



Beyond the Body

An Investigation of
Out-of-the-Body Experiences

"If Out-of-the-Body Experiences
must be diligently dissected and
analysed, in quest of Explanation,
there can be few as well fitted for
this task as Susan Blackmore."

—*Irish Times*

**Susan J.
Blackmore**

With a New Postscript
by the Author



Published on behalf of the
Society for Psychical Research

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Beyond the Body

About one person in ten claims to have left his or her body at some time. Some were close to death; others had undergone an accident or shock; but these experiences can occur at any time and for no apparent reason. Occasionally people claim to have travelled to distant places, and even to have been seen there by others, in the course of their experiences.

Do we possess some sort of "double" or astral body, which is capable of an independent existence? And if so, what implications does this have for survival after death?

Dr Blackmore's explanation for Out-of-the-Body Experiences is based on historical and anecdotal material, surveys and laboratory experiments (including attempts to weigh the soul and photograph the spirit). **Beyond the Body** is a rigorous yet intensely readable piece of research.



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About the Author

Susan Blackmore was born in London in 1951. She graduated in physiology and psychology from the University of Oxford in 1973 and gained a PhD in Parapsychology at the University of Surrey in 1980. Her research interests include lucid dreams, near-death experiences and consciousness as well as all aspects of the paranormal.

Author of *The Adventures of a Parapsychologist* (Prometheus 1986), she has published numerous articles in scientific journals and magazines and regularly appears in radio and television programs about psychology and parapsychology. She is a member of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research and editor of their newsletter.

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1. Tunnel of Trees.
(From a drawing by Susan Blackmore.)



Susan J. Blackmore

BEYOND THE BODY

AN INVESTIGATION OF OUT-OF-THE-BODY EXPERIENCE

With a New Postscript by the Author

Published on behalf of the Society for Psychical Research



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To Tom

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THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

The Society for Psychical Research is the oldest learned society in this field. Its aim is to investigate apparently inexplicable phenomena scientifically. It organizes monthly lectures in London and other activities; it publishes a *Journal*, *Proceedings*, and *Newsletter*. An extensive library and archives are held at the Society's London headquarters where all enquiries, including membership, should be directed to:

The Society for Psychical Research
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Kensington
LONDON W8 6UG



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Foreword

Around the year 1873, Frederic Myers was to recall in his *Human Personality*, a small group of Cambridge friends came to the conclusion that neither religion nor materialism had provided satisfactory answers to questions that were puzzling them:

Our attitudes of mind were in some ways different; but to myself at least, it seemed that no adequate attempt had yet been made even to determine whether anything could be learnt as to the unseen world or no; for that if anything were knowable about such a world in such fashion that Science could adopt and maintain that knowledge, it must be discovered by no analysis of tradition, and by no manipulation of metaphysics, but simply by experiment and observation — simply by the application to phenomena within us and around us of precisely the same methods of deliberate, dispassionate exact inquiry which have built up our actual knowledge of the world which we can touch and see.

Along with his friends — chief among them Henry Sidgwick and Edmund Gurney—Myers became one of the founder members of the Society for Psychical Research, when it was formed in 1882 to put these ideas into practice, and this series is being published to mark the Society's centenary.

The phenomena of the 'unseen world' to which Myers referred were originally for convenience put into five main categories, each of which a committee was set up to investigate: telepathy, hypnotism, 'sensitives', apparitions and 'the various physical phenomena commonly called Spiritualistic'. Over the years the emphasis has to some extent shifted — in particular hypnotism, which at that time was dismissed as an occult delusion, was just about to be accepted as a reality, so it ceased to be on the psychic side of the fence. But broadly speaking, the phenomena under investigation are the same, and the ways in which they have been investigated have remained as Myers planned.

The terminology, however, has changed - and changed rather often, which has made for some confusion. Myers himself introduced

'telepathy', as 'thought reading' was ambiguous; it could refer to the way in which Sherlock Holmes picked up what was in Watson's mind by watching his expression. 'Supernormal', however, which Myers thought preferable to supernatural to describe the class of phenomena with which the Society would be dealing, has since itself been replaced by 'paranormal'; and 'parapsychology' has been easing out 'psychical research' - though some researchers prefer to restrict its use to laboratory-type work, leaving 'psychical' for research into spontaneous phenomena. 'Psi' has also come in as an all-purpose term to describe the forces involved, or to identify them - for example, in distinguishing a normal from a paranormal event.

If evidence were lacking for 'parascience' - as it might now more embracingly be described, because the emphasis of research has been shifting recently away from psychology to physics - it could be found in the composition of the Society, from its earliest beginnings. There can be few organizations which have attracted so distinguished a membership. Among physicists have been Sir William Crookes, Sir John Joseph Thomson, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett and two Lord Rayleighs - the third and fourth barons. Among the philosophers: Sidgwick himself, Henri Bergson, Ferdinand Schiller, L. P. Jacks, Hans Driesch, and C. D. Broad; among the psychologists: William James, William McDougall, Sigmund Freud, Walter Franklin Prince, Carl Jung and Gardner Murphy. And along with these have been many eminent figures in various fields: Charles Richet, a Nobel prizewinner in physiology; the Earl of Balfour, Prime Minister from 1902-6, and his brother Gerald, Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1895-6; Andrew Lang, polymath; Gilbert Murray, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford and drafter of the first Covenant of the League of Nations; his successor at Oxford, E. R. Dodds; Mrs Henry Sidgwick, Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge; Marie Curie; the Hon Mrs Alfred Lyttleton, Delegate to the League of Nations Assembly; Camille Flammarion, the astronomer, and F. J. M. Stratton, President of the Royal Astronomical Association; and Sir Alister Hardy, Professor of Zoology at Oxford.

Such a list, as Arthur Koestler pointed out in *The Roots of Coincidence*, ought to be sufficient to demonstrate that ESP research 'is not a playground for superstitious cranks'. On the contrary, the standards of research have in general been rigorous - far more rigorous, as psychologists have on occasion had to admit, than those of psychology. The reason that the results have not been accepted

is basically that they have not been acceptable: extra-sensory perception and psychokinesis have remained outside science's domain, in spite of the evidence. And although the prejudice against parapsychology has been breaking down, so that it is being admitted as an academic discipline in universities, it is still very far from securing a firm base in the academic world.

Sceptics have sedulously propagated the notion that psychical researchers believe in ESP, PK, apparitions, and so on because they long to believe, or need to believe. Anybody who has studied the Society's *Journals* and *Proceedings*, or attended its meetings, will testify that this is a ludicrous misconception. Many of the most assiduous and skilled researchers have originally been prompted by disbelief-by a desire, say to expose a medium as a fraud. It has to be remembered, too, that many, probably the great majority, of the members have been and still are desirous of showing that paranormal manifestations are *natural*, and can be explained scientifically - though admittedly not in the narrow terms of materialist science, which in any case the nuclear physicists have shown to be fallacious.

No: insofar as a Society containing such a diverse collection of individuals can be said to have a corporate identity, it could almost be described as sceptical; certainly as rational, as this series will show. Not, though, rationale. Unluckily rationalists, in their determination to purge society of its religious and occultist accretions, often failed to draw a distinction between superstitions and the observed phenomena which gave rise to them — which led them into such traps as refusing to accept the existence of meteorites, because of the association with Jove's thunderbolts; and to this day, they are prone to lapse into support for dogmas as rigid, and as ill-founded, as any of those of the Churches. If the series does nothing else, it will show how rationally — using that term in its proper sense - the writers have examined and presented the evidence.

The experience of leaving our bodies and paying a visit to some distant place is familiar; we do it endlessly in dreams, and in fantasies. But some people occasionally, and a few people quite often, have the impression that they really do leave their bodies; and they may bring back evidence of a kind which appears to confirm that they really have been 'out of the body'.

Belief in this phenomenon is of very long standing. In tribal com-

munities the shaman, witch doctor or medicine man was expected to be able to travel in this way: his ability to do so, in fact, was one of the main qualifications required for the job, as the tribe might need him to survey the locality to look for game (or for enemies), or to call on the forest gods to find out what they had in store. Explorers often returned to civilization with accounts of the way in which a shaman had gone into a trance for a time and then, on coming out of it, had described what he had seen in some other camp: his description sometimes tallying with the reality, as the explorer would later confirm.

In legend and in history, too, there are many reports of a similar nature. When the King of Syria found that his plans were being leaked to the Israelites, and suspected that they had planted a spy in his court, a servant told him that the spy was in fact the Prophet Elisha, who although he was in Israel was able to listen in to what was being said in the King's bedchamber, and report it to his masters.

Usually it was assumed that the soul, or spirit, leaves the body to go to its destination—wherever that may be. But occasionally individuals have been seen in two places at once - 'bilocation'. Perhaps the most celebrated example is the episode when Alfonso Liguori, founder of the Redemptorist Order, fell into a trance while celebrating mass at Amalfi; telling the congregation when he recovered that he had been at Pope Clement XIV's deathbed. His description was treated with levity, until, a few days later, those who had been with the Pope reported that Liguori had been there, and had led the prayers for the dying.

During the nineteenth century the investigators of the mesmeric trance state occasionally encountered subjects who, while under the influence, appeared to be able to go to wherever the mesmerist suggested, and describe what they saw there. Many cases of what came to be described as 'travelling clairvoyance' were reported, some well-attested. But did such people actually travel? Was simple clairvoyance the explanation? Or could the accounts be attributed to overheated imagination? With the spread of scepticism and materialism, orthodox scientists tended to dismiss the evidence as based on delusion, sometimes coupled with deception. Even the psychical researchers in the SPR in its early days themselves viewed travelling clairvoyance - indeed, clairvoyance of any kind, as distinct from telepathy - with suspicion.

Yet individual cases of what have since come to be known as

out-of-the-body experiences, or OBEs, continued to be reported; and recently they have been subjected to more sympathetic, though also more careful scrutiny. They appear' to be common - more common than has been generally realized. So numerous are the case histories that the existence of OBEs can no longer be seriously challenged. But the questions remain: can they be explained in terms of conventional psychology — put into a category like dreams, say, and hallucinations? Or must parapsychology be invoked?

There has been a tendency to think of OBEs as paranormal in themselves; but the fact that some of the people who have experienced them have seen something which has been happening in another place no more classifies OBEs as paranormal than the fact that some people have dreamed future events put dreams into the paranormal category. Susan Blackmore has cast a cool eye over the now abundant source material, and come to her own conclusions. Some members of the SPR will disagree with them; but they will, I am sure, concede that with her emphasis on objective research and her careful sifting of the evidence, her book is in the tradition started and fostered by the Society's founders.

Brian Inglis





I Introduction

An out-of-the-body experience (OBE) can initially be defined as an experience in which a person seems to perceive the world from a location outside his physical body. This sounds simple enough until one gives it a second look. Do we normally seem to perceive the world from inside our body and is this then an in-the-body experience? If we imagine a distant scene, or dream of flying over far places does that count as an OBE? Perhaps that would not be perceiving 'the world' but some imaginary world, but where is the line to be drawn between imagination and perception? I shall be raising a host of such questions in this book, and certainly more questions than answers, but perhaps the best place to begin is with an experience itself

I had intended to start this book with some fictitious example of an OBE, perhaps choosing one which would exhibit those characteristics which I wanted to illustrate most clearly. I toyed with different ideas, wanting the story to be instructive and yet not unbelievable, until I finally decided that it would be better to start, as I started, with my own experience. After all, it was that which first forced me to ask myself all those questions which this book will be about. And so, with an apology for egocentricity, I shall describe my own first OBE.

It happened over ten years ago, in my first term at university. I was already interested in psychical research and had tried to join the Oxford University Society for Psychical Research. However, I soon learned that there was only one surviving member and so with him I reinstated it and ran it for the next three years. In this first term I began to learn about theosophy, spiritualism, tarot cards, and the cabbala for the first time, and I read a little about the theory of 'astral projection'.

One night a small group of us had a ouija board session in my room in college. Four or five of us sat around a table with our fingers

on an upturned glass in the centre of a ring of letters: an activity I wouldn't recommend to anyone. Three hours of holding out one's arm, trying to communicate with unintelligent or obstreperous 'entities' and feeling responsible for the others in a tense and highly charged atmosphere is exhausting. By 10.30 I was feeling more like going to bed than on to a friend's room for a smoke. But I had previously promised to go and was looking forward to the hash, and a pleasant end to the evening. I decided I would just go for half an hour and so, with Kevin, I went up to Vicki's room.

As far as I can recall there was nothing unusual except that I was terribly tired. Vicki put some music on and made some coffee and I sat cross-legged on the floor. I rather dropped out of the conversation, feeling sleepy and wondering whether I could make the effort to go back to my room to bed. I had a little of the proffered hash, very much less than I was used to, and not feeling quite right I refused any more.

As I sat, listening to the music, the voices of my friends seemed a very long way away. If I thought about my own body it did not seem to be firmly on the hard floor but rather indistinct, as though surrounded by cotton wool. In my tiredness my mind seemed to follow the music into a scene of a tree-lined avenue. I was thundering along this road as though in a carriage drawn by several horses, only I was very close to the ground. Below and very close to me were leaves dropped by the autumn trees and strewn by the wheels and hooves. Above, and indeed all around, were the multicoloured leaves still on their branches. The whole was like a tree-lined tunnel and I was hurtling through it.

I might have forgotten this piece of pleasant day dreaming were it not for the fact that every so often one piece of the scene stood out in quite indescribable clarity. It seemed as real - no, *more* real - than it would have appeared had I looked at it with my eyes open. These glimpses were only brief, but quite startling.

Simultaneously with this experience I was aware of Vicki asking if I would like some coffee. Kevin answered, but I did not; and I noticed this fact as though it did not concern me. Vicki passed quite close to me and went out into the kitchen. It is to Kevin's credit that he both initiated and helped me with the next stage. Quite out of the blue, and I have no idea why, he asked, 'Sue, where are you?' This simple question baffled me. I thought; struggled to reply; saw

the road and leaves; tried to see my own body; and then did see it. There it was below me. The words came out: 'I'm on the ceiling.' With some surprise I watched the mouth — my mouth - down below, opening and closing and I marvelled at its control.

Kevin seemed quite calm at this pronouncement and proceeded to question me in more detail. What was it like up there? What could I see? What was 'I'? Trying to answer his questions took all my energy and concentration. There was no time for being frightened or even for contemplating what an odd state this was. I suspect that it was for this reason, and my extreme tiredness, that I did not immediately get alarmed and 'return'.

Again, as I formulated answers, the mouth below spoke. It seemed quite capable of saying what I wanted said, and I soon let it be and concentrated on the experience. From the ceiling I could apparently see the room quite clearly. I saw the desk, chairs, window, my friends and myself all from above. Then I saw a string or cord, silvery, faintly glowing and moving gently, running between the neck of my body below and the navel, or thereabouts, of a duplicate body above. I thought it would be fun to try to move it. I reached out a hand and immediately learned my first lesson. I needed no hand to move the cord, thinking it moved was sufficient. Also I could have two hands, any number of hands, or no hands at all, as I chose. And so I learned a little of how to act in this thought-responsive world. Much later I learned that I needed neither cord nor duplicate body, and when I realized this they evaporated.

With encouragement I moved out of the room, myself and my cord moving through the walls, another floor of rooms and the roof with ease. I clearly observed the red of the roofs and the row of chimneys before flying on to more distant places. What is now particularly interesting to me is that my inspection the next morning showed the roofs not to be red but grey; no chimneys were to be seen there; and I must have been mistaken about where I was, because I passed through an extra floor of rooms.

The details of my travels are less interesting. I visited Paris and New York and flew over South America., All these places were much as I might have imagined them and neither I nor the others thought to ask about details which I could not have known or guessed. Some points of interest do stand out, however. In the Mediterranean I visited 'a star-shaped island with 100 trees'. It seemed to me then, as now, that this island was more like somebody's *idea* of an island, than

an island as it would appear to a normal observer. I had fun sinking into the darkness of the trees and rising up like a large flat plate above them. I floated on the water, rocking with the uncomfortable motion of the waves, and struggled, unnecessarily, to climb a crumbling cliff. All the while the physical 'I' was describing these events, in excited and rapid monologue, interrupted by occasional questions from my two friends.

I returned to the room twice. Once I opened my eyes to see the time and check that all was well, but this required a great effort and I preferred to set off on my travels again. A second time I found myself back in the room without effort, but now all semblance of normality, which had been so clear at the start, was gone. My own body sat on the same floor but without a head. Yet this did not frighten me; I rushed inside the broken-off jagged neck to explore the hollow body. This was odd, because my knowledge of anatomy would have led me to expect something other than a hollow shell. Exploration of the fascinating interior led me to an entirely different kind of experience. I realized I was rather small to fit inside a part of my own body, and so I tried to imagine myself larger. This attempt overshot and I found myself steadily expanding, like something out of *Alice in Wonderland*. I encompassed, with lesser or greater difficulty, the building, the earth below and air above, the whole planet, the solar system and finally what I took to be the Universe, but even that, it seems to me, was the Universe as my limited understanding of cosmology would have it - though I may be wrong there.

I shall not describe this experience in any detail; I shall only say that, having achieved that size, I made a supreme effort with the aid of Kevin's encouragement, and saw that even here, at the limit of this universe, there was more. I glimpsed another place. This final stage I would describe rather as a religious than an out-of-the-body experience. From that place my little struggles were being kindly and laughingly watched, and I kept repeating to myself, 'however far you reach there's always something further'.

But I had to return. I had begun tired and now, after some two hours, I was exhausted. The process of returning took every last bit of energy I had. Not only did I have to shrink to normal size but I had to readjust to having a physical body. I had to coerce myself into remaining in one spot, looking from one angle only, and taking that heavy body with me wherever I went. This was not only a

slow but rather a disheartening process. Nevertheless, at length it was achieved. I felt more or less coincident with my body. I could again open my eyes and see the world that way without too much trouble, and I could move my body. By this time it was after 1.0 a.m. The whole experience had lasted nearly three hours and had been witnessed - or at least what I said had been - by two people. I had a sleepless night, but after two days of feeling decidedly unstable I returned to normal.

Needless to say this experience had a profound effect on me. Most important of all was that it forced me into asking many questions which received no easy answers. In fact after ten years of research these questions still do not receive an easy answer. But it is to them that this book is addressed.

So what are these questions? Those which occurred to me then are very different from those I would ask now. In common with many others who experience OBEs, I jumped to many hasty conclusions at the time. Immediately I thought, 'This shows that "I" can function without my physical body and see without my eyes. Surely then I can survive the death of that body. I have another immortal body; there is no death; I am not afraid to die anymore.' Such statements are common after spontaneous OBEs but they can be based more on emotion than reasoning.

A few days after my experience, as soon as I felt capable, I sat down to write an account of what had occurred so that I should not forget it. Logical thinking began to prevail, and I began to reassess those hasty conclusions. Firstly, I was not functioning *without* my physical body. I seemed to be in a different place from that body, but there is no doubt that it was functioning quite well. It may have been tired, but it was not dead. It was sitting up, moving and talking. It is therefore unjustified to conclude that such an experience could take place without a functioning body. Later I shall discuss cases of OBEs in which the physical body was either close to death or severely incapacitated; whether an OBE can occur when there is little or no brain activity is an interesting question. But clearly in my case, as in most others, the body and brain were quite capable of normal activity. Any conclusions about the independence of 'mind' or the survival of bodily death seem therefore to be quite unjustified.

The same can be said of the assumption that we have another body. Early in my experience the duplicate body seemed quite

substantial, but its later changes led me to conclude that it was a figment of my own imagination. I consider myself very fortunate to have had such a long and varied experience so that I was able to find out these things experientially. But in any case, considering this point objectively, it is clear that however 'real' the body, the cord, and so on appeared, they could always be imagined, and no amount of such experience constitutes evidence that we have a second body.

As for the ability to see without eyes, this raises perhaps the most interesting and difficult of questions. In what sense was I 'seeing' during this OBE? Did I 'see' the chimneys I had imagined were on the roof? If I had seen something that I did not know to be there, and had later checked that it was in fact as I saw it, my conclusions might be different. I shall be discussing such cases at length later on. But as far as my own experience was concerned I obtained no evidence whatsoever that I could 'see' anything without the use of my eyes.

What then was I seeing? What constitutes the OBE world? Some readers may be becoming impatient with my questioning. They may urge me to accept the self-evident: that we do have another body that can travel away from our physical bodies. But for them this question becomes all the more pressing. Where does it go? I find no easy answer here. Did I travel in the normal physical world? If so that world appeared most curiously distorted, and even incorrect. Was I then travelling in a thought-created world, as that star-shaped island with 100 trees might suggest; a sort of group thought-world? Some occult theories include such a concept. Or could it be that my imagination created the entire experience? Some psychological theories of the OBE prefer this account; but then, what of the many claims that during OBEs people have obtained information they could not possibly have acquired normally? How can these be accounted for?

Another question I would like to answer for my own benefit is *why* this happened at all. Was it in some way intended for me, as it seemed at the time; or was it simply a consequence of the tiredness, dabbling with the ouija board, or the effects of the drug? I had smoked considerable amounts of marijuana before that experience, and taken many other drugs, without ever experiencing anything remotely comparable. It therefore seems unlikely that the drug **alone could have** been responsible, although I think it may have

helped to maintain the experience, and keep me from becoming frightened. What then set it off? Indeed, what ordinarily sets off such experiences? Can one learn to have one at will? Finally, why did the experience take the form it did? Why the silver cord? Was it just because I had read a book about astral projection? Or is there some other reason for these features? I shall be tackling all these questions as well as I can in the course of this book.

A critical appraisal of my original conclusions led me, as you can see, to dismiss most of them as unwarranted, and put in their place a series of questions. One change did remain, however; the loss of the fear of death. As we shall see there is evidence that this sort of experience sometimes does precede death. If I had died in the midst of mine, whether or not death does mean total obliteration, I don't think I should have minded in the least. Since my own fear is my own subjective affair, I can say with some confidence that the experience reduced my fear of death.

Still, hasty conclusions are unwarranted. So what can be learned from looking at this, or any other example of an OBE? I am tempted first to ask, 'What happened?' 'What does it all mean?' But these, I fear, are questions unlikely to lead to satisfying answers. I shall formulate what I think are clearer questions, to which there is some prospect of finding answers.

For the sake of clarity, they may be divided into two categories. The first concerns the facts of the OBE; the second, explanations and theories. In the first:

1. Have other people had similar experiences; if so what were they like?
2. How common are they?
3. Who has them, and under what circumstances?
4. Can they be induced at will and controlled?
5. Do OBEs resemble other experiences such as dreams or hallucinations?
6. Is there evidence that people can see things they did not know about (i.e. that they can use ESP) during OBEs?
7. Is there evidence for the existence of a 'double' of any kind?

1. What theories have been put forward to account for the OBE and is any of them adequate?
2. How is the OBE best explained?

Of course each of these subsumes a host of others; but I am sure that if we could obtain even partial answers to some of them we should be in a better position to start asking the second, more awkward, type of question.

Although I have divided the questions like this into empirical and theoretical, the two are of course not clearly distinct. Facts can only be gathered within the context of theories; the reports of ordinary people may be heavily biased by the beliefs of the time or their own religious or philosophical outlook. And theories can only be tested and developed in relation to the facts as they are seen at the time. So each will of necessity have to be discussed in relation to the other.

Nevertheless there is some value in this distinction. Having gathered all the information available I can then ask the most difficult of questions. Is there any satisfactory way to account for the OBE? Personally, my aim is to be able to understand what happened in those few hours ten years ago. But I hope that my findings may be of some use to others. Many people have had similar experiences. Some may be worried or confused, want to share their experiences or to find out more. For this purpose many turn to the Society for Psychical Research for help. The SPR has been investigating these experiences, among others, for 100 years and should by now be equipped with some of the answers. In this book I shall survey what the SPR and others have learned in those 100 years.



2 Defining the OBE

One question is easy to answer. I was not alone in my experience. Many other people have been through similar experiences and it seems that OBEs can occur to anyone in almost any circumstances. Here is a very simple example taken from my own collection.

I crossed the road and went into a well-lit wood. My distant vision began to blur and within five or ten seconds I could only see a distance of a few feet, the rest was 'fog'.

Suddenly my sight cleared and I was looking at the back of myself and the dogs from a position eight or ten feet behind myself and about a foot higher than my height. My physical self had no sight or other senses and it was exactly as if I was simply walking along behind some-one, except that some-one was me . . .

I say this is an OBE because it fits the definition I gave earlier, but before I delve deeper into this definition and its implications I would like to consider some other phenomena which I would not call OBEs. For example there are popular tales of bilocation and traditions of doubles. There are mystical and religious experiences and drug-induced visions or 'flying'. Are these OBEs? And how can we be sure? One answer is to define the OBE as an *experience*; an experience in which one seems to perceive the world from a location outside the physical body. Accordingly if this experience does not occur then the phenomenon is not an OBE. But is this distinction appropriate and can it always be applied?

To try to answer some of these questions let us look at some of the related phenomena. Many of these involve doubles of various kinds. The idea that we all have a double seems to spring naturally out of an OBE. If you seem to be leaving your physical body and observing things from outside it then it seems natural to assume that, at least temporarily, you had a double. It also seems obvious that this double could see, hear, think and move.

This is not necessarily true. As Palmer has so carefully pointed out (110b) the *experience* of being out of the body is not equivalent to the *fact* of being out. Similarly the experience of having a double is not equivalent to the fact of there being a seeing, thinking, and moving double. Nevertheless, the whole idea of the double is intimately bound up with the OBE and one of the most important questions I shall be trying to answer is whether any kind of double does leave the body in an OBE.

The notion of the human double has a long and colourful history. Plato gave us an early version of the idea. Like many before and after him, he believed that what we see in this life is only a dim reflection of what the spirit could see if it were released from the physical. Imprisoned in a gross physical body, the spirit is restricted; separated from that body, it would be able to converse freely with the spirits of the departed, and see things more clearly. In the true earth, in *aither* rather than air, everything is clearer and brighter, healthier and happier. In this purer environment those liberated from their bodies live in bliss and see with true vision. Although this idea is at variance with all we knew of the psychology of vision, there are probably many who prefer to think this way today.

Another idea which can be traced to the Greeks is that we have a second body. Mead, a classical scholar writing in 1919 (90) traced the 'doctrine of the subtle body' as it runs through western tradition. Other bodies appear in many forms and there are versions with anything from one to seven, or even more, other bodies. If it is not the physical body which sees, but the spirit or some subtle body, then it seems to follow that the spirit would be able to see better without its body. Aristotle taught that it could leave the body and was capable of communication with the spirits and Plotinus held that all souls must be separable from their physical bodies.

Perhaps the most pervasive idea relating to other bodies is that on death we leave our physical body and take on some subtler or higher form. This notion has roots not only in Greek thought and in much of later philosophy, but also in many religious teachings. The ancient Egyptians described several other bodies, among them the *ba*, or soul, and the *Ka*, which was like the physical body and stayed near it at death.

Some Eastern religions include specific doctrine on the forms and abilities of other bodies and the nature of other worlds; and in Christianity there are references to a spiritual body. Some religious

works can be seen as preparing the soul for its transition at death, for example the *Bardo Thodol*, or *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (37) **and** the *Ars Moriendi*, on the art or craft of dying (23). Rogo (124a) has described relevant teachings in Tibetan Buddhism and others have considered related ideas in more depth, but I shall have to restrict myself to the ideas which are more directly relevant to the OBE.

One of these derives from the teachings of theosophy. Within a scheme involving several planes and several bodies, the OBE is interpreted as a projection of the 'astral body' from the physical body. Because it has been so influential, I shall discuss this in detail in the next chapter. For the moment I should just point out that, like all schemes involving doubles, it is just one way of interpreting the OBE.

The idea that we have a double also appears in popular mythology. The Norwegians tell tales of the *vardeger*, a duplicate of a person which may arrive at his destination before him. The Scottish *taslach* is also a kind of warning of the approach of the traveller, and may arrive at a house, knock on the door and be let in, all before the real version has got there. In Cumberland such apparitions of the living were called *swarths* and represented another self which goes with every person but can only be seen by those with 'second sight'. Then there are the old English *fetch*, and German *Doppelganger*, both doubles or wraiths of the living. Often these doubles have sinister overtones, or are associated with the darker side of man; that side portrayed so vividly in the stories of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, or of Dorian Gray. But usually they are supposed to be quite harmless.

These phenomena seem to be related to the OBE in that they involve a double, but there the resemblance ends. In the folk tales of fetches and wraiths the double is usually a kind of unconscious automaton, and its 'owner' need not know that it has been seen. For example if my fetch were to arrive at the pub before me I would not be aware of the fact. I might turn up later to find that it had already ordered a pint of beer and a packet of crisps and that the barman was waiting for his money. This is certainly not an OBE in any sense comparable to those already described. In OBEs the crucial characteristic is the experience of seeming to leave the body and it is the double which becomes the more real of the two. In contrast the wraith or fetch is but an empty shell.

The same contrast is found in the experience of autoscopy.

Aristotle told the story of a man called Antipheron who was going for a walk one day when he found himself confronted by a reflection of himself, coming towards him. Dostoyevsky writes, in 'The Double', of a man who found his own double sitting at his desk at work one day. The fact that almost everyone can appreciate the terror of such an experience indicates the potency of the story. But does it tap a deep and poorly understood truth, that we have a double, or does it reflect a very real fear, but one based on no corresponding duality? Such experiences, of seeing one's own double, have been called 'autoscopy', or autoscopic hallucinations. We shall meet them again in connection with psychopathology (see Chapter 15), but here again the double is not the 'real' or conscious person. It is seen as another self, but the original self still appears the most real. In the OBE it is the 'other' which seems most alive.

It is said that on Holy Thursday in 1226 Saint Anthony of Padua knelt to pray in the Church of St. Pierre du Queyrrix at Limoges, pulled his cowl over his head and at the same moment appeared at the other end of the town at another service (8a). Another well-known legend is that of Alphonsus Liguori, who blacked out when preparing to celebrate mass in 1774. When he arrived he told those present that he had been at the deathbed of Pope Clement XIV in Rome, four days journey away. The news later reached them not only that the Pope had died, but that those at his bedside had seen and talked to the saint, and joined as he led prayers (97b).

There are also more modern stories of bilocation. In the 1840s, a 32-year-old schoolteacher called Mademoiselle Emile Sagee, was sacked from her nineteenth post. The girls at the school had seen two Mile Sagees side by side at the blackboard, two at dinner, and two carrying on totally distinct activities around the school. When their parents began to remove their daughters from the school the directors chose to remove Mile Sagee (135).

More recently still, Osis and Haraldsson (104a) travelled to India to investigate claims that the swamis Sathya Sai Baba and Dadaji had appeared in two places at once. In one case Dadaji was alone in a prayer room while his followers sang in another room. When he emerged Dadaji told one of the ladies there to ask her sister-in-law in Calcutta whether he had been seen there. At that time the Mukherjee family had all seen Dadaji. He had appeared in their study, silently indicated that he wanted tea and the daughter of

the house had brought him tea and a biscuit. Later he had vanished from the room leaving the half-consumed food and drink, and a still burning cigarette. Of course the story was told some time after it happened, and like the earlier legends can be questioned. But a comparison with OBEs is interesting. It could be that the vision of the swami was hallucinatory, or brought about by ESP, it could have been 'staged' by the swami for his own reputation, or it could have coincided with an OBE on the part of Dadaji. The latter is the interpretation Osiris and Haraldsson prefer. But as we shall see, physical effects in OBEs are rare, and no other cups of tea have ever been claimed to be drunk by a person 'out of the body'.

Also related to OBEs are the phenomena of travelling clairvoyance, ESP projection, and the more recent 'remote viewing'. The older term 'travelling clairvoyance' was used to describe a form of clairvoyance in which a medium or sensitive seemed to observe a distant place. Several well-known clairvoyants were tested for this ability during the last century and a good deal of evidence was collected for the accuracy of what they saw (e.g. 42). A problem from our point of view is that 'travelling clairvoyance' seems to have included both OBEs and experiences in which the clairvoyant 'perceived' the distant scene (or even one in a different time) but without any experience of leaving the body. In both 'travelling clairvoyance' and 'ESP projection' the occurrence of ESP is presupposed, but the experience of leaving the body is not. Since I am concerned with the experience I have avoided using these terms wherever possible.

Remote viewing is a much more recent, and better defined term. It describes a technique developed by two scientists, Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff, at Stanford Research Institute in California (145). Typically a subject describes or draws his impressions while an 'outbound experimenter' visits one of several randomly selected remote locations. Later the descriptions and the locations are matched up, either by the subject or by an independent judge. It has been claimed that the descriptions are sometimes extremely accurate and in many studies most of the locations have been correctly matched with the descriptions, although there has been much controversy about some of the results (87). I mention remote viewing because it has often been compared with OBEs. Sometimes subjects who can have OBEs are used. Ingo Swann, about whom we shall hear a lot in later chapters, was a pioneer remote viewer. But very often

the subjects have no experience of seeming to be out of the body. Since I have chosen to define the OBE experientially most remote viewing would not count as an OBE and so for that reason I shall not discuss it in further detail.

So far we have been able to decide what constitutes an OBE by comparison with the definition, but this is harder in the case of other subjective experiences such as dreams. Many people have argued that the OBE itself is some kind of dream and involves no double other than an imaginary one. However, an ordinary dream does not have those important features of seeming to leave the body and being conscious of perceiving things as they occur. Even if you dream of being in some distant place you normally only recall this on waking and then immediately accept it as a dream. But what of lucid dreams? These are dreams in which the sleeper realizes, at the time, that he is dreaming. He may become perfectly conscious in the dream and the experience is then very much like an OBE. Perhaps it is the same thing. (This question is discussed in Chapter

H

It has been argued that the OBE is an hallucination, and any other body or double is likewise hallucinatory. There are in fact many similarities between some kinds of hallucination and some OBEs and I shall discuss this relationship later on.

Among other experiences difficult to disentangle from OBEs are a variety of religious and transcendental experiences. People may feel that they have grown very large or very small, becoming one with the Universe or God. Everything is seen in a new perspective, and may seem 'real' for the very first time. It is difficult to draw a line between a religious experience and an OBE and any line may seem artificial or arbitrary. One experience may grow out of the other and OBEs are often found in collections of religious experiences (e.g. 5). But usually, using the definition given, it is possible to decide whether a person seemed to be out of the body or not. Just what the relationship between these different experiences is will be left to a later chapter.

As you can see, the definition of the OBE as an *experience* allows one to rule out many phenomena from the start. It may not be a perfect definition but I have chosen to use it throughout this book. One of its major advantages, and the main reason why I prefer to use it, is that it does not imply any particular *interpretation* of the OBE. There may or may not be a double, something may or may

not leave the body; the definition presupposes none of these possibilities.

The consequences of this are important. First, since the OBE is an experience, then if someone says he has had an OBE we have to believe him. No proof that anything left the body is required. If a person has the experience of being out of the body then, by definition, he has had an OBE. Conceivably in the future we might find ways of measuring, or establish external criteria for, the OBE, but at the moment we can only take a person's word for it.

Another related consequence is that the OBE is not some kind of psychic phenomenon. As Palmer has explained (using a slightly different definition), 'the OBE is neither potentially nor actually a psychic phenomenon' (110b p. 19). This statement of his has often been misunderstood but what he says is a natural consequence of any experiential definition. A private experience can take any form you like. It can be unbelievably bizarre, but it cannot be paranormal or psychic; it is not that sort of thing. It is only in relation to other external circumstances that an experience becomes psychic, such as when a dream 'comes true'. This is very important for research on the OBE because we are not hampered by dealing with something defined as 'paranormal' or not explicable in normal terms. We are dealing with an *experience* and it may turn out to be one associated with ESP and paranormal events, but it may not. This is just one of the questions I hope to tackle in the course of this book, and starting with the definition given here is starting with a clean slate in this respect.

I hope I have now made it clear just what I mean by an OBE, and that this book will be about the many forms of that experience and the attempts to understand it. I am now going to plunge straight into one of the most pervasive attempts to explain the OBE: the doctrine of astral projection. So many experiences have been described within its framework that to understand them we need to understand 'astral projection'.



3 The Doctrine of Astral Projection

We have seen that the idea of the human double has a long history and is intimately bound up with the OBE. Superficially it may seem to explain the OBE to say that we all have a double and sometimes it can leave the physical body. However, as soon as this idea is pursued problems become obvious and the system has to get more complicated to deal with them. One of the most complex, and certainly the most influential, of such systems is the theory of astral projection, based on the teachings of theosophy. I shall describe this theory in some detail, not because I think it is either sound or helpful, but because it has so often been used to interpret OBEs.

In 1875 Madame Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society in New York, to study Eastern religions and science. From her teachings, brought back from her travels in India and elsewhere, a complex scheme evolved which includes descriptions of other levels of being and bodies beyond the physical. According to the Theosophists man is not just the product of his physical body, but is a complex creature consisting of many bodies, each finer and more subtle than the one 'below' it. As one of the chief exponents of theosophy, Annie Besant (6), insisted, the self or conscious man must be distinguished from the bodies which from time to time he inhabits. The bodies should be thought of as an outer garment which can be thrown off to reveal the true man within.

Although there are variations in the details, it is commonly claimed that there are seven great planes and seven corresponding bodies or vehicles. The grossest of all is the physical body, of flesh, with which we are all familiar, but there is supposed to be another body also described as physical and that is the etheric double. In some writings the astral body and etheric double are confused, but in the theosophical traditions they are clearly distinct. Etheric substance is seen as an extension of the physical: The lower physical consists of solids, liquids and gasses; and in addition there are four

grades of etheric matter. It is these which make up the etheric double, or vehicle of vitality, which acts as a kind of transmitter of energy, keeping the lower physical body in contact with the higher bodies. This etheric body is firmly attached to the physical, being only slightly larger and interpenetrating it. It is claimed that the two separate only rarely, for example in illness or when close to death, and after death the etheric becomes redundant and dissipates for good. It is sometimes said that the ghostly wraith seen in churchyards is nothing but the etheric double leaving its body.

When theosophy was developing and active, in the later part of the last century, there seemed to be some 'scientific' basis for this idea of the etheric world. Annie Besant tells us that wherever there is electricity there must be the ether. Much later in 1931 a book called *On the Edge of the Etheric* became immensely popular (38). In it Arthur Findlay claimed that the etheric worlds occupied those parts of the electromagnetic spectrum which were unknown and undetected by the science of the day. With the abandonment of the notion of the ether, and the increasing understanding of electromagnetism, these niches for the etheric world were lost. Nevertheless, Theosophists continue to discuss it, and say that it can be seen with only a slight extension of normal sight.

Next up the scale is supposed to be the astral world and its associated astral body. These are finer than their etheric counterparts and correspondingly harder to see. The astral world consists of astral matter, in seven grades; and all physical atoms have their astral envelopes, so that all physical objects have a replica in the astral. There is therefore a complete copy of everything in the astral world, but in addition there are things in the astral which have no counterpart in the physical. There are thought forms created by human thought, of many a colour and shape. There are elementals, given form by human thought, and animated by various desires or emotions and there are other such as the lowest of the dead, who have gone no further since they left the physical world (*see e.g.* 78). All these entities, and many others are used in ritual magic (*see e.g.* 24) and thought forms can be specially created to carry out tasks such as healing, carrying messages, or gaining information. •

The astral body is supposed by Theosophists to be the centre of all these senses, the seat of animal passions and desires, and a vehicle of consciousness. Current psychology holds that the senses are physical systems passing information to the brain which processes and makes

sense of it. No other sensing body is required. But according to Theosophists, the physical does not do any sensing itself, but only passes the energy on to higher, conscious levels. They also hold that the astral reflects any thoughts which impinge on it, either thoughts of that person or of another, and it is this which makes telepathy possible in the astral.

On this scheme, those who have the ability are supposed to be able to see the nature of a person's thoughts by changes in the colour and form of the astral body. All around the physical can be seen the bright and shining colours of the larger astral body, making up the astral aura. In an undeveloped person this aura is small and with a nebulous outline. In the highly developed or spiritual person it is larger and more definite. It is said that the aura of the Buddha or of Christ could fill the whole world. The colours of spirituality are clear blues; of intellectual development, yellows; while pride shows as bright red, selfishness and depression as various browns, and malice as black (67). All these colours are supposed to be visible in the astral aura, so showing the sensitive what kind of person he is looking at.

All this is of special relevance here because of the fact that the astral body is supposed to be able to separate from the physical and travel without it. Since the astral is the vehicle of consciousness it is this body which is aware, not the physical, although it does not always pass the memory of its travels on to the physical brain. It is said that in sleep the astral body leaves the sleeping body. In the undeveloped little memory is retained and the astral body is vague and its travels limited and directionless, but in the trained person the astral can be controlled, can travel great distances in sleep, and can even be projected from the physical body at will. It is this which is called astral projection.

In astral projection the consciousness can travel almost without limitation, but it travels in the astral world. It therefore sees not the physical objects, but their astral counterparts, and in addition the beings that live in the astral realms. Because of the effect of thought on the astral world it has been known as the 'world of illusion' or world of thoughts. The unwary traveller can become confused by the power of his own imaginings. In this state one can appear, as an apparition, to anyone who has the 'astral sight'. Indeed one can appear to others too, but to do so requires some involvement of lower matter, for example of etheric matter, as in ectoplasm.

An aspect of astral travelling which has become important in later writings, though it appears little in early theosophy, is the silver cord. It is held that in life the astral body is connected to its physical body by an infinitely elastic but strong cord, of a flowing and delicate silver colour. In spontaneous experiences of astral projection the traveller sometimes sees this cord stretching back to his body.

Traditionally the cord must remain connected or death will ensue. In the normal way as one approaches death, the astral gradually loosens itself, lifts up above the physical, and then the cord breaks to allow the higher bodies to leave. Death is thus seen as a form of permanent astral projection, and one in which the essential man survives and goes on to higher worlds.

Beyond the astral Theosophy distinguishes a further five levels. These include the mental or devachnic world, the buddhic, the nirvanic, and two others so far beyond our understanding that they are rarely described. The task of a true student of theosophy is to progress through all of these. In fact it is supposed to be the task of every man, through many incarnations, to do so. But here we are only concerned with the astral which provides one way of interpreting the OBE, and one which has been enormously influential.

Some people have seen references to astral projection in the Bible. For example Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus has been claimed as evidence that Jesus was able to project at will. Martin Israel has suggested that Ezekiel had frequent OBEs in which he was transported from Babylon to Jerusalem (67) and Leonhardt interpreted the story of Jacob's ladder, in which he saw a ladder to heaven with angels walking up and down, as an OBE (81). Perhaps more commonly interpreted in this way are Christ's ascent into heaven and the story of His resurrection; but most often cited of all are Paul's reference to a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15. 35-38) and this short passage from Ecclesiastes (12.6):

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

It is that reference to the silver cord which has led so many to conclude that Christianity supports the notion of astral projection, but they may well be mistaken. Michael Perry, Archdeacon of Durham (115), argues that the author of Ecclesiastes was simply

using poetic metaphors. The bowl was the skull and the cord the spine, or alternatively they could both be parts of the ornamental lamp, a figure of death. In any case it seems equally likely that it represented any of these things as that it is an 'astral cable' and there are no other references to this silver cord in the Bible. In my opinion none of the biblical stories gains by being stretched to fit the astral projection framework.

If the doctrine of astral projection is not particularly helpful in understanding the Bible, it can apparently be useful in interpreting otherwise strange experiences. Features of some OBEs which seem odd to the experiencer suddenly seem to make more sense if he learns about astral projection, and it is this which has contributed to its success. There are several cases in the SPR archives which fit well into this pattern.

Since the founding of the Society people have sent in accounts of experiences which they considered 'psychic' or just related in some way to psychical research. These include tales of apparitions and ghosts, telepathy and clairvoyance, premonitions and precognitive dreams, and, of course, OBEs. All these are carefully categorized, filed and catalogued, and are available for members to consult. In the section labelled 'Astral Projection' are many accounts of both spontaneous, and deliberate OBEs. Here is one which is not couched in the terms of theosophy, but which sounds like a classical astral projection. The subject, whom we may call Mr K., stressed that he had never seen or heard or read of anyone having an 'out-of-body experience' before he had his own. He only came to report this because he read, in the SPR Journal, an account of such an experience.

Mr K. was concerned about his wife who was ill. He was sitting on the side of her bed and says he doesn't recall how he got into bed, but:

... I remembered lying there and looking up. The ceiling seemed to disappear as also the roof and I clearly saw a star, or what appeared to be a star. Then, I can only describe this my own way, I was given psychic vision, for my spirit left my body, which I saw by my wife's in bed. I seemed to resemble the shape of a flame with a long silver thread attached to my Earth body. I enjoyed, what I can only liken to, the Peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Mr K. then goes on to describe how he was reassured that his wife would be all right and how, eventually, he returned to normal, the

cord being at one time very long, but finally very short. He felt quite sure that he must avoid breaking it. The next day his wife was better and he told her all about it. But it was not until he heard that others too had these experiences that he was prepared to talk about it.

The astral aura is often described as being like a flame, wider than the physical body; it can take a variety of shapes, oval, cylindrical or like a vague copy of the physical. But also, like a flame, it moves and looks alive, and shines with a soft light. The flame could then have been Mr K.'s astral body, or aura. The cord, too, finds its place in the scheme. What Mr K. says about his cord, the fact that it was silver, and stretched as he moved further away, all fits. Does this kind of account then confirm the reality of astral projection?

Many investigators have thought so. Among the best known are Muldoon and Carrington, and Crookall. Sylvan Muldoon was able to project at will and, described his experiences in *The Projection of the Astral Body* (97a) written in collaboration with the psychical researcher Hereward Carrington (see Chapter 4). Together these two collected many cases of spontaneous OBEs which they amassed as support for the reality of astral projection. Many years later Robert Crookall, in more systematic fashion, did much the same thing. But sometimes this approach can cloud the issue more than illuminate it. The features of the original experience can become lost in a welter of interpretation. And that interpretation need not necessarily be the only, or the best one.

It is obviously essential to disentangle the details of actual experiences, from the varied interpretations which can be placed on them. But it is not only the investigators who make this hard. Many of the people who report OBEs have found the notion of astral projection helpful, and describe their experiences in these terms. Here is one from the SPR archives. Ms F., as we shall call her, had many projections and here she describes one in which she attempted to visit a friend who was in hospital.

I left my body as soon as I fell asleep (or rather I should say without having fallen asleep). It must have been between 11.30 and 12. My faculties were absolutely clear as I left the house, and travelled across London. I travelled low, as I suppose the journey was so much shorter than those I have usually had to make, so that instead of rising to the Mental I travelled Astrally the whole way which is slower, and so low that I went through all the houses instead of over them ...

This narrator has given the level of travelling, and explained the low flight in these terms. Of course she may well have chosen a valid interception. Perhaps one does travel this way in the astral and higher in the mental plane. But it is hard to disentangle the outline of the experience and the interpretation placed on it in this, as in many other accounts. This makes it very difficult to find out just what the experience was like.

There are several serious problems with the theory of astral projection. I shall return to its theoretical difficulties later on but here I shall mention two more immediate problems. The first is that many OBEs simply do not fit well into the astral projection framework. Celia Green (49c) has collected many cases in which the person describes no astral body, indeed no other body at all. Some are a blob, some a point of light, and some nothing at all but only seem to be seeing from that position. Also very few people actually report any cord, let alone the traditional silver cord.

Of course this type of experience can be fitted in by saying that their astral vision was clouded, or the astral body or cord too fine to be seen, but this begins to weaken the theory. And this relates to the second problem, its 'stretchability'. The theory is so complicated and flexible that almost anything can be stretched to fit it. If you don't see the features you should, your astral vision is not clear enough, or memory was not passed on from higher levels. If you fail to make yourself visible to someone else then not enough etheric matter was involved and so on. In this way the 'theory' is in danger of explaining everything and nothing.

Bearing these problems in mind, and with some knowledge of what astral projection is all about, we can now go on to examine the evidence. There are accounts of habitual 'astral projectors', spontaneous OBEs, surveys, and experiments. Only when we have considered all these will it be possible to assess fairly whether the doctrine of astral projection is a useful and valid way of interpreting the OBE, or a fiction creating more confusion than clarity.



4 The Astral Travellers

Our first question has been partly answered already: other people have certainly had similar experiences. So now we may ask what those experiences are like. Are they all closely similar, or is there great variation between them?

Accounts by people who have had them fall, roughly speaking, into two categories. There are the many ordinary people to whom an OBE occurs just once, or a few times, and who have given an account of the experience; and there are a small number of people who claim to be able to project at will, and who have described a lifetime of OBEs. Two of them, Oliver Fox and Sylvan Muldoon, described their experiences mainly in terms of astral projection and I shall consider their stories first.

OLIVER FOX

Oliver Fox (44c) was born in 1885 and spent his childhood in northeast London progressing, as he puts it, 'from illness to illness' and often dreading sleep because of the nightmares it might bring. He saw apparitions both terrifying and pleasant; and he feared moments in which, when he was occupied in some normal activity, things would 'go wrong', leaving him feeling temporarily paralysed and with everything around him seeming to separate and stretch him. His early dreams are important because it was through dreaming that he first learned to project at will. His first control over his dreams came when as a child he used to see small blue or mauve vibrating circles, something like a mass of frogspawn. Either grinning faces would appear, presaging a nightmare, or little inkpots, saving him from one, and so he learned to call upon the inkpots to avoid the terror of a bad dream.

One night in the early summer of 1902, when Fox had started as a science student in Southampton, he dreamed that he was standing on the pavement outside his house. But there was something odd

about the pavement; the little rectangular stones of which it was composed all seemed to have changed position in the night, and were now parallel to the kerb. This mystery was solved when, in a flash of inspiration, he realized that although the sunny morning seemed as real as anything, he was dreaming. The moment that he realized it was a dream, the quality of everything changed: the house, trees, sea and sky all became vivid and alive, and the dreamer felt powerful and free; but it lasted only a moment before he awoke. This type of dream, which Fox was to have many more times, he called a 'dream of knowledge', because one has the knowledge that one is dreaming. Others have called them 'lucid dreams'. After this first exhilarating realization Fox went on to practise, and found how difficult it is to realize one is dreaming, but eventually he did learn to achieve this realization fairly frequently.

It was in one of these dreams that Fox found himself both walking along a beach on a sunny morning, and conscious of himself lying in bed. He struggled to remain on the beach, lost the 'dual consciousness', but gained a terrible pain in his head. He went on fighting the pain until he won. Then there was a 'click' in the head, and he was free. Along the beach he met people but they did not seem to be aware of him. Then he began to get frightened. What was the time, how long had he been there, and how was he supposed to get back? Was he dead? A fear of premature burial gripped him. He willed himself to wake up, there was the click again, and he was back. But he was paralysed. This was better than being away from the body, but it took some time before he managed, after a desperate struggle, to move one little finger and so break the trance and move again.

Although this experience was frightening, Fox's curiosity soon triumphed and he went on to experiment further, learning that the cataleptic state was more easily dispelled by falling asleep again and letting it break naturally. He found out that emotional involvement of any kind would terminate the dream of knowledge and discovered how difficult it is to read in a dream. For all that, he did apparently succeed in seeing two questions of an exam paper the day before he took it, although he did not care to repeat this somewhat immoral activity. Going on with his experiments he soon experienced a new phenomenon, the 'false awakening'. One night he awoke to find his room dark, but the atmosphere seemed 'strained' and a greenish glow was coming from a little cabinet beside his

bed. Only then did he 'really' wake up and realize he had only dreamt that he awoke. It was some time later that he learned that in the false awakening it is only necessary to try to move to find oneself projected.

Fox also tried some experiments with others. Two of his college friends shared his interest in theosophy and astrology and the three of them decided that they would try to meet on the Common in a dream. Two of them made it, both dreaming that they met the other, but that their third friend was absent. This seemed to be a successful test although it is impossible to be sure whether there was any reason for expecting that the third friend would not make it.

On another occasion one of these same friends determined to visit Fox one night. Fox awoke and saw his friend appear in an egg-shaped cloud of bluish-white light, with lights of other colours playing within it. This too seemed to be a success except for the fact that the friend recalled no matching experience. Fox concluded that he had seen a 'thought form' projected by his friend. This may or may not be an adequate explanation, but this kind of experience was often to be repeated. For example, much later in his life Fox often saw or spoke to his wife when projected but in the morning she would recall nothing of the meeting.

On one occasion, though, it was different. One of Fox's sweethearts, Elsie, disapproved of his experimentation, but was even more incensed at his suggestion that she was 'only a narrow-minded little ignoramus'. So she determined to prove herself by visiting him one night. He didn't take her boast in the least bit seriously but sure enough, that night he saw a large egg-shaped cloud and in the middle of it was Elsie with her hair loose and in a nightdress. He watched her as she ran her fingers along the edge of his desk but as he called her name she vanished. The next day she was able to tell him the layout of his room, and the details of some objects in it, although she had never been there, down to the gilt ridge running along the edge of the desk which Fox himself had not realized was there. This incident was important for Fox because he felt that it was one of the few occurrences which indicated something which was not purely subjective in his out-of-body adventures.

Most of his findings were purely subjective, however, and Fox felt that his critics dismissed them on those grounds. Later I shall question the importance of this distinction. It is my belief that most of what he, and others, have discovered about OBEs is purely

subjective, in the sense that it is private and involves only one person's experience, but that does not, to my mind, diminish its interest. But Fox was acutely conscious of the fact that he was trying to convince an unwilling audience of the reality of astral projection. For this reason any evidence that the experience could be shared, or information brought back, was crucial to him.

It was many years later that Fox made his next important discovery. He had assumed that a dream of knowledge was essential for projection, and that the trance condition came after projection, but one day as he was lying on a couch in the afternoon, he found that he could see with his eyes closed. He was in the trance condition although he had not been to sleep. He left his body, found himself in some beautiful countryside, and then passed quickly back through a horse and van in a street. After this Fox realized that he could project from waking, and proceeded, some time later, to experiment whenever he had an opportunity to lie down quietly by himself. In this way he learnt to use what he called the 'Pineal Door' method of projection (44a).

One interesting feature he points out is that when projected he could never see his physical body. This seems odd because one of the most common features of spontaneous OBEs is that the person sees his body as though from outside. But Fox had a rationale for this: he argued that if he was seeing the astral world when projected, then he should see the astral counterparts of physical objects rather than their physical or etheric aspects. Since his own astral body was projected he would not expect to see it without using some special extra power. After all, he was travelling in his astral body.

Thinking about this, it seems odd that other writers have not used the same argument. Certainly I have not come across any other projectors who have been unable to see their own physical bodies. Is there, then, something wrong with the traditional astral projection theory? Or can people see both astral and physical at once? I would guess not, for often things look slightly different, or even grossly different, when 'out of the body', and this is supposed to be because one is seeing the astral not the physical. One cannot have it both ways. It seems to me that this argument presents an interesting problem for the holders of the traditional view.

One day Fox decided to try the effect of chloroform, but it proved an unpleasant experiment. He seemed to shoot to the stars with a shining silver thread connecting his 'celestial self' with his

body. Throughout he maintained dual consciousness and as he spoke the words seemed to travel down the thread and were spoken by his body, but according to his companions all that he said was regrettably flippant. He did not try this method again. The reference to the thread, however, was one of the rare times when Fox mentioned anything which could be compared to the traditional silver cord. On another occasion he was walking, in his projected body, along a busy street when his feet began to feel heavy and he felt the tug of his body 'as though a mighty cord of stretched elastic, connecting my two bodies, had suddenly come into existence and overpowered me'. In many of his other projections he could also feel something like a cord, but he never saw it.

From 1913 to 1915 Fox made more projections. The places he visited were very varied, from familiar and ordinary street scenes to countryside of stunning beauty, or buildings unlike any ever built on earth. At times the conditions seemed to be those prevailing physically at the time; at others he found himself enjoying warm sunshine in the middle of the night, or blue skies when it was physically raining outside. These travels, he concluded, were on the astral plane, while others were of an earthly location. He forestalls criticism here with this comment, 'People who cannot forget or forgive poor Raymond's cigar will get very cross with me when I say that there are electric trams on the astral plane; but there *are* - unless there is no astral plane, and my trams run only in my brain' (44c p. 90).

This problem is very familiar. Many a spirit communicator has had to explain why it is that there are fields of flowers, houses, and even tax collectors, in the afterlife or 'summerland'. It always seems awkward. But if the astral is composed of thought forms it is natural that there should be trams. The question then arises whether the thought forms are objective - shared entities, as some would claim them to be - or purely private things. But I shall leave this difficult question for later.

Often an excursion was cut short because something arrested Fox's attention and he became too involved in it. Once he stood behind a beautiful girl watching her brush her auburn hair. As he reached out to touch her shoulder she started and he rushed back to his body. Another time he found himself in the trance condition and then was borne away to a country road where he walked along until he came to a horse grazing at the roadside: 'I stroked it and

could distinctly feel its warm, rather rough coat, but it did not seem aware of my presence. This, however, was a mistake; for it distracted my attention from the experiment, and my body called me back.'

Fox also notes that there are different ways of moving in the astral. He describes the difficult flapping of the arms or paddling with the hands which seems necessary in a dream of knowledge, and compares it with the movements caused by will alone which are possible in 'skrying' or 'rising through the planes': the clumsy dream movements might actually be unnecessary, he suggests, but useful as an aid to concentration. I think this is important. We shall come across many idiosyncrasies of the means of travel, methods of movement and ways of inducing experiences among the different experts, but from my limited experience I learned one important lesson. That is, it is easy to get trapped into a habit of thought, and to use familiar props, such as a body, a cord or illuminated world, to make things seem more reasonable. I think that just as Fox learned that his movements were unnecessary, so many others have failed to learn that many of the details they find in their travels are unnecessary.

Fox goes on to tell the novice how he might best learn to project for himself, but I shall leave these suggestions for Chapter 9. Fox first wrote articles about his experiences in the early 1920s (44a, b), just a few years before Sylvan Muldoon began writing.

SYLVAN MULDOON

By the mid 1920s Hereward Carrington had written many books about psychical research (17a-d) and had mentioned more than once the phenomenon of astral projection, but he mainly condensed the work of others and gave little information that would be of interest to someone who had a spontaneous OBE. Then in November 1927 he received a letter from a young American called Sylvan Muldoon, telling him in no uncertain terms what he thought of his book. Muldoon wrote, 'What puzzles me most is that you make the remark that M. Lancelin has told practically all that is known on the subject. Why, Mr Carrington, I have never read Lancelin's work, but if you have given the gist of it in your book, then I can write a book on the things that Lancelin does not know!' Muldoon went on to sketch a wealth of details about the astral world, the silver cord, and the formation and movement of the phantom. Naturally enough, Carrington's curiosity was aroused. He contacted Muldoon, and together they wrote two books. The first was *The Projection of*

the Astral Body (97a) and was mainly an account of Muldoon's own experiences. The second *The Phenomena of Astral Projection* (97b) contained a collection of cases to be discussed in Chapter 5.

Muldoon's first conscious projection occurred when he was 12 years old. He awoke in the middle of the night to find himself conscious, but not knowing where he was, and apparently unable to move, a condition he later called astral catalepsy. Gradually the sensation of floating took over, and then a rapid up-and-down vibration and a tremendous pressure in the back of his head. Out of this nightmare of sensations the boy's hearing gradually began to return and then his sight, by which he could see that he was floating in the room above his bed. Some force took hold of him and pulled him from horizontal to vertical. He saw his double lying quietly asleep on the bed, and between the two of them stretched an elastic-like cable which joined the back of the head of his conscious self, to a spot between the eyes of the body in bed, six feet or so away. Swaying and pulling against the cord Muldoon tried to walk to another room to wake someone, but found that he passed right through the door, and through the bodies of other sleepers too, when he tried to shake or clutch them. Frightened, he roamed around the house for what seemed like fifteen minutes, and then slowly the pull of the cord increased and he found himself being pulled back to his body. Everything went in reverse. He tipped back to horizontal, again became cataleptic, felt the same vibrations and then, with a jerk, dropped back into the body. He was awake and alive again.

Muldoon went on to experience hundreds more projections but he was not fully conscious in all of them from beginning to end as he was in the first one. This one is especially interesting because it included so many of the features which were to form a part of his later writings. First, there is the astral catalepsy. Physical catalepsy, says Muldoon, is a result of astral catalepsy. At the beginning of a projection the catalepsy lasts until the phantom has assumed a vertical position, whereupon it becomes free to move again. The appearance and effect of the cord, or cable, varies greatly according to Muldoon. When the astral is close to the physical the cord is about the diameter of a silver dollar, although its surrounding aura makes it look larger. When it is thick like this it exerts a powerful 'magnetic pull' and one is then in what Muldoon calls 'cord activity range'. In his experiments in projection he found that this range varies from about 8 feet to 15 feet, and this depends on physical

vitality. When the physical body is healthy the cord exerts the most effect and over the greatest range. Indeed, in many cases it makes projection impossible. When the body is weakened in some way the activity of the cord is correspondingly weaker and projection is easier and the cord activity range less. This is why illness or physical weakness, as well as fasting, are conducive to projection, leading up to that final projection - death. It is therefore significant that both Fox and Muldoon were often ill. When the astral body manages to pull away from the physical and out of cord activity range it becomes free to move at will, and the cord is then stretched to its thinnest, about the thickness of sewing thread. (Muldoon's scheme is illustrated in Plates 1-5.)

Once away from the physical the astral is supposed to have three moving speeds. At its slowest it simply walks, or moves as a physical body would. At the intermediate speed the projector feels still and everything passes backwards. Streaks of light thrown off by the astral body trail behind. Finally at supernormal speed the phantom can cover great distances without being aware of them, faster than the mind can imagine. Covering such distances one might think that the astral body could get lost, but Muldoon categorically denies this. While the cord is intact it can always pull the projector back.

It is Muldoon's contention that projection, at least partial projection, is commoner than most of us think. When we receive a shock or physical blow the astral may temporarily separate, and under anaesthesia it projects, although we usually do not recall the excursion. He even suggests that if the physical body is stopped suddenly, for example in a car, then the astral may continue for a moment, so leading to feelings of sickness. All kinds of odd feeling, fainting, breath-taking sensations, and jerks before falling asleep, are attributed to partial separation of the double. Most important, though, is projection during sleep. In natural sleep, claims Muldoon, the astral separates slightly to be replenished with 'cosmic energy'. Most of us do not realize this and remain unconscious throughout; but in falling, flying, and other special dreams we can experience just part of the astral body's night-time travels.

In his experiments Muldoon discovered many other features. Like Fox he found that emotional involvement in anything would terminate the projection. Sexual desire he found a negative factor, but some kinds of stress could help in inducing projection. When the body is immobilized in sleep, for example, if there is a strong desire

for something the astral may try to leave to get it. Similarly the breaking of a long-established habit can lead to projection. Muldoon related this to hauntings in which, he claims, the phantom may continue with accustomed routines.

Some of Muldoon's most interesting experiments are those in which he tries, in his astral body, to affect material objects. This is not easy. The reason, he explains, is that the astral body has a higher rate of vibration when it is far away from the physical, and the higher the rate of vibration, the less it can interact with objects of a low vibration rate. This is necessarily so, he claims, because if the astral body were not at this higher state of vibration it could never pass through material objects, and if it were always at the highest rate then other astral entities would not be able to pass through it on their travels, which clearly they can. This leads to the conclusion that the astral body gains higher vibrations as it moves further from the physical, and consequently it becomes less able to affect material objects.

In addition Muldoon argues that the conscious will cannot move objects in the astral, but only the subconscious, or crypto-conscious, mind. On one occasion when he was very ill he tried to call out to his mother but failed to wake her. Getting out of bed he crawled across the floor, but fainted, and only his astral body ascended the stairs. His consciousness then faded; but next he knew, he found his mother and small brother discussing excitedly how the mattress had lifted up and nearly thrown them out of bed. Although other explanations can be suggested, Muldoon attributes the effect to the crypto-conscious will. On another occasion he produced raps which were heard by others when he was dreaming of producing them; but on many occasions he failed to touch or move physical objects when projected.

One of the facts Muldoon stresses is the importance of thought in the astral. Thought holds up the astral body, for when it walks upon an upper floor, it is not the floor which holds it up (it could easily pass through that); it is habits of thought. In fact thought is everything in the astral world. Critics, he realized, would be worried by the clothes of the phantom. Why should the astral body wear earthly suits, pyjamas and dresses, as so many have reported? The answer, he explained, is that 'thought creates in the astral, and one *appears* to others as he *is* in mind. In fact, the whole astral world is governed by thought' (97a p. 46).

Many readers will find Muldoon's descriptions difficult to understand. He does not give simple descriptive accounts as Fox did. Instead every account is steeped in the theory which he so laboriously developed. Some of his findings, such as the power of thought in the astral world, and the methods of moving, are familiar from other accounts; but his detailed description of the cord and its activity range is quite idiosyncratic, as are his method and position of projecting.

Muldoon constantly adjures readers to try for themselves, perhaps the only way to learn many things about astral projection. But I am sure that most people who try it will find that only some of Muldoon's elaborate details fit their own experience. Above all we are beginning to see just how variable the OBE can be. Perhaps the most important discovery so far is that 'thought creates in the astral'. As one person's thought differs from another's, so we may expect his OBE to differ. In the next chapter we shall learn that three habitual travellers have described experiences that are different again.



5 Further Explorers

YRAM

Yram (159) is the pen name of a French occultist who, like Fox and Muldoon, learned to project at will. Unlike the others he '... became sated with ordinary phenomena. To pass through stone walls, to visit friends, to roam freely in space simply for the sake of enjoying this extraordinary state, are games of which one soon wearies.' Many of his descriptions are of experiences on 'higher planes' in which he met with other beings or powerful forces. These are couched in terms of his kind of physics: of other levels involving radio-active essences, ultra-sensitive atoms and differing rates of vibration.

Yram suggests that three things are necessary for astral projection: good health (the opposite of that suggested by Muldoon); psychological preparation, involving a peaceful life and the ability to relax; and psychical preparation. He distinguishes three kinds of projection. First there is projection by means of the sensory faculties. For this exercise the projector has to imagine passing through some kind of window, door, or space. Yram describes some unpleasant experiences using this method, a slap in the face, spiralling and being knocked over; but once you get out of the tight space, he claims, you are free and projected. This 'tight space' may be similar to the tunnels which are sometimes reported in spontaneous OBEs.

In the second type, instantaneous projection, the separation is sudden and uncontrolled. Yram describes an occasion on which he felt as though a trap door had suddenly opened beneath him and he was falling. 'My first impulse was automatically to make the same movements as would occur if this had happened to my physical body, I stretched out my arms and legs in the hope of gripping something, and started to cry out.' This resulted in his becoming conscious, and he found himself projected.

The third type of projection, by whirlwind, Yram describes as the 'most agreeable'. This is interesting because Muldoon and

Carrington (97b) suggest that it is the violent exteriorizations, for example with anaesthetics, which cause a spiral ascension; but perhaps the spiral and the whirlwind are not the same experience. In any case, Yram describes how he was carried from his body in a whirlwind, watched over by one of the many dogs which he saw during his experiences. These, he claimed, were images sent by the Friends who help with psychic experiments, and intended to inspire confidence!

Once projected there are many different levels one can inhabit. In the lowest, one is unable to pass through walls or other objects; to rise to a higher plane, one must go through some procedure such as that of imagining the door or passage again. On the higher levels, objects offer no resistance, and the lighting is brighter too. Even in the dark a soft phosphorescence illuminates the world and it is easy to find one's way about. On the different planes, one also inhabits different bodies. The higher, or less material, doubles are, according to Yram, far more 'radio-active' than the previous ones, and the atoms of which they consist are finer, less dense, and more sensitive (though to what I do not know).

At all levels of projection the physical body and the more subtle double are joined by the familiar cord. Its ability to stretch is said to be limitless and Yram says he has seen thousands of very fine elastic threads where it joins the double. Like Muldoon he found that the closer he came to the physical, the greater was the pull of the cord. The same principle, he states, applies to the distance in terms of levels of vibration; the higher the level of projection, the less pull is felt back to the body.

In his own room, or when walking about the streets, Yram moved as he would do in his physical body, but when projected into space he moved by thought alone. At first he did breast stroke, like swimming, then learned to move on his back pushing with his feet, and finally he floated horizontally, as some do in spontaneous OBEs. The position, according to Yram, is important. When threatened one should adopt a 'defense position', and one should never travel upside down.

In a final way of travelling Yram discovered that he could get to a desired place instantaneously, and this produced a consciousness of extreme clarity. He returned from his first trip of this type retaining the 'impression of the radio-active waves of this superior

state for a whole day', though one hopes that this was not radio-activity in the normal sense of the word.

This excursion had taken him to visit a friend who lived in an unknown and distant house. On returning he wrote an account of all he had seen there and, he says, received 'full confirmation' two months later. On other occasions he also claimed he was able to bring back information about distant places from his travels. After he had met a young woman three or four times in the flesh they became separated by several hundred miles, so he visited her by self-projection. It was in this state that the two became engaged, and Yram says that his fiancée was able to confirm the correctness of all the details he related to her. On another occasion he apparently obtained some correct details about a friend's room; but the friend retained no memory of the visit.

In many experiments Yram tried, as had Fox and Muldoon, to affect material objects while 'out of his body'. He set up light objects to be moved, flour into which to dip his astral fingers, and other tests. One night he placed a piece of paper on a chest-of-drawers. When out of his body he approached it but found to his consternation that there now seemed to be two pieces of paper. Undaunted he picked them both up and carried them to his bed, but when he had returned and written down everything that had happened, he found that the paper had not moved. Later he tried again, blowing on the paper, but still it remained firmly unmoved.

Most of Yram's experiments were concerned with things far removed from that mundane task of moving a piece of paper. He discusses at great length his discoveries of moral law, cause and effect, and other general principles. Some of these are very similar to those found in many branches of occultism. For example, he was once sitting talking with friends in some sort of astral drawing-room which they had all created for their use. Without being aware of it he let slip an 'unfortunate phrase'. Immediately he was tumbling from a height back to his physical body. In this way he learned that thoughts of a similar nature attract each other, and contrary thoughts repel. So to reach the highest planes one must have thoughts which are suitable to those planes. This idea is a form of that important principle in magic and occultism, 'Like attracts like'. Yram's means of dealing with difficult situations or evil powers are also similar to many found in occult training (see e.g. 24). He describes various types of thought form and lower entities which one might meet, and

how he dealt with them. Above all, he claims, moral purity is the safeguard and thought is the tool by which we can travel in the higher worlds.

Much of Yram's physics must be taken with a large pinch of salt. His descriptions of electricity and relativity make it clear that he is not using terms such as 'radioactivity', 'molecules', or 'vibration' in ways which would be understood by any physicist; and I cannot help wondering about the source of the drawing-rooms, and the helpful dogs. However, if his theories are looked on as a description of the nature of the mental world as he saw it they contain much of interest. Many of his findings are similar to those of occultists and of other astral projectors. His three ways of travelling are similar to Muldoon's although his methods of projection are different. His description of the cord is similar to many previous descriptions, and his insistence that it is hard to remember the experiences unless you record them straight away is also familiar. Gradually we may be able to piece together a picture of what is stable, and what ephemeral in these different explorations of self-projection.

J. H. M. WHITEMAN

For Yram out-of-body experiences are just part of a wider experience. The same is true for Whiteman, a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. In his book *The Mystical Life* (156b) he describes his vision of God as archetypal light, his practice of continuous recollection, his discovery of 'The Source' and higher Obedience, and other revelations leading him, after more than twenty years, to the 'higher Transformation'. It is within the context of this mystical development that Whiteman describes his out-of-body experiences.

In some sense the whole of the mystical experience takes place 'out of the body' - that is, in a non-physical world and using non-physical senses; but Whiteman distinguishes many different types of 'separation'. These vary in the degree to which consciousness is clear and rationality maintained, and in the extent of awareness and activity in the physical body. Of most relevance here are the experiences he calls 'full separation' These occur, when 'the physical body and its sense organs appear to be asleep or entranced while the subject himself is singly-conscious in another space and body, or multiply conscious in spaces other than the physical' (156a p. 240). Related experiences include dreams, 'fantasy separations' and 'half-

separation'. Crucial to the full separation is that the subject's consciousness is fully located apart from the physical while the power of rational reflection is maintained.

Whiteman also distinguishes psychological, psychical, and mystical states. The kind of experience depends on the state of the person undergoing it. Psychical states of separation appear far more 'real' than physical states, almost like being awake for the first time. The difference between psychical and mystical states is hard to explain, he admits, but easy to recognize when it happens.

Most of Whiteman's work concerns the different processes involved in separation and return. First there are experiences in which separation is induced by shock, drugs, or illness. Whiteman describes one that occurred when he was a boy of about 12. He was experimenting in his laboratory when he burnt himself with a piece of yellow phosphorus. He felt no pain but walked downstairs for his mother to dress the burn. As he watched her the room seemed to take on a glowing, dream-like quality; objects seemed to be more distant, and then first his hearing and then his sight disappeared. Feeling in his body then disappeared, from his feet upwards, and only when all feeling had gone did he realize he was standing and aware of the sound of some heavy object falling. Before realizing what was happening he found himself lying on the floor, ashamed at having fainted.

The second type of separation is that which begins from a dream. This was the most common method for Whiteman, as it had been for Oliver Fox. In the first experience of this type he became lucid in a dream and suddenly his perception seemed free and pinpointed. He thought, 'I have never been awake before.' The parallel with Fox's experience can be seen in content as well. In another separation he saw a wonderful building, a glowing palace or temple with stained glass windows and people moving up and down the steps. He was led to understand that this came from a joint memory of many human beings worked out over a long period of time. From this vision he was gradually brought back to the physical world, refreshed in both body and spirit.

Other separations were effected by passing through some sort of opening. On one occasion Whiteman saw a circular opening, within which was a vivid park scene. On others he could see his bedroom 'through the eyelids', seeing it clearly although his eyes were closed; then, he would pass through an opening in the ceiling or a wall.

Whiteman relates this method of passing through an opening to the phenomenon of tunnels.

A fourth type of separation can occur from a balanced state of dissociation. Under this heading Whiteman includes those occurring spontaneously when he was in a state of voluntary detachment, those induced by a wish on his part, or by calling forth Obedience. The latter, he claims, leads to a better quality experience. In one experience he left his physical body sleeping in bed and examined his bedroom, which bore only a superficial resemblance to the actual room. He avoided the mirror, in case it should lead him into fantasies, and approached the door, finding it had no handle. He then turned to the windows, trying to escape from the stuffy air, and passed out into the silence of the night. But there the experience ended and he returned to the body because, he thought, he had lacked higher reflection and obedience throughout the experience.

Whiteman describes states in yet further experiences in which he was conscious of more than one space at once. Although he does not say so this seems to be similar to the state of dual consciousness already described. In other experiences he seemed to participate in another person's personality and memory, finding himself aware of some scene simultaneously as though it were unknown and familiar. Finally in his last type he achieved separation through recognition of 'The Waters'. By this he means that there is a transitional stage in which everything appears shapeless and fluid. Often this state lapsed into a dream of flying or floating.

Whiteman also describes a variety of experiences with different processes of return. In some the two bodies gradually come into coincidence. Whiteman gives as an example an experience in which he was in a park or wood when he felt the physical world's call. The inner space began to melt away and in its place there formed a parallel world, like the physical but not identical. From there the other body was lowered into the physical and consciousness returned to the body.

An alternative kind of return involved dual consciousness of an inner world and of the physical world, one gradually supplanting the other. Many other authors have described both these methods of return to the physical. Whiteman also mentions false awakenings of two kinds. In the first he would return from a separation and seem to be back in the physical, only to find that he was still separated. In the other kind he seemed to return to a dissociated

state, but the bedroom turned out to be a strange one. Some of Whiteman's experiences ended because they lapsed into other sorts of experience, such as a dream or half-separation. Others ended symbolically with him seeming to return through sinking into earth or water; and in a final type he ended by being absorbed into some other entity.

Whiteman also describes the different forms taken in separation experiences. For example, in psychical separation the other body is like the physical but in mystical states higher forms of greater and greater beauty are manifested. Similarly the worlds seen and the light which illuminates them vary as the experience becomes more mystical. Whiteman does not describe many of the features which have so preoccupied other writers such as the silver cord, the different modes of travelling, or the physical objects and places apparently seen. Nor did he experiment with trying to move physical objects or travelling to unknown places to check whether the details seen were correct. In fact he specifically argues that the veridicality of the experiences, in physical terms, is far less important than their 'reality' in terms of that other world in which they take place.

The similarities between Whiteman's and others' findings imply that the same experiences are being described. Separation through shock, from dreaming, or through symbolic openings are all familiar, as is dual consciousness, and return through gradual merging. The clarity and vividness of the experience is a common feature, but the great difference lies in Whiteman's emphasis. For him every state is seen as a reflection of the nature of the inner mind or stage of mystical progress. It may be because of my own lack of mystical awareness, but I cannot help wondering whether the mystical life is really a necessary prelude to these experiences.

Many spontaneous OBEs in otherwise untrained people have mystical qualities about them. In my own OBE I experienced a state of unity with the world and a wonderful sense of joy, energy, and clarity. But I had had no mystical training or prior experience whatever. Whiteman emphasises the need for Obedience, arguing that it was Yram's use of effort which led to his unpleasant experiences, but Yram also describes joy and well-being in his experiences. Whiteman describes the distaste and shame which followed his attempts at induction by effort, but I wonder whether that shame stemmed from a sensitivity to a higher nature, or his own precon-

ceptions about how he ought to behave. I do not know, and can only express some doubts.

Perhaps we can only answer certain questions by experiencing these states for ourselves. And one thing is becoming clearer. If we did experience them they would certainly not be identical to any we have yet read about. No two people have described identical experiences, or identical progression through their experiences out of the body.

ROBERT MONROE

Robert Monroe was no mystic or magician, but an American businessman with a wife and children living in Virginia (93). Working in the field of communications, he had been experimenting with learning during sleep. One Sunday afternoon he was lying down while the family had gone to church. Suddenly a beam of light seemed to come out of the sky to the north, at about 30° to the horizontal. His body began to vibrate and he seemed powerless to move, as though held in a vice. These sensations lasted only a moment and stopped when he forced himself to move, but over the following six weeks the same thing happened altogether nine times. He always felt the shaking but could not see any actual movement, and it always stopped when he moved.

Very worried, he went to his doctor, but was told there was nothing wrong. Soon he decided to face up to the sensations instead of fighting them and found that he could stay calm and come to no harm. Then one night, when he had lain down to sleep they started again, but this time it happened that his arm was out of the bed, his fingers brushing the rug on the floor. As he began idly moving his fingers he found that they seemed to pass through the rug. Then they passed the floor and Monroe felt the rough surface of the ceiling below, with a triangular chip of wood, a bent nail, and some sawdust. Through the ceiling his arm emerged and then touched water. Only as he splashed his fingers in it did he become aware of what was happening. He yanked his arm back and the vibrations faded away.

Another time when the vibrations returned Monroe was thinking about going gliding when he found himself brushing against what seemed to be a familiar but strangely blank wall. With shock he realized he was bouncing against the ceiling, and there was 'he', down below in bed with his wife. Thinking he had died he dived

back into his body and opened his eyes. Mostly the experience was frightening, but with encouragement to try it again from a psychologist friend Monroe eventually plucked up courage, and began his long adventure in OBEs.

As Monroe progressed he learned how to induce the experience at will and how to move when out of his body. On several occasions, he claimed, he succeeded in visiting friends and was able to describe what they were doing, the place they were in, and even their clothes. He learned to differentiate among three different 'locales' to which he travelled. The first of these, Locale 1, corresponds more or less to the normal physical world. In it are people and places that correspond to people and places in the physical. It is in this locale that all the veridical information was gained. For instance on one occasion he attempted to visit a friend, Dr Bradshaw, and his wife. He knew that Bradshaw was ill in bed and intended to visit him in his bedroom, a room he had not seen before. He managed to get out of his body and set off over trees and up a hill. This uphill travel was hard until it seemed that someone lifted him under each arm and helped him on his way. Then he came upon Dr and Mrs Bradshaw, but was puzzled to find them outside their house. He floated around them and tried in vain to get their attention, and succeeded only to the extent that the husband said something to him. Later on that evening he rang the Bradshaws and learned that his friend had decided that a little fresh air might help and so had gone outside, at about the correct time, with his wife who was going out to the post office. He had also described their clothes fairly well, but most important was that the experience was not what Monroe had expected. This experience was important in proving to Monroe, if not to anyone else, that there was more than just hallucination in what was happening to him.

Of course not everything he saw on his trips was correct. In this particular incident Dr Bradshaw had not in fact spoken the words Monroe heard him say. On other occasions too he got details wrong, although he got many right. As with so many other OBEs, the details seen tended to be a mixture of right and wrong; enough right to make one feel that more than chance is involved, and enough wrong to be sure that the OBEer is not seeing a complete duplicate of the physical world at that time. An excellent example of this kind of mixture is provided by Charles Tart in his introduction to Monroe's book (146d). After completing a series of laboratory experi-

ments with Monroe (these are described in Chapter 18), Tart moved to California, and decided he would try an informal experiment. He telephoned Monroe one afternoon and told him that he and his wife would try to help him to have an OBE and come to their home, which he had never seen, some time that night. They gave him no further details. That evening Tart randomly selected a time which he thought would be well after Monroe had gone to sleep. This turned out to be 11.0 p.m. California time or 2.0 a.m. where Monroe lived. At 11.0 p.m. Tart and his wife began concentrating. They continued for half an hour, ignoring the phone which rang at 11.05 p.m. Next day Tart rang Monroe and asked for his independent account of what had happened.

One detail was an excellent match. It was Monroe who had rung at 11.05 p.m. He had taken an OB trip, assisted by someone who took him by the wrist and guided him. He then drifted down into a room and on returning he rang Tart to tell him. The time match had been good but Tart adds, 'on the other hand, his continuing description of what our home looked like and what my wife and I were doing was not good at all: he "perceived" too many people in the room, he "perceived" me doing things I didn't do, and his description of the room itself was quite vague' (146d p. 21).

This is a clear example of something we shall meet again and again: the frustrating mixture of right and wrong information. It is always tempting to feel that everything must either be right or not; that the person must either be 'out of his body' and therefore seeing things correctly, or not 'out' and seeing them wrongly. It is also tempting to think that if the details are correct this 'proves' he was 'out'. In fact, of course, there are many other reasons why the information might be correct without the person being 'out of the body'. These include chance, rational inference, and knowledge acquired both normally and paranormally. So producing the right information is no proof that the person was 'out'. On the other hand it is clear from the evidence so far (and much more will be adduced in the course of this book) that information gained in an OBE is rarely *all* correct. So what sort of theory of the OBE is needed. This is the sort of evidence we need to collect before we can start on the job of theorizing.

Monroe's next 'area' is Locale 2, another step away from ordinary reality. Here are heaven and hell, and all sorts of strange entities. Monroe explains that in Locale 2 "thought is the well-spring of

existence" . . . As you think, so you are'. His explanation that movement in this state is brought about by thought, not by any sort of physical effort, begins to sound familiar. Also familiar is the dictum 'like attracts like'. This, according to Monroe, accounts for much about the nature of travel in Locale 2. Your destination there depends on your innermost desires, not your conscious plans.

Locale 2 is supposed to be a world of thought, and quite separate from the physical, but it has many of the features of the physical. Entities living there, who were once in the physical world, recreate some of their familiar environment, or create for themselves things they liked before. In addition, Monroe speculates, higher entities may create a more familiar environment for the benefit of 'new-comers' arriving after death. He describes some areas as 'closer' to the physical and unpleasant to pass through, while the 'further' places are better. In traditional occult lore these would be referred to as the lower and higher astral planes. By long experimentation Monroe learned how to navigate them, and on the way he fought hostile creatures, willingly and unwillingly indulged in sexual adventures, and was guided by the 'Helpers'. It is to this Locale that Monroe believes all people may go sometimes during sleep.

Locale 3 Monroe discovered when he once turned over 180° (not physically of course) and found himself looking into a hole in an apparently limitless wall. In successive experiences he finally got through the hole and found a world in many respects like the normal physical world, but with strange differences. There were trees and houses, people and cities, but everything was a little different. There was no electricity, and although cars and machines existed they were quite different from any seen on earth. Monroe found that people there were unaware of him until he merged with another self living in that world. This swap seemed to be less than fair to the other 'him' for he disrupted his life on several crucial occasions by suddenly taking 'him' over, as it were, without warning.

Monroe gives a detailed description of the 'second body'. It has weight, is visible under certain conditions, produces a sensation of touch just like the physical touch, and yet it is very plastic and may adopt any form required of it. Possibly, suggests Monroe, the second body is a reversal of the physical. He even relates this to his ideas that it may consist of antimatter, although what he means is obscure. As for a cord, he tried feeling it on some of his excursions, but it was not an important part of his experience. Finally he

suggests that the second body is related in some important way to electricity and magnetism. In experiments in a Faraday cage he found that he could not pass through the walls when a current was passed through them, but when it was turned off he could (though sufficient details are not given to assess the explanation fairly). He suggests a 'third force' to add to electricity and magnetism which is used by the second body and fundamental to thought.

What can we make of Monroe's descriptions? As always it is hard to disentangle what he has discovered about locations others might visit, from the product of his own bias or preoccupations. Some of his descriptions sound familiar, but many seem only odd. In Locale 2 he describes how everyone lies down, abdomen arched upwards as some great being passes by, and there are strange vehicles running on principles unlike those on earth. Are these details part of an objective 'other world' or all a result of Monroe's own thoughts?

There is no obvious answer to this question. We can only take note of what all these adepts have to say and try to keep an open mind until we have put together more pieces of this intricate jig-saw puzzle. I have discussed here the accounts of just five habitual OBEers. Of course there are many more (e.g. 56, 80, 141, 151). Some never tell their stories publicly. Others have taken part in recent experiments and we shall meet these later on. But now we shall return to the experiences of more ordinary folk, to whom the OBE comes spontaneously, without their bidding. Over the years many collections of such cases have been made.

