks and troughs and traced one long straight line. Swann explained that he could look into the machine and by concentrating on various parts he could alter what the machine did. He could even describe and draw the inner components of the machine with complete accuracy.

Puthoff assumed that there was some non-local affect between Swann and the machine. What he had witnessed could have been described as *astral projection*, or *out-of-body experience*, or *clairvoyance*. After much deliberation on the common interpretation of these terms, and to identify his concept as unique, Puthoff settled on calling it *remote viewing* (Puthof, 1996).

The Central Intelligence Agency received news that the Soviet Union was conducting experiments with clairvoyants in remote viewing for the purposes of spying on the United States. When the CIA learned of Puthoff's experiments with Swann they invited him to set up their own experiments on their behalf. Puthoff recruited Russell Targ, a colleague who had pioneered development of the laser. This led to a 13-year project that coincided with Puthoff's work on the Zero-Point Field theory.

At the close of the programme in 1995, a US government sponsored review agreed that the statistical results for remote viewing phenomena were far beyond what could have been attributable to chance. As far as the US government were concerned, the Stanford Research Institute studies gave America a possible advantage over Russian intelligence. But to the scientists themselves, these results represented far more than a manoeuvre in the cold war. It suggested that because of our constant dialogue with the Zero Point Field, we are potentially everywhere at once.

Russell Targ published his own account of the Stanford remote viewing research and applied his findings to healing (Targ & Kutra, 1999). He concluded that:

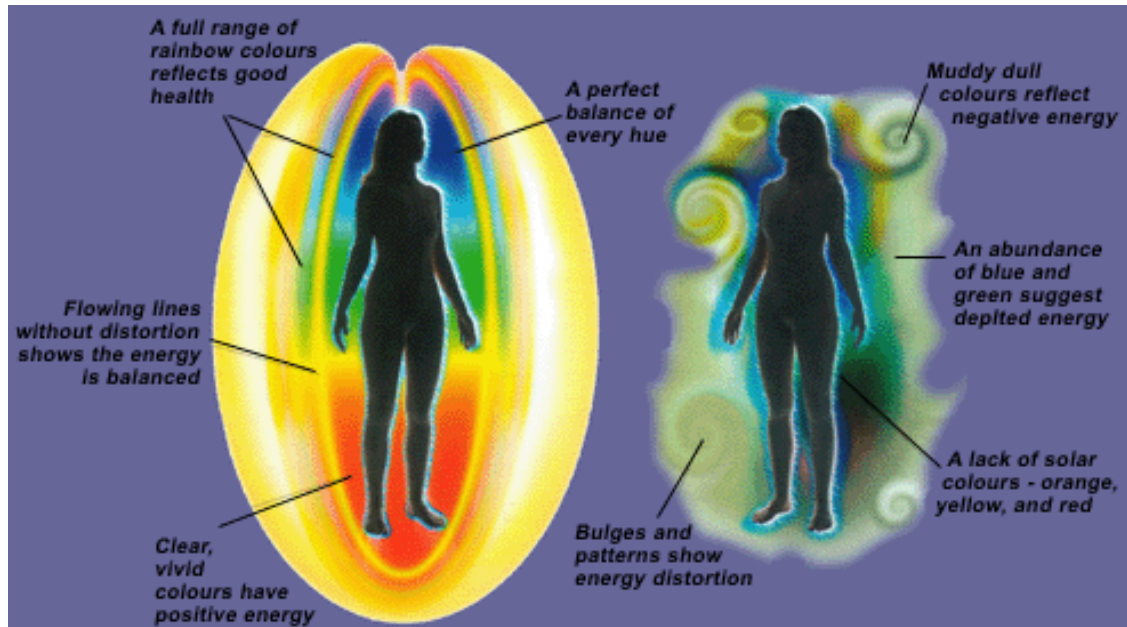
We would say that we don't have to search for psi, but our task is to remove the barriers that we and our society have erected against it. Our understanding of mind-to-mind communications derived from experience, as well as science, offer us on-going opportunities to achieve this goal (Targ & Kutra, 1999, p. 288).

In my introduction to this thesis, I explained how in SRT, the mediumistic practitioner, in the 'remote' method, allows a part of his or her consciousness to access the energy field of



the patient/client to see where there are disruptions in his/her energetic field (often referred to as the spiritual energy field, or 'aura').<sup>83</sup>

### The Aura



SRT training enables the practitioner to identify disruptions, anomalies, interference and inappropriate attachments from other peoples' or other forms of consciousness, living, deceased, or even non-human, and deal with them in an appropriate way that benefits the client *and* the attached forms of consciousness.

It is my contention that what the Stanford research reveals from the application of quantum theory is precisely what Myers conceptual framework of the Subliminal Self provided for modern transpersonal psychology over a hundred years ago.

### ***Volition or Intention as Primary Variables in the Process of Sympathetic Resonance***

It was earlier noted in chapter 4 that *experimenter-effect* is a factor that needs to be understood and taken into account when conducting psychological experiments, and this was an issue that was of particular concern to Myers. Research in quantum theory gives insights into this tricky area with the concepts of wave/particle duality, observer effect,

<sup>83</sup> [http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=the+aura&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=uG&sa=G&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&channel=s&biw=1280&bih=535&prmd=ivns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&ei=YesWTp\\_z9Hs2xhAeQg8DMBQ&ved=0CD8QsAQ](http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=the+aura&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=uG&sa=G&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&channel=s&biw=1280&bih=535&prmd=ivns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&ei=YesWTp_z9Hs2xhAeQg8DMBQ&ved=0CD8QsAQ). Accessed on 8/7/11.

zero-point energy, and the emergent collection of theories currently contributing to acknowledgement of the 'co-creative conscious universe' (Pfeiffer, Mack & et al, 2007). Collectively, the theories that contribute to the greater concept of the *co-creative* conscious universe, suggest that, as individuals we contribute to universal creation with the power of our thoughts. The results of experiments in distant healing may add credence to this possibility.

Elizabeth Targ, is a conventional psychiatrist and daughter of Russell Targ, involved in the US Department of Defense investigation into remote viewing. In her research into the efficacy of distant healing, the positive results obtained were described as inescapable (Sicher & Targ, 1998). Targ found that no matter which type of healing was used, no matter what their view of a higher being was, the healers were dramatically contributing to the physical and psychological well-being of their patients. Elizabeth Targ's study, together with the work of William Braud on the effect of distant mental influence (2003), raised a number of profound implications about the nature of illness and healing. In these experiments, it may be suggested that *intention* on its own is a healing element, but that healing intention is also a collective force. In similar research, Carol Nash, at St. John's University in Philadelphia, found that people could influence the growth rate of bacteria simply by willing it so (Nash, 1982, p. 217). These findings continue to challenge the mechanistic sciences, but quantum theory may provide the framework for an explanation with the concept of particle/wave potential.

Quantum theory suggests that a sub-atomic particle may be understood as both a wave and a particle at the same time (Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2007, p. 61). As a wave, it is purely potential, but the moment it is observed or measured then it becomes a particle and comes into existence (ibid, p.60). Quantum physicists began to consider that the most essential ingredient of the interconnected universe was the living *consciousness* that observed it. In classical physics, the experimenter was considered as a separate entity: a silent observer attempting to understand a universe that continued whether he or she was observing it or not. In quantum physics, however, it was discovered that the state of all possibilities of any quantum particle collapsed into an object as soon as it was observed or a measurement taken (ibid, p.61). To explain these strange events, quantum physicists had postulated that a participatory relationship existed between the observer and the observed. These subatomic particles could only be considered as 'probably' existing in space and time until they were perceived, and the act of observing or measuring them forced them into a static

state. These observations had shattering implications about the nature of reality and the part that consciousness has to play in creating it (McTaggart, 2008, p.11).

## **Implications for Spirit Release Practitioners**

The entire discussion of this thesis is leading towards the application of Myers' concepts to the epistemology of SRT. According to Myers, all human experience is connected in a continuum that is natural. Human beings are able to communicate with each other and with discarnate entities through accessing altered states of consciousness according to their abilities, vulnerabilities and intentions. Quantum theory seems to be offering a link between physics and spirituality. One of the conceptual components of this link is that of *volition or intention*:

In the universe there is an immeasurable, indescribable force which shamans call intent, and absolutely everything that exists in the entire cosmos is attached to intent by a connecting link (Carlos Castenada, quoted in Dyer (2004, p. 3).

Let us now consider Mesmer's scientific theory on his healing abilities, in relation to what we have learned from Myers and from the most rudimentary introduction to quantum theory.

Mesmer's system of healing the sick can be reduced to four basic principles: (a) a subtle physical fluid fills the universe and connects everything in it, including man, all living things, the earth, all heavenly bodies, and is instrumental in connecting man to man; (b) disease is caused by an imbalance in the distribution of this fluid in the human body and a cure is affected when the equilibrium is restored; (c) the fluid can be stored, channelled and conveyed between human beings; (d) using a variety of techniques, a crisis of symptoms can be provoked in patients and diseases cured (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 62).

Let us now substitute Mesmer's terminology with what we have learned from quantum theory, and expressed in different terms:

Mesmer's system of healing the sick can be reduced to four basic principles: (a) a subtle energy of Light fills the universe at the sub-atomic level and connects everything in it, including man, all living things, the earth, all heavenly bodies, and is instrumental in connecting man to man; (b) disease is caused by an imbalance in the frequency of this Light in the human body and a cure is affected when equilibrium is restored, (c) the Light can be

stored, channelled and conveyed between human beings; (d) using a variety of techniques a crisis of symptoms can be provoked in patients and diseases cured.

The differences between the two paragraphs above illustrate not only a simple change of terminology that is based on new knowledge, but also illustrates just how far social and cultural belief systems, represented by a few well-chosen words, can influence our understanding of what is really fundamental.

The perceived miraculous quality of Mesmer's work was recorded by a sceptic appointed by Baron Horeczky de Horka of Rohow in Slovakia, who invited Mesmer to cure his nervous spasms. The sceptic, whose name was Seyfert, assuming that Mesmer was a quack, observed him closely in order to expose him. He writes in the third person:

Shortly after Mesmer's arrival, several of the castle's inhabitants began to feel pains or muscular sensations in their bodies as they came near him. Even the sceptical Seyfert noticed that he was seized with an invincible sleepiness when Mesmer played music. It was not long before he became thoroughly convinced of Mesmer's extraordinary powers. He saw how Mesmer could elicit morbid symptoms in people around him, particularly in those he had magnetized. A lady who was singing lost her voice as soon as Mesmer touched her hand and recovered it when he made a gesture with his finger. Seyfert saw that Mesmer was able to influence people sitting in another room simply by pointing to their images reflected in a mirror, even though these people could see him neither directly or indirectly in the mirror<sup>84</sup> (cited in Ellenberger 1970, p. 59).

It is my own contention that whether the thought, the suggestion or the intention is directed face-to-face, or indirectly through a mirror, telephone, or any other means is irrelevant. When the thought is directed to a person, then that person will receive it. Whether the recipient actually becomes a percipient and is affected by the thought will depend on their level of receptivity, and their ability (or vulnerability) to be influenced by a thought that is transmitted through the subatomic realm by way of the subliminal mind. When a spirit release practitioner asks a patient's Higher Self to guide him or her to the thoughts and feelings of the patient then that is what happens. If there is agreement in the intention of the healer, the patient and the Higher Self of the patient then the healing will begin. Without intention, or without the agreement of just one of the parties, then the process of recovery will not be able to commence.

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<sup>84</sup> This document was discovered and published by Justinus Kerner in 1856 . Cited in Ellenberger (1970, p. 59).

Myers did not have at his disposal any of the knowledge that has been accrued by quantum physicists or the technological equipment that is available to modern researchers. However, modern research is producing results that support Myers' contentions that human beings are much more than the expression of cerebral automata. Quantum physics apparently recognises that we are all connected in a way that transcends space and time. This notion lends support for Myers' theory that we are spiritual in nature and that a spirit world exists where consciousness survives the physical death of the body.

In the chapter that follows I review some of the evidence from modern research to support Myers' theory for the continuance of consciousness beyond the physical realm, and to lend support for the case for spirit possession.

## CHAPTER 11

### Evidence for a Spirit World

Should it be true that spirits influence the living - whether they are spirits of the dead, spirit guides, angels, demons or elementals, then it implies that there must be a realm where the discarnate consciousnesses of spirits exist. If there is *not* a realm where the disembodied consciousnesses of spirits exist, then it can only be left to say that all notions of spirits, or spirit realms, are hallucinations, or delusions created by the human imagination. These arguments are either in favour of the existence of a spirit realm, (which implies a spatial conceptualisation that resembles our three-dimensional universe), or not. However, we have learned from Myers that there ought to be more than two diametrically opposed arguments. It is not enough to argue that there is no spirit realm because we cannot locate it in time and space. The third option is the possibility that there are other dimensions that do not conform to the same physical laws as our four-dimensional space-time continuum. Furthermore, it may be hypothesised that our conscious minds can access these other dimensions through psychic abilities and altered states of consciousness. The fundamental question is: 'How can we test the hypotheses that, (a) discarnate entities exist, and (b) is there a realm where they reside?' This chapter therefore moves from questions of epistemology and the application of radical empiricism in scientific methodology, to the debate on ontology, and on to the nature of consciousness itself.

#### ***Contemporary Methodological Parallelism***

Whether there is a spirit realm that is on a continuum with our known physical universe, as suggested by Myers (1903b), or a part of William James' pluralistic universe (1909), or another dimension that is beyond our concept of space and time, is a question that continues to impinge on every debate about the nature of objective reality and the plausibility of an alternate reality. Contemporary psychology has created for itself a methodological parallelism that appears to run along three parallel lines rather than two. Mainstream psychology is concerned with cognition and behaviour that are epiphenomenal. Parapsychology appears to run in parallel because it challenges the mainstream by attempting to produce theories to explain psi phenomena without discounting epiphenomenalism. However, psi research is really a black sheep of mainstream thought, because it still needs to be accepted, just as the infant psychology of

the 19<sup>th</sup> century needed to be accepted by mainstream science. In complete contrast however, is research that recognises the possibility that consciousness is fundamental and not produced by the brain or is dependent on it, but is involved in an interactive relationship with it. This is the *tertium quid* stance that Myers took, and it is the stance that some modern researchers, such as Russell Targ (2004) and Charles Tart (2000) have adopted in their search for theories to explain the nature of consciousness.

Myers argued that to accept the hypothesis that consciousness can survive the death of the body does not dismiss epiphenomenal psychology. He argued that it is not a case of 'either or,' but a combination of both. Instead of arguing the case for opposite ends of the dichotomy, Myers insisted that there was a continuum that linked all phenomena into a cohesive whole. In this chapter, I bring together what I believe to be the most important and convincing strands of modern research that support Myers' hypothesis, and I will show that the evidence is being produced, not by psychology, but by engineers, physicists and biologists.

## **Consciousness Studies**

Without any theoretical training in psychology, Peter Hardwick, an engineering post-graduate at King's College, University of London, who was researching for his doctorate in the theories of artificial intelligence, arrived at the conclusion that consciousness is a fundamental factor in the biological evolutionary process (Hardwick, 2000).

Hardwick's research indicates that a machine cannot have a consciousness because consciousness is related to living systems and is part of the evolutionary process (ibid, p.261). Hardwick was not a psychologist or a student of philosophy or metaphysics, but his analytical engineering mind was able, through a multi-disciplinary methodology, to conclude that matter is not fundamental to consciousness, but that consciousness is an integral component that emerges from an evolutionary process of continual change and increasing complexity in biological systems (ibid, p.245). This observation is often used in the arguments of proponents of epiphenomenology. However, the methodological concepts cited by Hardwick are in contrast to mechanistic reductionism that tries to understand consciousness by examining its constituent parts. His framework was partly developed from seeing how Einstein used new forms and concepts in relativity theory, where he observed that certain phenomena could only be explained by considering them as constituents in the *relational* framework of an integrated system. Hardwick observes

that a primary mechanism of Nature is 'feedback', which is a two-way interaction between an organism and its environment (ibid, p.266). At the most complex level of operation, feedback enables self-awareness and consciousness to develop in humans as the demands of the environment change (ibid, p.245).

The interactive relationship between consciousness and the biological system is demonstrated by bio-feedback and the emergent science of psychoneuroimmunology that I referred to in Chapter 9. The organism responds to changes in the environment through the mechanisms of homeostasis, but with the application of 'volition' (conscious will) as a causative factor, rather than an unconscious, automatic reaction of the nervous system. Through a conscious effort of *will*, the organism's autonomic nervous system can be controlled.

Hardwick made no references to the work of Myers, but his conclusions are sympathetic to Myers' assertion that consciousness is evolutionary. Myers asserted that the abilities of somnambulists and mediums represent the leading edge in the evolution of mind and mental capacities (Myers, 2003, p.121). The feedback mechanism in clairvoyance, for example, is in relation to the validity of information received from spirit sources. Where the information is externally validated, there is movement forward in the evolution of consciousness, and where there is misinformation or resistance to the acceptance of the process, then the evolutionary process is temporarily impeded.

Myers' method of validating the messages received through mediums showed that they could not possibly be obtained psychically, but only from the spirits of the deceased. In order to prove this by his own volition, Myers sent fragments of information, following his own death, to three independent mediums, widely separated in England, India and the United States (Saltmarsh, 2004). The messages made sense only when scrutinised by members of the Society for Psychical Research in London. These are the celebrated 'cross-correspondence' cases.

The absence of references to Myers' work by those engaged in consciousness studies is an indication that his work is largely unknown to modern researchers, with the exception of scholars of the works of the 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneers in psychology and philosophy such as those who have contributed to Kelly's *Irreducible Mind* (2007a).

Some modern researchers into the nature of consciousness, such as Charles Tart (2000), acknowledge the importance of those mystical experiences that Myers recognised (Myers,



1903, p. 411) and the altered states that accompany them. In his *systems approach* to understanding consciousness, starting with a blank sheet with no reference to Myers, Tart's systematic methodology has arrived at similar conclusions to those of Myers and of Hardwick (cited above).

Myers and his colleagues at the Society for Psychical Research were certainly pioneers of modern consciousness studies, although they are not generally recognised by modern researchers as such. It is difficult to estimate how far consciousness studies have been accepted by mainstream psychology, but there is, I believe, sufficient evidence to suggest that a significant paradigm shift is underway.<sup>85</sup>

Myers' observations enabled him to develop his model of mind (the Subliminal Self) as a theoretical concept that could accommodate the phenomena that he witnessed and tested. That same concept is just as relevant today as it was a hundred years ago. My thesis argues explicitly for acknowledgement of the fundamental nature of mind according to Myers' concept of the Subliminal Self. I further argue that recent research conducted on the nature of consciousness, together with the earlier research conducted by Myers on the survival of consciousness following physical death hypothesis, are supportive of each other.

## **Myers' Evidence for a Spirit World**

The evidence that spirit beings exist in a realm that integrates with, but is beyond the three-dimensional physical universe (or four-dimensional space-time continuum), was examined by Myers and his colleagues at the Society for Psychic Research from 1882 until his death in 1901. Research has continued by the SPR and an increasingly diverse array of institutions to this day.

Myers' main theme was to demonstrate, using scientific data, that 'at the depths of human personality there lie indications of a life and faculty that is not limited to a planetary existence, or to this material world' (Myers, 1903b, p. 264). His introduction to the medium, the Reverend Stainton Moses<sup>86</sup> (ibid, p. 371) was to provide him with a solid foundation for all his future research with other somnambulists and spiritualist mediums, as well as members of the public who responded to surveys conducted by the SPR.

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<sup>85</sup> A detailed review of the research evidence collected in consciousness studies is provided by Dean Radin, Director of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (1997; 2006; 1989), and together with the series of publications edited by David Lorimer of the Scientific and Medical Network (1998; 2001; 2004) give ample evidence of this paradigm shift.

<sup>86</sup> A detailed account of the mediumship of Stainton Moses and his relationship with Myers and the Society for Psychical Research is elucidated by Melechi (2009, pp. 223-228).

Through a detailed study of sensory and motor automatism, phenomena have been observed, which, according to Myers, are: ‘...impossible to explain except by supposing that there is a spiritual world in which the individualities of our departed friends still actually subsist’ (Myers, 1903, p.1657).<sup>87</sup>

In addition to his own observations and experiments with somnambulists including Stainton Moses and the celebrated ‘Mrs. Piper’ (who impressed William James), Myers was not negligent in reviewing evidence to support his hypothesis from a variety of sources including the records of the 18<sup>th</sup> century scientist and mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) (Swedenborg, 1758).

Quite apart from the documentary evidence uncovered by Myers, ordinary people have experiences in private that are not documented or, in many instances, not even talked about outside of their immediate circle of family and friends. On this Myers writes:

I have reason to believe, both from what I have witnessed myself and from the reports of others, that occasional phenomena of ecstasy and possession are not infrequent in many family circles or groups of intimate friends. The persons concerned however, do not realise the importance of keeping accurate records. Manifestations can be sporadic and not easily susceptible to any detailed examination. Often these phenomena are concealed from outsiders. Sometimes due to the sacredness of the manifestations, or the tendency to regard the trance to be regarded as some sort of calamity and the medium regarded as having some kind of distressing disease (Myers, 1903b, p. 358).

Other evidence that Myers had access to were the case files accumulated by his friend William James, some of which were presented in his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience* that was published in 1902 shortly after Myers own death. The task of collecting further evidence of a spirit world following on from the work of James was taken up by Professor James Hyslop of Columbia University, who published his *Contact with the Other World* (1919).

### ***Spiritualist’ Communications with the Deceased and Spirit Guides***

The criteria used by Myers for validating the veridical authenticity of the communications between spiritualist mediums and their controls were, either that more than one person

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<sup>87</sup> In Chapter 8 I cited examples from Myers’ research that provide evidence that thoughts and feelings can be transmitted through telepathy from one mind to another, and in Chapter 9 I cited some of the evidence to support the hypothesis that the mind can affect body. Chapter 10 then brought these concepts together under the microscope of quantum theory.

might be independently affected by the phenomenon, or that the information conveyed would be true and previously unknown to the recipient (Myers, 1903b, p. 211). The following is an example wherein the 'control' presents himself as a doctor and gives medical information that the recipient could not possibly have known:

Our medium was in most cases Mr. Andrew .... I mentioned an invalid brother. He suffered from a heart affliction known as presystolic murmur. At one sitting we consulted a medical man who called himself Dr. Snobinski of Russia. This gentleman not only prescribed for my brother, but also furnished us with a diagram of the human heart, and put a special mark to indicate the valve diseased in my brother's case. How this diagram came to be drawn by a person ignorant of human physiology, and how the diseased valve was shown and explained by one ignorant of pathology, was more than I could account for (Myers, 1903b, p. 359).

Possession by a discarnate spirit with knowledge that the medium could not possibly have gained by any other means is the hallmark of genuine spiritualist mediumship, and was investigated by a great many researchers during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Melechi, 2009). Although evidence was provided by such renowned mediums as Mrs. Piper, Stainton Moses and others, the activities of charlatans, fraudsters and stage performers damaged the credibility of genuine mediums and research in this area lost its fashionable appeal (ibid, p.262). Despite the damage done to serious research by fraudsters, the evidence provided by genuine mediums in the Victorian era is a rich source of evidence to support the survival hypothesis.

## **Modern Scientific Approaches to the Survival Hypothesis**

Modern evidence to support the hypothesis for the existence of a spirit world can come from a variety of sources. There are cases of individuals who have been shown, or rather *taken* to a spirit world by what they may describe as *spirit beings* or *spirit guides*, such as the case of 'Mr. Skilton' of Florida cited by Myers below, and by persons who have experienced a physical death, or *near-death experience* (Moody, 1975). Others describe an *out-of-body experience* when they spontaneously find themselves in a spirit realm. Recent research has also been conducted by leading neurologist Peter Fenwick (2009) on what he calls the 'end of life experience' (ELE) when those who are dying are visited at the deathbed by those non-corporeal beings that will escort them to the *Light*.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> In this context the term 'the Light' means the source of all creation (Genesis, 1:3-5).

In subjective reports where there is consistency there is an identifiable pattern, as there is in all scientific discoveries, and it is the discovery of repeatable patterns that provides science with its models and theories. On this Fontana writes:

If survival of death is to be meaningful – that is if the individual is to feel that the state after death is in some major way connected with the state before – we have to suppose that it involves a continuation of earthly thoughts, ideas, concerns, feelings, and memories. Moreover, we must suppose that individuals still have their senses, and can see and hear and feel things in much the same way as before death. In other words, that there is an important sense in which the person still recognises himself, much as we recognise that the person we are when we wake up in the morning is the same one who went to sleep the night before. But we wonder how this can be possible if we are talking about a disembodied state? Much of our experience is registered through the sensory organs, so without them it is very difficult to conceptualise a life after death. This inability is just one of the reasons why physical science either ignores or rejects the notion of survival, and makes no effort to mount research into the subject (Fontana, 2005, p. 11).

### ***Instrumental Voice Communication (IVC)***

Beginning in the 1950s a new avenue of research has been emerging that investigates the phenomenon of receiving and analysing what appear to be spirit voices through technological instrumentation such as radio, television, telephones and tape-recorders, otherwise known as Instrumental Voice Communication (IVC).

Fontana gives a detailed review of the research conducted by several researchers scattered throughout Europe, but for the need for brevity I shall cite only one example from Fontana's review:

... [on] September 17, 1952, when Italian Roman Catholic priests Father Ernetti of the Abbey of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice and Father Gemelli, a medical doctor at the Catholic University in Milan, were investigating in the University's Experimental Physics Laboratory ways of filtering the taped sound of Gregorian chants in order to enhance their acoustical purity. The efforts of the two priests were hampered by the fact that the wire used by tape recorders before the invention of magnetic tape broke frequently, and required constant and delicate repair work. Finally, Father Gemelli, as was his habit when exasperated, called on his deceased father for help. On starting the machine again, the Fathers hear, not the Gregorian chant upon which they were working, but the voice of Gemelli Senior, "Of course I'll help you! I am always with you."

The astonished priests obtained an audience with Pope Pious XII to acquaint him of the incident, and were reassured by his strongly positive response. He considered that the reception of the voice through an electronic machine might initiate "a new scientific study for confirming faith in the afterlife." Professor Francois Brune, a leading theologian and himself a Roman Catholic priest and expert on ITC who details these facts (Brune 2002), reports that although the Church itself remains neutral on whether or not ITC really represents contact with the dead, seeing this

as a matter for scientists and technicians, he himself is convinced of the strong support that it provides for survival (e.g. Brune 1993, Brune and Chauvin 1996). Quoted in Fontana (2005, p. 365).

Pope Pious' endorsement of this potential line of research is in complete contrast with the attitude of the Church during the Victorian period when it rebuked research into life after death (Melechi, 2009). Conflicts between religion and science can only be resolved with cooperation between the two and Pope Pious XII paved the way for modern scientists to follow this line of enquiry. Cooperation between science and religion, and cooperation between scientific disciplines, is essential if answers are to be found to questions regarding a spirit world and spirit communication; and Myers' model of mind can provide a start point for any research project that attempts to approach these questions.

## **Modern Evidence of a Subliminal Self**

Myers' concept of the *Subliminal Self* has not been adopted by modern researchers who prefer to use the more convenient and simpler concept of the *unconscious mind* that was proposed by Freud. Evidence that the mind may be working at levels outside of normal waking conscious awareness, and may be influencing our thoughts and actions in subtle and unrecognised ways, has been cited in Chapter 10, when I referenced the work of William Braud (2003) and his concept of Direct Mental Interactions between Living Systems (DMILS). In DMILS research, measurements are taken of the receiver's electro-dermal reactions (skin response), while he or she is subjected to a series of both arousing and calming thoughts by the sender. Even though receivers have no conscious idea of whether they are the recipient of arousing or calming thoughts, their unconscious mind seems to be receiving the information and registering it in physiological reactions (Fontana, 2005, p. 23).

Successful DMILS experiments have also been carried out that support the popular conviction that our unconscious mind tells us when someone is staring at us (Sheldrake, 2003). The sender, who sees the receiver through a one-way mirror or on a video screen, is instructed for various periods during the session either to stare or not to stare at the receiver. The receiver is told when each of these periods commences, but is not told whether it involves staring or not. He or she is instructed to press buttons to indicate whether or not they intuitively feel that staring is taking place during these periods, and electro-dermal measurements of their reactions are also taken. Shyness and introversion are psychological rather than physiological characteristics, so this finding points to the fact that the act of being stared at is registered first by the unconscious mind, which then

triggers the body's reaction. Sheldrake's observations are in agreement with Myers, who postulated that a region of the subliminal mind receives information first, and then conveys it to the conscious awareness through a process not yet known to science (Myers, 1903, p. 405).

If the vast reservoir of mental life below the threshold of awareness (what we call the unconscious), is indeed responsive to external influences that sometimes fail to register upon consciousness, then it implies that it may be the frequent recipient of a steady stream of information through subtle channels from other living systems. Except perhaps for those with highly developed psychological abilities, much of this information may emerge only rarely into consciousness, but the unconscious may nevertheless allow it to influence the body. The involvement of the unconscious in this way further emphasises the point that the mind's abilities – and the aspects of the mind that could survive death – may be far more extensive than would appear on the basis of the occasional snippets of telepathic and clairvoyant information that emerge into our consciousness (Fontana, 2005, p. 23).

In summary, many findings of parapsychology research strongly support the view that some part of the mind is independent of the limits of time and space and the known laws of physics, and may therefore survive the physical death of the body.

### ***Modern Experiments with Mediums***

Gary Schwartz, professor of psychology, medicine, neurology and psychiatry at the University of Arizona, conducted a series of experiments over a period of three years with mediums to test the life-after-death hypothesis (2002).

Schwartz' experiments were designed to eradicate any possibility of fraud or deception, and he designed protocols that would withstand any rigorous criticism of methodology. Inspired in part by the experiments with Leonora Piper conducted by William James and others at the Society for Psychical Research (Myers is not named), Schwartz quoted James: 'In order to disprove that all crows are black, it is enough to find one white crow' (Schwartz, 2002).

Following the research and its conclusive findings, Schwartz acknowledges that his scientific training was a significant contributor to his scepticism, and in spite of the evidence before him he acknowledges that he persisted in expressing an irrational opinion:

The truth is that I was being scientifically hypocritical. I had failed to do the very thing I always try to encourage my students to and colleagues to do.... I realized

that concerning belief in survival of consciousness, I was at the “opinions” level. Scientific theory strongly indicated the plausibility of the hypothesis, and the data were clear enough to enable me to hold the opinion that survival, in theory, was true.... I had witnessed with my own eyes. My degree of doubt in the presence of all the data was frankly irrational. I was experiencing skeptimania. I knew it, but I hadn't been able to do anything about it (Schwartz, 2002, p. 257).

However, the evidence changed his views and Schwartz' research is important in two respects: first it demonstrates that experiments with mediums can be replicated under rigorous scientific scrutiny, and second that scientific 'opinion' can persist in an irrational scepticism that refutes even the most compelling evidence. Schwartz expressed his fear as follows:

My growing fear was that if I actually summarised and integrated the entire set of observations, I might be forced to conclude that – at least concerning the specific research mediums we worked with – the sceptics were completely wrong (Schwartz, 2002, p. 256).

One of Myers' methods of validating his findings was to obtain verification on the information given by a medium from a secondary source (Myers, 1903, p. 749). Modern scientific method on the other hand uses statistical methods in replicated studies to test the possibility of chance. Commenting on the work of Schwartz, Fontana says that the odds against the results being obtained by chance are three in a hundred (2005, p. 224). Schwartz was fortunate in that his chosen mediums were gifted individuals. It would be fair to say that Schwartz's mediums would have had a high degree of rapport with the sitters, and that the frame of mind of the sitter would be receptive (objective, rather than gullible or hostile) if successful results are to be obtained (ibid, p.224). These comments endorse the work of Myers in his experiments with 'community of sensation' (rapport) that I referred to in Chapter 10, under the microscope of quantum theory.

Modern research that has a contribution to make to the theory that consciousness is not brain-dependent, and can contribute to the afterlife debate, are those reports of near-death and out-of-body experiences.

### ***Near-Death (NDE) and Out of Body Experiences (OBE)***

The essential difference between a near-death (NDE) and an out-of-body (OBE) experience is that in the former the body is clinically dead and life-monitoring instruments show the 'flat-line' of brain inactivity (Fenwick & Fenwick, 1997). In contrast, an OBE can be experienced by anyone at any time.

Mainstream medicine is unable to explain adequately OBEs, such as 'break-off syndrome', when pilots of fighter aircraft in high altitude, supersonic flight, experience themselves outside their own aircraft watching themselves sitting inside the cockpit (Sours, 1965, p. 447). This is a form of OBE that can be compared with *intended astral projection* alluded to in Chapter 9, but with the difference that it is not intentional, but is spontaneous and unexpected.

Research into near-death experiences was initiated by a report by philosophy lecturer Raymond Moody (1975), who published 150 first-hand accounts of NDEs; and has been continued by psychiatrists Bruce Greyson (1984) and Peter Fenwick (1997), psychologist Kenneth Ring (1982), cardiologist Michael Sabom (1981) and many others (Randall 2010, p. 254). There are now literally thousands of documented cases of near-death and out of body experiences from these different researchers in their respective disciplines (Lawton 2008, p. 3). Analysis of these reports reveals several consistencies in the phenomena experienced. Firstly, when consciousness leaves the body when it ceases to function there is the experience of travelling through a dark tunnel and out into a brilliant white light. This experience is accompanied by feelings of peacefulness without any sense of fear. Second, there is a meeting with someone who is there to welcome, either a close relative who is deceased, or a spirit guide, or guardian angel. Thirdly, there is the experience of telepathic communication and instant rapport with these and other beings. Fourthly, there is the sensing of some kind of barrier, or point of no return, where, should one cross it, there is no going back to the body. Finally, there is the reluctant, but otherwise accepted decision to return to the body in order to complete unfinished earthly business.

Individual experiences do vary. Where some people describe realms of pure light and love, others may describe a peaceful garden, or green fields and blue skies. It would seem that people form their own personal construct of what the spirit realms are like during these initial encounters. Whereas some people may feel comfortable with the purely energetic nature of the environment, others may feel the need to give more quasi-physical detail to their surroundings (Lawton, 2008, pp. 7-8).

It is difficult to assess how many people have near-death or out of body experiences. When Peter Fenwick appealed through national media for people to report their experiences, he received a huge response. He selected 500 from those who responded and sent them a detailed questionnaire. They universally expressed their delight that at last they could



share their experience with someone, without the fear of being ridiculed (Fenwick & Fenwick, 1997).

According to Tobert (2007) the fear of disclosure is a significant inhibitory factor to revealing religious or spiritual experiences. Both Tobert and Jakobsen (1999) comment on the number of cases held in the Alister Hardy archive of religious experience that reported their reluctance to say anything of their experiences until encouraged by either a newspaper article, television or radio interview of Sir Alister inviting them to do so. The reasons given for not speaking about their religious experiences include the fear of not being believed or being labelled as mentally ill (Tobert, 2007, p. 42). This is relevant to my argument, because these are clear indications that such experiences are far more common than may be assumed.

An important issue with near-death experiences, such as encountering negative entities and 'hellish' environments, is how often, if ever, these occur. Those researchers cited above do mention a few cases, but Greyson (1984) felt the need to investigate further and after ten years of additional research he found another 50 cases which he reported in *Psychiatry*. Other researchers such as Phyllis Atwater (1994) and cardiologist Maurice Rawlings (1978) suggest that hellish experiences are far more common than expected. An example of a negative near-death experience, where dangerous entities were encountered, is the case of 'Howard Storm', reported by Phillip Berman (1998), and cited by Lawton (2008, p. 20).

One afternoon in 1985, whilst on a trip to Europe, Howard Storm, a professor of art at the University of North Kentucky, was suddenly taken ill with a perforated small intestine and rushed to hospital in Paris. As he awaited an operation the following morning, he was in such intense pain that he felt he could not survive. Then, drifting in and out of consciousness, he suddenly found himself standing by the side of the bed looking down at his own body.

He heard voices saying they could help him and he followed them into a hazy fog. The silhouetted figures became increasingly aggressive and when he tried to turn back they pushed him and started to claw and bite at him. As fast as he tried to push them away, more arrived who wanted to hurt him and cause him pain. They seemed to feed off his distress and misery. An inner voice told him to pray, and in spite of his atheism and rational mind he started to recite the Lord's Prayer. This sent his tormentors into a frenzy and they

left him alone. He still felt afraid and very much alone, and in his desperation he called the name of Jesus to save him. He then saw a spot of light that grew as it moved closer until it surrounded him with a radiant love and compassion. It then took him into the Light.

This case demonstrates the concept of 'sympathetic resonance' that I explored in Chapter 10. The theory is that whatever emotion is being experienced at the time of death has a frequency that is transmitted outwards, and those non-corporeal entities that exist with a similar frequency, or use it for their own existence, will be attracted to the dying person (Baldwin, 1995, p. 11)

Confusion and anger may be seen as attractants to negative energies that feed off these powerful emotions. If these mechanisms are at work in attracting negative entities to the living (as I suggested in chapter 10) then it may be hypothesised that they would be even more effective without the constraints of the filtering system of the biological organism.

During the course of the 110 year interval between Myers' research and the modern day, scientific terminology has changed. NDE and OBE are fashionable terms that were not known to Myers and his colleagues. But in Myers' view, research into NDEs and OBEs would remain at the very heart of the science of psychology, and the search for answers concerning the survival of the spirit after death. I can only speculate that Myers would have been disappointed that the bulk of the research into NDEs has been reported by cardiologists and neurologists and not by psychologists (with exceptions such as David Fontana). He would probably agree that mainstream psychology has still not found its way back to its core issue of investigating the true nature of the human personality. Modern researchers continue to complicate these research issues by inventing even more new terminology that takes us even further from these core issues. For example, John Randall, in his review of Janice Holden's *Handbook of Near-Death Experiences* (2009) makes the comment that NDE is at the heart of parapsychology, and he disagrees with the growing tendency to redefine the subject as the study of anomalies with the new term 'anomalous psychology' (Randall, 2010, p. 256). There can be no doubt that Myers would agree with him, but I am also sure that Myers would maintain his objection by the use of the term *parapsychology* in place of the term *psychical research*.

There appears to be a tension between two opposing forces at work in the search for answers to the survival hypothesis. On one hand the science of psychology continues to fragment itself into ever more discriminatory disciplines, as it moves further and further

away from its core task, as Myers saw it. On the other hand, there are researchers from the biological sciences, such as Bruce Lipton (2010), Rupert Sheldrake (2003; 2012), who appear to be ploughing a furrow that is in parallel with the path that was pioneered by Myers. It is my contention that this parallel furrow is in sympathy with mystical and religious experiences, and with traditional religious practices from many parts of the modern world.

## **Religious and Spiritual Practice**

There remain those spiritual teachers and practitioners of the traditional religious and spiritual philosophies, who live their lives according to what they teach. An example is Seiyu Kiriya, (2000) founder of the Agon Shu Buddhist Association in Japan. Kiriya draws our attention to the writings of Leopold Szondi (1893-1986), the Hungarian psychoanalyst who proposed a third layer of collective consciousness that theoretically resides between the personal unconscious of Freudian psycho-analytics (Freud, 1991) and the collective unconscious of Jungian theory (Jung, 1959). Avoiding any references to life after death, or reincarnation, because of the prevailing fashion to disregard such things, Szondi called this intermediate layer the 'familial unconscious', and on this Kiriya writes:

The desires of specific ancestors are repressed in the intermediate layer of the unconscious as drives and these drives determine the object choices a person makes in love, friendship, profession, sickness, and possibly even the mode of death (Kiriya, *ibid*).

As well as avoiding controversy by not alluding to life after death, Kiriya reports that because of the difficulty in accepting these ideas, Szondi compiled a sufficient number of case histories to prove his hypothesis and accumulated a staggering amount of evidence that was sufficient enough to gain recognition from the receptive psychoanalytic community at the time.

Kiriya cites the theory of Szondi as an integral factor in his model to explain the Buddhist concept of karma and reincarnation (*ibid*, p. 21). In his own work, *You Have Been Here Before* (2000) Kiriya cites many of the cases from his own experience as a practising Buddhist healer of people's relationships with family members and with aspects of themselves from previous lives.

Kiriya claims that it is not so hard to determine that a person is being affected by a negative spiritual influence when one has the 'psychic ability of spiritual insight' (*ibid*, p. 25). But he states that, no matter how gifted you may be, it can still be very difficult to

distinguish the difference between cases of possession and cases of reincarnation. This kind of understanding, according to Kiriyaama, requires esoteric training in principles and techniques that are contained in *The Six Yogas of Naropa* (not included in his bibliography) and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (translated by Evans-Wentz 1927). Among these techniques is the Tibetan *summoning of spirits* that enabled him to discern immediately whether a person was affected by an aspect of reincarnation or of possession. He cites the case of 'Mieko' from his own case files:

Mieko was the reincarnation of a woman who had tragically committed suicide by throwing herself into a river after being abandoned by the man she loved. In her current life she was very athletic, but was unable to go anywhere near water and had never learned to swim. The case is representative of the principle that, according to Kiriyaama, when a person suffers a traumatic death in a previous life it causes them to be afraid of whatever it was that had killed them. For example; a person who was stabbed to death would be afraid of knives. A person who reincarnates after an unnatural death has knowledge of the circumstances lodged deep in their memory (ibid, p. 28).

What Kiriyaama was able to do was to access the past-life memory of Mieko through his ability to enter into the *subliminal* mental state that facilitates access to the intermediate level of the *familial unconscious* according to Szondy.

Other authors on the life between lives, such as Edith Fiore (1978), Irene Hickman (1983) Michael Newton (1994; 2000; 2004), and Shakantala Modi (2000), provide evidence from their own case files as practicing psychiatrists and hypnotherapists, and a review of the evidence has been compiled by Ian Lawton in his *Big Book of the Soul* (Lawton, 2008).

Kiriyaama's work in the Far East gives us in the West, together with those western psychiatrists cited above, further encouragement to look more deeply into spirit release work, and take into account ancestral influences and reincarnation, as well as spirit obsession and possession. These may be some of the causes of both mental and physical illness, and this area is in need of further research.

## CHAPTER 12

### Psychiatry and Possession

Two significant trends have been developing concurrently in both psychiatry and clinical psychology for several years that strongly suggest a paradigm shift towards a broader conceptual framework that is leaning (most probably unbeknown to their adherents) towards the theories and methods of Myers. One of these trends is the application and testing of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) that is linked with Buddhist meditation for increasingly challenging mental disorders. The approach of 'Mindfulness' that was conceived by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) involves a method of guided meditation and strictly focussed attention that bears a strong resemblance to inductions for altered states of consciousness that were examined in Chapter 7. The other trend is the growing awareness that mystical and spiritual experiences and religious beliefs have a relationship with mental health and emotional well-being. This second trend can be identified by the recent expansion of published works on spirituality by psychiatrists,<sup>89</sup> and by the rapid development of the Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.<sup>90</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesise current psychiatric thinking within the conceptual framework of Myers in the diagnosis and treatment of a range of psychiatrically diagnosed mental disorders. In the first part of this chapter I will show how Myers' concept of the continuum is actually being applied by some researchers to mental health, and in the second part I shall demonstrate how the diagnosis of spirit influence, obsession, attachment or possession can be accommodated as possible deferential diagnoses.

In this chapter I have chosen *Dissociative Identity Disorder*, a diagnosed disorder where the aetiology is linked with emotional and physical trauma (Janet, 1976; Dell & O'Neil, 2009; Moskowitz, Schafer & Dorahy, 2009). It is my contention that these people could also be suffering the influences of destructive spirit entities that are attracted to those with the vulnerability of negative emotions that are commensurate with such experiences, and it is here that Myers' concept of the continuum is to be applied.

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<sup>89</sup> A search of the Amazon on-line bookseller with the search criteria 'spirituality and mental health' produced a total of 595 results. Accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx>

## The Continuum of Mental and Emotional Disorders

On the continuum of mental and emotional disorders, anxiety and depression may be seen to represent the thin end of the wedge, progressing in seriousness and intensity through the neuroses to borderline personality disorder, then to DID and ultimately to schizophrenia at the extreme end of the scale. The progression along this scale can be illustrated by a scale of ego-fragmentation conceived by Scharfetter (2009).

### Scharfetter's Ego Fragmentation Continuum

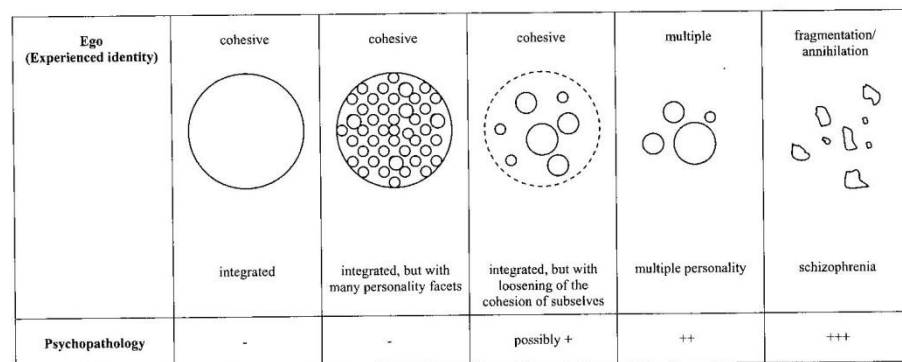


Figure 4.1 The continuum of dissociation.

Scharfetter's model enables us to see clearly how a progressively fragmented personality lends itself to an increasing potential for spirit influence. Scharfetter's 'ego' refers to the 'experienced identity' of the individual, and the circle on the left indicates a cohesive, integrated personality. The second circle denotes a cohesive, integrated personality that is comprised of many personality facets. Each of these facets represents an ego-part that has the potential to emerge according to circumstances in the immediate environment that are similar to those that prevailed at the time the ego-part responded to external stimuli. Neurotics (and the majority of so-called 'normal' people) would fall into this category. Moving along the continuum to the centre, this represents a loosening of the cohesiveness of the sub-selves and the boundaries with the external environment, and would include borderlines. The fourth diagram shows a dismantled boundary between the fragmented

self and the environment, constituting dissociative identities. The fifth illustrates a complete fragmentation of the self with no boundary with the environment, such as schizophrenia (Scharfetter, 2009, p. 56).

It is my contention that the one significant factor that unites these categories on the continuum is *emotion*. In chapter 10 I explored the concept of sympathetic resonance as the predominant factor that attracts spirit entities (positive and negative) to a person who is transmitting a powerful emotional energy. Scharfetter's model above can be used to illustrate the progressive outcome of an inability to control powerful destructive emotions such as fear (the key),<sup>91</sup> anger, rage, and etcetera.

Adding support to the concept of the continuum, Richard Bentall challenges the proposition of Emil Kraepelin (1857-1926) that there are a discrete number of psychiatric disorders, each one associated with a distinct type of brain pathology (Bentall, 2004, p. 13). Bentall explains how the Kraepelin model, which has evolved into the modern principle of arriving at a diagnosis based on the identification of presenting symptoms, has been maintained by mainstream psychiatric services. He argues that the maintenance of the diagnostic system based on symptomology is misleading and has no scientific foundation, and the thrust of his argument is supported by empirical evidence from a diverse array of anthropological, social, psychological and biomedical research (Bentall, 2004. P.13).

Bentall refers to research conducted at the Department of Experimental Psychology at *Oxford University*, where Gordon Claridge recognised an apparent continuum (the schizotypal scale) from sanity to insanity that necessitates a revision of the Kraepelinian model of psychosis (Bentall et al., 1989; 1990; Claridge, 2001).

Claridge suggests that there is a normal distribution of the predisposition to develop psychosis, and that this predisposition can be triggered by some kind of environmental event. Environmental events that could precipitate a psychotic breakdown may include psychological and physical traumas (Claridge, 1990).

In parallel with Claridge's schizotypal scale, Thalbourne (2010b) posits the concept of *transliminality and sensory sensitivity*. In chapter 4, where I examined the methods of modern researchers in beliefs in the paranormal, I noted Thalbourne's suggestion that transliminality may be a common factor in contributing to beliefs in the paranormal.

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<sup>91</sup> It is my contention that fear, and an inability to deal with it in an appropriate way, is the primary cause of all non-organic mental illness.

Tranliminality can be seen as a predisposition to dissociate or enter into trance states or altered states of consciousness on a progressive scale.

Elsewhere, Heap and colleagues have collected a total of 13 different hypnotisability scales (2004, p. 35). These scales differ in the number of qualitative criteria used, and consequently produce differing results. The two scales most often used in laboratory research are the *Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale (SHSS)*, and the *Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility (HGSHS)* (ibid, p.35). Extrapolating results from the collection of scales in order to arrive at a consensus of hypnotisability is extremely difficult, but it may be suggested that across the general population the ability to enter into a trance is evenly distributed with about 20% of the population having the ability to enter into a deep somnambulistic state.

On the continuum of trance experience, daydreaming represents the thin end of the wedge progressing through absorption (ibid, p.173), to dissociative states, to complete dissociation with a full out-of-body experience (Moody, 1975; Fontana, 2005), or soul-loss (Villoldo, 2005). It may be hypothesised that there is a correspondence between Claridge's *schizotypal* scale, Thalbourne's *transliminality* scale and Heap's fuzzy and inconclusive *hypnotisability*. Any of these measures could hypothetically be used to identify vulnerability (the negative) or the potential ability (the positive) to spirit influence or possession.

A predisposition to positive or negative possession could be translated into the language of ego strength and integrity (integrated, cohesive) using Scharfetter's model or Claridge's *schizotypal* scale, together with the ability to enter an altered state of consciousness. A correlation between decreasing ego-state integrity with an increase in predisposition to enter trance would indicate vulnerability. Conversely an increase in ego-strength (a strong sense of self) with a decrease in hypnotisability would indicate resistance to spirit influence. Naegeli-Osjord suggests that possession vulnerability is somewhat dependent on a combination of weakness of the ego and high suggestibility (1988, p. 37).

Putting it simply, a person with a strong sense of self (ego-strength) with a high propensity to enter an altered state (to dissociate) will have the psychological means to protect himself and control any influence from an external source, depending on their knowledge and experience. Examples of this type of personality are those who invite positive possession, such as Mercy Magbagbiola who invited the Holy Spirit, Alberto Villoldo who undertakes shamanic journeying, and mediums who permit themselves to be used as



instruments of communication for deceased relatives or other beings in the spirit realm (Morse, 2012). Conversely those persons with a fragmented personality or a very weak sense of self, and who have a high propensity to enter an altered state or to dissociate, will not have the means to protect themselves and exercise control over spirits that are attracted to them. Unfortunately none of these concepts are taken seriously by mainstream psychiatry, and any behavioural symptoms that signify spontaneous entry into trance states or complaints of spirit possession are automatically deemed to be pathological.

## Medical Diagnoses and Spirit Possession

Although ‘possession and trance disorders’ are listed in the ICD-10 (World Health Organisation, 1992, p. 347) they are generally regarded as phenomena that are experienced primarily in tribal communities where shamanic practices are endorsed by the society, unless they are destructive in which case they are seen as pathological according to western medical theories. In the table below ‘possession and trance disorders’ are shown in relation to similar dissociative diagnoses in ICD-10 and DSM-IV.

### Dissociative disorders classifications in ICD-10 and DSM-IV

ICD-10 dissociative (conversion) disorders	DSM-IV dissociative disorders
Dissociative amnesia	Dissociative amnesia
Dissociative fugue	Dissociative fugue
Dissociative motor disorders	Dissociative identity disorder
Dissociative convulsions	Depersonalization disorder
Dissociative anaesthesia and sensory loss	Dissociative disorder not otherwise specified
Dissociative stupor	
Possession and trance disorders	
Mixed dissociative (conversion) disorders	
Other dissociative (conversion) disorders	
Dissociative (conversion) disorder, unspecified	

It is my contention, in support of Myers’ conceptual framework, that all of the above dissociative disorder diagnoses could be indications that spirit influence should be seriously

considered as a deferential or compound diagnosis. In cultural differences, according to Shweder (1985): 'Possession is arguably the most common culture-bound psychiatric syndrome, and the experience of its converse 'soul loss' perhaps more common internationally than depression' (cited in Littlewood 2009, p. 29). On this Littlewood writes:

Clinical presentation is most likely to be involuntary possession trance or the belief for which an individual presents as patient. They are commonly seen in clinical settings around the world, and in Britain are most likely to be seen among migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Middle East or North Africa (where the spirit is *Jinn*), and occasionally among evangelical Christians, though here the presentation is more likely to be possession belief alone (Littlewood, 2009, p. 31).

According to Littlewood possession *belief* is an explanatory model that can be used to explain any illness, especially epilepsy and psychiatric disorder (2009, p. 34). Due to commonalities in phenomenology, *possession states* could be used to diagnose hysteria, multiple personality disorder or dissociative disorder. Traditional modes of dealing with spirit possession states normally include gently cajoling the spirit or accommodating it, rather than brutally expelling it, but the treatment practiced in Britain may be less confident and culturally validated. Littlewood therefore offers an alternative, by suggesting that in less developed cultures the possessing spirit may be gently cajoled or accommodated, but this is still seen as a socially accepted placebo. In Chapter 4, on page 125, I introduced Hunter's method of spirit release where he advocated use of the patient's belief system (Hunter 2005, p.156), and this could also be seen as a form of placebo where beliefs and suggestion are the principle therapeutic factors. However, if we are to be able to discern whether a person is actually being influenced by an external entity that has ontological status, or whether they are responding to a belief, then we need to engage the entity in dialogue in order to determine its origin and objectives.

## **Myers' Alternative Explanation**

Myers cites examples of what he calls 'disintegrations of personality' (Myers, 1903b, pp. 36-73), beginning with what he considers to be 'the most trifling *idée fixe*' to actual alternations or permanent changes to the whole characterisation of personality (ibid, p. 72). Within Myers' continuum of personality disintegrations, Janet's notion of the 'fixed idea' as the origin of multiple personality is at the very beginning of the dissociation scale, and full-blown multiple personalities are at the extreme end of the continuum. Whereas Janet restricted his own hypothesis to explain multiple personalities as purely autogenic, in contrast, due to his exploration for explanations for automatisms, Myers arrived at the

conclusion that an alternative explanation for multiple or alternating personalities had to be possession by the consciousness of discarnate entities (Myers 1903, p.1866).

As an example of 'secondary consciousness', Myers cites the case of 'Sorgel', presented by Elliotson (Myers, 1903b, p. 44), who was diagnosed with epilepsy and transformed from an innocent industrious youth to a vicious murderer. He remembered nothing of the murder and only knew that he was very confused and had dreamed of 'all manner of nonsense' (ibid, p.45). He was acquitted of the crime due to diminished responsibility, but died a short while later in a lunatic asylum. Myers suggests that post-epileptic states may run parallel to many secondary phases of personality and resemble some hypnotic trances (ibid, p.44). This suggests that an artificially induced hypnotic trance could reveal answers to perplexing questions, and the following case is an example of how hypnosis can be applied.

This case cited by Myers is the case of 'Ansel Bourne' first published in *Society for Psychical Research Proceedings*, vol vii, (1892-92) in a paper by Dr. Richard Hodgson (Myers, 1903b, p. 45). On 17<sup>th</sup> January 1887, Ansel travelled from his home in Coventry, Rhode Island, USA to Providence, expecting to return home the same day. On 14<sup>th</sup> March, two months later, Ansel awoke in a strange bed to discover himself in a strange town. During the intervening two months he had presented himself as a Mr. A.J. Brown and had set up a small business in a shop in Norristown, Pa. He had no recollection of the alternate personality until hypnotised by William James (Myers, 1903, p. 579). Under hypnosis he recounted the personality of Mr. Brown, giving his date of birth and an account of his movements during the two month period that Ansel was missing. Corroboration of the account was verified by statements by witnesses, who had dealings with Mr Brown. Although evidence was obtained through hypnosis of the alter personality, there was no explanation for the transformation and the case remained a mystery. The official medical conclusion was that Ansel suffered a post-epileptic partial loss of memory (Myers 1903, p.186). Myers later suggested that spirit possession was a possible explanation due to the evidence he later accumulated from his observations and experiments with somnambulists (Myers, 1903b, p. 345).

It is by analysing cases of multiple personality from past literature, in the light of Myers' theories, that we are able to gain a different perspective altogether and arrive at alternative explanations.

Full possession of an individual's mind and body by an external intelligence is rare, very dramatic, and extremely challenging for our belief systems to accept and our physicalist science to acknowledge. At the other end of the continuum, spirit influence by subtle thoughts and ideas is probably experienced by most people. But, even creative geniuses, whose gifts are given by a spiritual source, are more likely to attribute their creativity to themselves. The evidence to support the hypothesis that there is an afterlife, and the case for a non-material spirit realm, has been reviewed in the previous chapter. If this evidence has any validity it becomes increasingly difficult to view mental illness and emotional problems from a purely epiphenomenal perspective. The psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, or psychotherapist with experience of patients reporting or discovering subtle spirit influences or attachments are better placed to recognise the signs immediately and initiate one of the investigation methods described on page 17 in the introduction to this thesis.

In researching the modern psychiatric literature for references to the conceptual framework of Frederic Myers I have discovered a parallel in the literature from Brazil. Below is a quotation from a paper, published in English, by Brazilian psychiatrists Moreira-Almeida and Lotufo Neto (2005).

In the history of dynamic psychiatry and psychology, Spiritism was 'an event of major importance as a source of unexplainable phenomena' (Janet, 1889, pp. 357–8; Ellenberger, 1970, p. 115). Spiritism produced psychological phenomena to be investigated by the medical sciences. In the late 19th century, dynamic theories of the unconscious were in part a result of the translation of the doctrine of communication of the spirit into orthodox medical rhetoric (Ellenberger, 1970). Hess (1991) identifies more objective signs of this translation in Myers' 'subliminal self' and in the writings of Pierre Janet, William James and Jung. Koss-Chioino (2003) recently showed several parallels between Jungian and Spiritist views in the structure and content of human consciousness. Investigations dealing with mediumship and telepathy were frequent during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, involving several renowned authors in the international scientific milieu (Murphy & Ballou, 1960; Stevenson, 1977; Ross & Joshi, 1992; Myers, 2001) (Moreira-Almeida & Lotufo Neto, 2005).

On close inspection there are clear parallels between Myers' and Kardec's respective conceptual frameworks and scientific methods. Kardec coined the term 'Spiritism' (Bragdon, 2012 p. 23) in order to distinguish it from the 'Spiritualism' of England and North America, where it is still practiced to this day in spiritualist churches as a branch of Christianity, and remains largely unrecognised by science as a healing modality. In contrast, the application of Kardec's Spiritism to healing has been integrated into mainstream medicine in Brazil (Silva de Almeida & Moreira-Almeida, 2009).

There is a huge gulf between Myers' and Kardec's respective concepts being accepted or rejected by institutionalised medicine. In Myers' case his work has been largely ignored by mainstream psychology, and it is only now that he is being rediscovered by modern psychologists such as Kelly *et al* (2007a). In complete contrast however, Kardec has been accepted as the pioneer of a healing modality that is widely accepted and practiced in many parts of the world, and in South America in particular (Nobre, 2003; Bragdon, 2012).

Naegeli-Osjord reinforces his argument on the relationship between mental health and possession with a quotation from C.G. Jung:

The statement by C.G. Jung may be appropriate here: 'The ideas or moral laws of deity are a constant in the human soul which can not be exterminated. Therefore, every psychologist who is not dazzled by narrow-minded, arrogant interpretations must deal with these facts' (ibid, p.30).

This chapter has been a continuation of the topic of discernment that was introduced in Chapter 3 where Myers' concept of the continuum has been applied to a scale of intensity for spirit possession. In this chapter I have shown a corresponding scale of continuity in mental illness from depression to schizophrenia and I suggested a correlation between ego-strength and resistance to possession in contrast to a lack of ego-strength with vulnerability.

In Chapters 7 and 8 I have shown how Myers bypassed the powers of expectation, beliefs and suggestion in his experiments with sensory and motor automatisms. The concept of telepathy was tested and verified by Myers, Gurney and Podmore and the reality of telepathic hypnosis has added a partial explanation for the mechanisms that facilitate spirit possession. Modern research into the nature of consciousness, remote viewing, distant mental influence, out of body and near death experiences can all be accommodated within Myers' conceptual framework.

## CHAPTER 13

### Conclusions

#### A Revised Epistemology

The primary objective of this thesis has been to present a revised epistemology for Spirit Release Therapy that is grounded in the scientific conceptual framework of F.W.H. Myers. What has emerged is the recognition that there is an evolving paradigm shift in scientific enquiry that is centred in the need to understand and explain human consciousness. However, there remains a tension between the established epistemologies of the mechanistic sciences of physics and chemistry, and the humanistic sciences such as anthropology, psychology and sociology.

The tension is between the need to fit all psychic and psi phenomena into the existing physicalist framework on one hand, and the need to expand the framework in order to accommodate psi phenomena on the other.

The history of psychological healing teaches us that what is first observed as a mystery, because existing knowledge cannot explain it, leads to the development of new theories and the discovery of previously unrealised concepts that can accommodate the mystery into expanded scientific frameworks (Janet, 1886a, p. 21). One such concept, *telepathy*, has become integrated into our language, but persists in being the subject of controversy. This thesis represents an investigative journey, from a modern societal consensus of disbelief in spirit possession, that is reinforced by social science observations and a mechanistic view of human experience, to the scientific acknowledgement that telepathy is at the heart of possession theory. Pioneers in treating spirit possession from a clinical, humanist perspective have presented their experiences and those of their patients against a societal and scientific consensus of disbelief and incredulity. But in researching this thesis, I have discovered that the conceptual framework of Frederic Myers, together with recent discoveries in quantum theory, can provide a valid and acceptable scientific framework that can accommodate such experiences.

At the heart of this journey are those problems that are grounded in the philosophical arguments surrounding epistemology, or 'how do we know what we think we know?' Elizabeth Sahtouris (2007), in her essay on the emergent paradigm shift in the study of consciousness states, 'The only way to truly know that something has happened or exists is to have direct experience of it' (ibid, p. 91). The importance of this statement is a recurring

theme throughout my research, and as a consequence, we arrive at a revised epistemology for SRT according to the conceptual framework of Frederic Myers that he developed during twenty years of research into the theory that consciousness survives the death of the physical body.

Many problems have been encountered along the way, such as the validity of eye-witness testimony, interpretations of what constitutes a hallucination, the unexplained mind-body link, the power of suggestion and expectation in placebo, the vulnerability of certain groups of individuals to external spirit entities, and the ontological status of such entities. Questions have been raised regarding the authenticity of an afterlife, of mystical and religious experiences, interpretations of the terms conscious, unconscious and subconscious, and their related constituents in models of mind. We have discovered parallels in shamanic journeying with Jung's archetypes and active imagination. And we have discovered that there is a connection between mystical states of consciousness, dissociation, hypnosis, meditation and prayer.

In Myers' conceptual framework, he identified a methodological parallelism between mechanistic theories of cerebral automatism as an automatic reaction to the environment, and the concept of volition as a conscious determinant of response. The mechanistic perspective of modern psychology maintains this methodological parallelism to this day in maintaining neurological explanations for all psychological phenomena when the findings of research into psi phenomena indicate otherwise.

In order to resolve this parallelism, Myers' *tertium quid* approach accepted both perspectives and brought them together into a cohesive whole that espoused an expanded naturalism. Movements in the paradigm shift in modern science are sure signs that an expanded naturalism is in the making, one hundred years after Myers envisioned it. Myers can therefore be acknowledged as a true scientific visionary, and his contribution to the science of psychology need no longer be ignored or underestimated.

Myers' preferred experimental method involved the use of the artificially induced altered state of consciousness that resembled the observed experiences of somnambulists and hysterics - hypnosis. Modern hypnosis theorists, rather than adhere to their theories of suggestion and conformity, would do well to introduce Myers' concept of the greater Subliminal Self into their model of mind, and make strenuous attempts to bypass the power of suggestion and expectation in order to arrive at more unexpected findings from

their explorations. Using the example of the stage hypnotist, I have demonstrated that possession of the mind and body of a willing subject is easily demonstrated for entertainment and amusement. But with the introduction of Myers' assertion that telepathic hypnosis is scientifically validated, we arrive at a perfectly plausible explanation for spirit possession where either a discarnate spirit, or the conscious will of another living person, can use the mental and physiological infrastructure of the organism for its own purposes, and thereby influence thoughts, feelings and behaviour. In his desire to entertain, the stage hypnotist clearly demonstrates the concept of possession.

Myers findings that the living, and the spirits of the deceased, can present themselves to another person can be acknowledged as credible, and that visions need not be considered as hallucinations, but apparitions with veridical authenticity. His experiments with conscious projection of the self to another add credulity to this phenomenon, and recent research findings in *remote viewing* are testimony to the reality of the projection of consciousness beyond the limitations of time and space.

Myers does not elucidate his conceptual framework as clearly and concisely as one would like, and this may have contributed to modern psychology's difficulty in acknowledging it. However, in summary, Myers' conceptual framework can be presented as follows:

- The human being is a spirit entity that occupies, possesses and uses a physical body for the purposes of experiencing an Earth life.
- There is a non-corporeal spirit world.
- Consciousness continues to survive after the death of the body.
- The deceased can feel that they are still alive even though they have left the body.
- The deceased can continue to try to carry out their objective despite having no body.
- Vulnerability in the living can attract disembodied earthbound spirits of the deceased.
- Spirit entities are unconsciously attracted to energetic vibrational frequencies of the living.
- Psychotic symptoms could be attributable to spirit influences.
- To arrive at a diagnosis of multiple personality on the basis of the existence of identifiably different occupying intelligences and to reject the possibility of externally or spiritually originating intelligences may be misleading.



Further support for Myers' framework is provided by the healing philosophy that was channelled through hundreds of mediums to French scientist Hippolyte Rivail (pen name Allan Kardec) (1857), which has been incorporated with success into the institutionalised medicine of Brazil (Menezes Jr & Moreira-Almeida, 2010). Brazilian institutionalised medicine therefore leads the way in research into the efficacy of SRT (Bragdon 2012).

## **Modern Research on the Efficacy of Spirit Release Practice**

The complementary use of traditional religious healers by persons in psychotic states has been documented for a number of societies including Puerto Rico (Koss-Chioino, 1992), Africa (Lambo, 1978), Brazil (Redko, 2003), and Mexico (Zacharias, 2006). However, the impact of these treatment modalities on the recognition and treatment of psychotic symptoms, and on the course of schizophrenia, has rarely been systematically examined (Edgerton, 1980). A bibliography of research conducted in South America is attached to this thesis in Appendix C. Of the 12 publications listed therein, only one is a report on the efficacy of Spiritist mediums, which I cite here.

In their study of the *Recognition and Treatment of Psychotic Symptoms by Spiritists Compared to Mental Health Professionals*, Moreira-Almeida & Koss-Chioino (2009) expand on psychosocial and cultural perspectives on the experience and expression of psychotic symptoms and the treatment of schizophrenia by exploring how Spiritist healers in Latin America treat persons with severe mental illness.

In a survey of 53 persons in Puerto Rico who were diagnosed with schizophrenia according to DSM-III-R criteria (APA, 1987) in three community mental health clinics, it was found that 22 of these patients contacted Spiritist healers. The ways that the Spiritist healers recognised and treated symptoms were systematically observed and the healing sessions were tape recorded. Cases treated by Spiritists were then compared to conventional mental health treatment (provided by a staff of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and mental health technicians) of similarly diagnosed patients. Perceptual differences between mental health providers and Spiritists are summarised below.

### ***Spiritual Aetiology***

The greatest conceptual difference between the Spiritist healers and mental health professionals is that the Spiritist healers do not identify a category of experience labelled 'hallucination/delusions'. In this study, persons diagnosed with schizophrenia were

recognised by Spiritist mediums as 'spirit-obsessed' and unable to control the effect of the spirit on their bodies and behaviour.

For Spiritists there is a non-material reality that is inhabited by spirits who may manifest at any time and may interfere with a person's perception of reality. They also believe that the spirit of the real person may be absent when an invading spirit takes possession of the body. Therefore, distortions of reality expressed by some patients are not attributed to themselves, but instead to spirit invaders. Reality distortions are not perceived as false beliefs or unreal perceptions, because the patient's own spirit is not present.

Brazilian psychiatrist Inacio Ferreira began to incorporate Spiritism into institutionalised medicine in Brazil as far back as the 1930s (Silva de Almeida & Moreira-Almeida, 2009), and wrote several books presenting evidence for spiritual aetiology in many cases of insanity, and for the efficacy of Spiritist treatments. Some of his books have been translated from Portuguese into Spanish, but his work has not been published in English. In contrast, in the English speaking world there is no scientific research into the efficacy of SRT, and it is primarily for this reason that this thesis on the conceptual framework of Myers is presented. It is my objective, pending acceptance of this thesis, to present a proposal to test the efficacy of SRT methods of discernment with patients diagnosed with schizophrenia, due to their experience of auditory hallucinations.

## **Myers' Expanded Naturalism**

In his expanded naturalism, Myers insisted that there is no such thing as the paranormal and that everything is normal, that there is no such thing as supernatural and that everything is natural. Applying Myers' concept of the continuum to spirit possession in Chapter 3 I examined examples of cases of possession at the extreme end of the continuum where eye-witness testimony challenges the known laws of physics and biology. I suggested in this chapter that there remain undiscovered laws that can explain how the human body can be manipulated by external forces, and that the sciences of biology, quantum physics and a broader psychology will eventually arrive at a more complete naturalism. In chapter 3 the problem of discernment between mental health and spirit possession was introduced with the example of Peck's case of 'Jersey' who was originally diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. I criticised Peck's inability to use his skill as a hypnotist to enter into a more fruitful dialogue with Jersey's possessing spirits. This case is representative of how psychiatrists and religious exorcists can cooperate and still get it wrong through a lack of knowledge and experience. Where the cases presented in Chapter

3 challenge eye-witness testimony and known physical laws, they also question the adequacy of scientific epistemology in general. It was therefore important to examine the relationship between beliefs and knowledge by asking how modern psychology questions and measures beliefs in the paranormal.

In his introduction to *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* Myers makes his position very clear with regard to metaphysics and religious belief:

My discussion, I may say at once, will avoid metaphysics as carefully as it will avoid theology. For somewhat similar reasons I do not desire to introduce the philosophical opinions which have been held by various thinkers in the past, nor myself to speculate on matters lying beyond the possible field of objective proof. (Myers, 1903b, p. 24)

It was Myers' intention to focus on dimensions of objective reality and subjective experience, and to avoid the contamination of proof by what people believed, and it is therefore in keeping with Myers' single-minded objectivity that I have applied his methods and theories to the epistemology of *Spirit Release Therapy* in this thesis. Myers' research gives testimony that it matters not what people believe when it comes to the phenomena associated with spirit possession and spirit attachment. It is by using the scientific methods of Myers that it is possible to bypass the deceptions and illusions of the conscious rational mind and to search beneath expectation and suggestion to uncover what is causative in a variety of mysterious human experiences – including spirit possession. Modern researchers tend to prefer the use of psychometric instruments in their attempts to understand and explain belief systems, and my criticism of this method is that they appeal only to the cognitive abilities of the normal conscious awareness. Complementary to psychometric methods is the method used by Myers to access levels of mind beyond the threshold, and the use of the altered state of consciousness (hypnosis) is recommended in all research into psychic phenomena and relative belief systems.

## **An Integrated Psychology**

Myers demonstrated that psychology is the science of a holistic being that incorporates a subliminal consciousness that exists beyond the threshold of normal conscious awareness. The interaction between the subliminal mind and the physical brain is more complex than simply an expression of nervous system responses, and he demonstrated that both the intangible mind and the organic brain are both fundamental and causative. An integrated psychology therefore investigates the spiritual aspects of human consciousness and its relationship with the material world. With particular regard to spirit possession Myers

conceptual framework accommodates an interaction between discarnate minds with those that are incarnate, not just in pathology but in the everyday experiences of normal healthy people. On the continuum of human experience SRT practitioners have encountered the influence of discarnate minds on the living at every level. Even those who have no belief in the transcendent or in spirits of any kind can have at their elbow a discarnate spirit that is attached to them for some reason or other, just as Jung commented in his memoirs *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (Jung, 1995, p. 339).

## **On-going Research**

There is a need, identified by Stobart (2006), to maintain statistical evidence on reported cases of suspected possession in ethnic groups, with particular emphasis on the protection of children. In support of Stobart, I would propose that information be collected on a much broader scale by medical, psychiatric and religious practitioners to report *all* cases of suspected possession in *all* communities, together with *all* cases of diagnosed dissociative disorders and possession trance syndrome. If such a data collection project could be initiated, it would be very interesting to reveal the results as to the incidence of reported cases according to beliefs and suspicions, with correlations on effective outcome measures.

I have identified gaps in modern scientific research in Chapter 4, into beliefs in psi phenomena. Specifically, the dimension of beliefs in possession is conspicuous by its absence in psychometrics tests. The recommendations suggested by Wiseman (2006) to test for the origins and attributions of beliefs would be a step in the right direction if applied to spirit possession. In Chapter 6 I referred to my own questioning of participants in stage hypnosis, with the comment that I am unaware of any formal research on the subjective experiences of such participants. Research in this area could provide further evidence to support Myers' model of mind and the hypothesis that consciousness can dissociate under varying circumstances. Research of this kind could also support my contention that stage hypnosis is a model for spirit possession. However, a project such as this (or indeed any other research project of this kind) would need to be conducted under rigorous methodologies in order to counter the possible bias of experimenter-effect.

The potential for future research into the influence of the spirit world on our daily lives is staggering. I did not use the subheading – *Bridging the gap between religious experience and scientific enquiry* – in the Introduction without good reason. Myers' scientific methods, supported by William James' philosophy of pragmatism (1907) and radical empiricism (1912) do bridge the gap. Medical science and religious exorcism fail to address all forms of

spirit possession. But SRT bridges the gap between these two dogmas with practical and compassionate methodologies that are grounded in knowledge gained through experience. Hence, how do we know what we think we know? By personal experience of interactions between an unseen realm and this physical world, and Myers provides the methods, theories and scientific framework to support that claim.

For the student of religious experience and theology questions remain regarding the teachings of institutionalised religion in relation to the experiences of mystics and prophets and the religious and spiritual experiences of ordinary people. What are the similarities in the theologies between the great world religions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism? Similarly are there consistencies and common factors in traditional religions such as Wicca, Paganism and Shamanism? We can extend this line of reasoning by asking the same question of Spiritualism, Spiritism, Christian Science, Scientology, and so-called New-Age spirituality in all its diversity. All of these questions can be viewed through the conceptual framework of Frederic Myers, which does not argue against religious teaching or healing rituals, but enhances our understanding of them. For the religious exorcist in particular, Myers' model of mind, which is reinforced and supported by the experiences of SRT practitioners and their patients, provides insights into layers of subtle spirit influences that demand attention. In addition to possession by the demonic; possession and attachment by the earthbound souls of the deceased are of primary importance, and the discernment process needs to explore the relationship between mental health, spiritual crisis and the possibility of earthbound spirit influence. Myers chose to bypass discussion on religious belief systems and preferred to test hypothesis that went beyond beliefs. In short, Myers proposed a scientific method that can address questions of theology, which is why William James supported Myers' views in his own *Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902).

If all areas of human behaviour can be researched with a new epistemological foundation then the possibilities for new discoveries are endless. For example; when people commit the heinous crimes of serial murder, rape and paedophilia we may pose the question: 'Are these people simply evil, are they mad, or are they possessed?' In all areas of emotional, mental and physical health we may pose the question: 'What external influences are at work here?' This question can be applied just as easily to the person who suffers from gender dysphoria, Tourette's syndrome, depression, anxiety and fear or anger for no apparent reason.

It is my own contention that research into psi phenomena and the nature of consciousness would profit more if Myers' conceptual framework were to be applied. When Myers presented his work he declared that a start had been made in the investigation into the nature of Man's soul, and we need not waste time on a fresh start (Myers, 1903, p. 1806). It is unfortunate that the start he made has not been followed through to the present day with specific regard to the phenomenon of spirit possession. However, the fortunate thing is that his legacy has been handed down and we have his knowledge at our disposal should we wish to use it – *ad infinitum*.

## Appendix A

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## Appendix C

### Spiritist Research in South America

Note: All of these references are links to web sites where the documents may be found.

[Médecine et spiritualité - Un Congrès redemandé](#)

Bulletin de liaison du Conseil Spirite Français

[Psycho Medicin](#)

Marlene Nobre / Júlio Peres

[Psychisch Krank Oder Nur Sensibel](#)

Dagobert Göbel

[Spirituelle Aspekte der Organtransplantation](#)

Joachim Hornung

[Neural correlates of a mystical experience in Carmelite nuns](#)

Mario Beauregard, Vincent Paquette

[Dissociative and Psychotic Experiences in Brazilian Spiritist Mediums](#)

Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Francisco Lotufo Neto, Bruce Greyson

[Utilisation de pratiques spirituelles en institution en faveur des porteurs de déficiences mentales](#)

Frederico Camelo Leão

[Altered States: transformations of perception, place, and performance](#)

Frederico Camelo Leão

[History of 'Spiritist madness' in Brazil](#)

Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Angélica A. Silva de Almeida, Francisco Lotufo Neto

[BOOK REVIEW - Is There Life After Death? An Examination of the Empirical Evidence, by David Lester](#)

Alexander Moreira-Almeida

[Spiritist Views of Mental Disorders in Brazil](#)

Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Francisco Lotufo Neto

[Uso de práticas espirituais em instituição para portadores de deficiência mental](#)

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