

Seeing Myself

The New Science of Out-of-body
Experiences

Susan J. Blackmore



ROBINSON

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To everyone who has had an out-of-body experience
and not known what to make of it.



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A Note on the References

I have chosen to use an academic referencing system for this book. The way it works is that I put the author's name and year for each book or article I am writing about in parentheses. Then all the publications are listed in alphabetical order at the end of the book. By convention, a maximum of two authors are given in the text. If an article has more than two I insert *et al* which, in Latin, means 'and others'. All authors are shown in the list at the end unless there is a really huge number. The system I am using is the APA; American Psychological Association system. Following the main reference list is a list of websites that I have quoted from.

I am doing this because I hope the book may be useful to other OBE researchers in the future. When I read any science book I want to see immediately which research is being referred to. Sometimes, from the author and date, I know already and this helps me assess whether the discussion of it is correct. Sometimes I recognise the authors but don't know this particular paper. And sometimes I know that the work is new to me and I must look it up. Only then do I have to turn to the list at the back.

Many popular science books use end notes. Personally this drives me up the wall. I do not want to keep interrupting my reading to look at a confusing list at the back, especially when the notes are presented by chapter and I've forgotten which chapter I am currently reading! The other is that I sometimes want to check whether the book includes

a given piece of research and for that I need an alphabetical list, not one listed by order of appearance in the book.

If you are not familiar with this system I hope that once you've been reading for a while you'll get used to skipping straight over the names in parentheses and that this full referencing system will be helpful.

Acknowledgements

I could not have completed this book without the help of many friends and colleagues who have sent me images or copies of their work, explained difficult procedures or analyses, and answered my persistent questions. I would especially like to thank Carlos Alvarado, Jason Braithwaite and Ken Ring for their generous help, and my son, Jolyon Troscianko, for his delightful cartoons of the aura test and the rubber hand illusion. Thanks too to my agent, Donald Winchester, who has provided steady help and reassurance throughout. My husband, Adam Hart-Davis, has put up with me during my obsession with trying to understand the OBE, as well as helping in practical ways including acting as my editor, reading the entire book and providing invaluable suggestions. My thanks to you all.



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I was just nineteen when everything I thought I knew was overthrown and my life changed direction. If I had imagined a future in some sensible university job, that was now impossible for I was determined to understand what had happened to me. For just a couple of hours I was no longer confined to a slow, heavy, physical body but escaped through a tunnel into a world of flying, exploring the world from outside my body and finally entering the mystical experience of oneness, of unity with the universe.

How could an enthusiastic first-year student of psychology understand any of this? I couldn't. There was nothing in the narrow 1960s science we were learning at Oxford that had any bearing on such adventures. Indeed, our lecturers made it quite clear that we were not there to think about (or even mention) such woolly topics as the nature of mind or the meaning of consciousness, but to study measurable behaviour and only measurable behaviour. I had never heard of tunnel experiences, and the phrase 'near-death experience' (NDE) had not yet been invented. So I jumped to my own conclusions. I was sure that my spirit had left my body and would survive after death. I was convinced that telepathy and clairvoyance must be possible and that ghosts were real. From that day on I became determined to devote my life to parapsychology and to prove all my closed-minded lecturers wrong.

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I failed; of course I failed. The conclusions I had jumped to so quickly were ill-thought-out and superficial. But never mind. The vivid memories of those few hours kept driving me on. Nearly half a century later I can look back and see the way my intellectual life has been shaped, pushed and pulled by the experience, and how my spiritual life might never have even begun had I not found myself disappearing into selflessness without having a clue what that was.

So that failure has shaped the story of my life. I did become a parapsychologist, hunting for paranormal phenomena and failing, time and again, to find them (Blackmore, 1996). That repeated failure, over months and years of experimentation, drove me back again and again to my own experience, the memory of which I could never shake off, but nor could I induce it to happen again. At first, I tried to understand it by studying the occult, sitting with mediums, learning to read Tarot cards and training as a witch. I still have my beautiful crystal ball that I learned to peer into. I studied mystical theories of spirit separation and astral projection and found they led only to confusion and wild, untestable conjectures.

But if my spirit had not left my body then what had happened? Could there be a more down-to-earth explanation than astral projection? I soon discovered there was a more neutral term, 'out-of-body experience' or OBE. I studied what little academic research had been done on OBEs, and began to do my own experiments. Then I wrote my first book, *Beyond the Body* (1982), doing my best to find a psychological account of what I, and so many others, had experienced. But the science I needed was simply not there.

By that time there were just a few scientific studies mapping the nature, circumstances and details of spontaneous experiences (e.g. Green, 1968, Morris et al., 1978, Palmer, 1979). It was clear that OBEs were surprisingly common and were reported by people of many ages and cultures, regardless of sex, age or education. In 1975, the term 'near-death experience' (NDE) was coined by the American physician Raymond Moody and OBEs close to death were widely documented and widely taken as proof of a surviving spirit or soul. But what caused them still seemed utterly mysterious.

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Almost no one seemed to want to understand these experiences scientifically. Instead a popular movement began in which tales of guardian angels, surviving spirits and trips to a loosely Christian heaven captured the public's imagination and were taken as proof that consciousness survives death. As an increasingly sceptical parapsychologist I was invited on to numerous TV and radio shows, where a hundred people who had been to the other side were pitted against one 'materialist, reductionist, atheist, unspiritual sceptic' (me) to be a lone voice suggesting there might be better explanations.

Popular enthusiasm for such tales waxes and wanes. After relative calm, a new flood arrived in 2011 with the experiences of two doctors, Eben Alexander with *Proof of Heaven* and Mary Neal with *To Heaven and Back*, books which spent months on bestseller lists. Then came the book *Heaven Is for Real* that was turned into a popular film about a young boy's experiences. Once again their claims of heaven – an exclusively Christian heaven – were widely accepted at face value despite such peculiarities as spirit clothes and shoes, and heavenly cities, streets, trees and pets. Claims of survival make for bestselling books regardless of such tricky questions as which of my lovers might greet me at heaven's gate and whether my parents will be as deeply demented as they were when they died.

Several of us tried, back in the 1970s, to frame psychological theories without other worlds or travelling minds but with only a handful of us taking the experiences seriously, progress more or less fizzled out. Then, finally, with the turn of a new century, everything changed.

This is why I am writing this book. This is why, after so many years, I have come back to the first love of my working life, trying to understand what happened to me during those few hours in 1970. It is a great pleasure to see the details finally falling into place, even the strangest and most disturbing of them. It is a joy, after such long struggles, to come to accept the very different notion of a self and consciousness that emerges from this new understanding. So where else can I begin but with an account of what happened on the evening of Sunday 8 November 1970.

Bright and vivid memories

My memories of that night are curiously vivid, as people often say about their memories of NDEs, OBEs and mystical experiences. It is as though they have a brightness, immediacy and intensity of feeling that other old memories do not, and studies of NDE memories confirm this (Thonnard et al., 2013). But are they accurate? Are they reliable over such a long time? Possibly they are. Among NDE researchers, Bruce Greyson (2007a) contacted seventy-two of his surviving patients after two decades to find their accounts had hardly changed. Another team re-interviewed NDErs twice. After two years they could 'retell their experience almost exactly' and after eight years survivors still had clear memories (van Lommel et al., 2001).

Or could my memory be selective and distorted by wishful thinking? It was hard enough to make sense of what had happened immediately afterwards, and since then I have had a lifetime of strange experiences; spontaneous visions, drug-induced states and insights arising through long practice of meditation. Could I be mixing these memories together or twisting them to fit with my later experiences? Possibly, but I am encouraged by research showing that NDE memories behave more like memories of actual events than memories of imagined ones (Thonnard et al., 2013).

And I'm getting old. These memories now reside in an ageing brain and we know how unreliable even recent memories can be. We also know that when you tell and retell any story, what you remember is more often the latest version of what you said rather than any reliable details of events. This is often how false memories are formed (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995, French, 2003). So perhaps I still shouldn't rely too much on those glorious memories.

Happily, I have two other sources to go on. The first is my diary, which I began writing in 1964. I scribbled 'I love Paul' or 'I love Ringo' in the margins and every page was decorated with little pictures of beetles to enliven my boring accounts of the tedium and misery of life in a girls' boarding school. Descriptions of my first term at Oxford are far more exciting, full of challenging lectures and scary tutorials, music, painting, rehearsals and eclectic new friends. Even so, the entry

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for 8 November stands out. It begins: 'I have the most amazing thing to tell. Really the most fantastic thing that ever happened in my life. I went astral travelling. I was thousands of miles away – not in my body at all'.

The rest of that entry tells of a typical day, being exhausted from a previous late night while struggling with my work, having my new friend Kevin to supper in college and then hosting one of our regular séance evenings. I had met Kevin in Freshers' Week after I'd signed up to join, among other clubs, the Oxford University Society for Psychical Research (OUSPR). I had no deep interest in or knowledge of the subject, but having read a single book on psychic powers, I thought the idea rather exciting. Then Kevin turned up in my room one morning and said he was the only remaining member of the OUSPR from the previous year and asked whether I would like to join him in setting it up again. He was not only a second year but had long, dark, wavy hair, bright eyes and hippy clothes. I immediately agreed.

So this is how we ended up inviting mediums and psychics to give us lectures, running experiments to test for ESP (extrasensory perception), reading about astral projection and having regular sessions with a Ouija board in my college room. We wrote the letters of the alphabet on scraps of paper, along with the words 'Yes' and 'No' and the numerals 0–9, arranged them in a circle on a table and placed an upturned glass in the centre. Then we all placed one finger on the glass, half-closed our eyes and asked the spirits to appear. Typically the glass would soon start moving and, ever faster, spell out answers to our questions. We got terribly excited whenever a door creaked or a curtain moved with no sign of a breeze, but we were also sceptical and curious to find out the truth.

On one occasion we decided that spirits ought to be able to see through paper with no trouble so we turned all the pieces over and wrote numbers on the back. Then we recorded which numbers the glass pointed to and only at the very end turned over the papers and decoded the answers. The sequence they made, unlike all our attempts with visible letters, was total gibberish.

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As our society became increasingly popular I used to cycle around Oxford pinning handmade posters for all our events on college notice boards. Sometimes we even had too many participants to sit comfortably around one small table, so we used another student's room and used two or three tables simultaneously. In my diary for that day I wrote of our séance in barely legible writing:

The other room had a very light-hearted, fun one. Ours was terribly intense. Robin, Dugald, Brian, Kevin, Paul L... + I. We had some very dubious contacts and got a little scared! We packed it in and I was exhausted – absolutely exhausted and no-body would leave. Finally they left at 11.30, or 11.15 anyway. We 3, Kevin, Vicki and I went up to her room to smoke. I don't think I really got high at all. I started off seeing all these hallucinations. They thought maybe I was tripping I think and after I don't know how long I realised and Kevin realised that I was Astral travelling. The white shining cord was there and I went all over the world, and out of the world – or the universe etc. it was fantastic. I must write a whole thing on it, where I went etc. I won't do it now; if I do it at all I'll do it properly.

And so I did, at least as 'properly' as I could. Two days later, when I began to feel well enough to set my fingers to my little portable typewriter, I wrote a much fuller account. I still have the grubby original and it has also been online since 2001 when American parapsychologist, Charles Tart, asked me if he could post it on his 'Scientists' Transcendent Experiences' website. It is also on my own site but makes for an odd and tedious read, so I'm using that, my diary and my still vivid memories to write a more concise account. This seems like a rather selfish and indulgent thing to do – to drag up this old experience as though it were the most important thing in the world – but it was this, after all, that inspired my research. Explaining it, and other experiences like it, is really the whole point of this book. I'll try to keep it simple.

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Figure 1.1: Tunnel of trees. I drew this 'tunnel of trees' to try to convey the sense of moving through a tunnel that was made of autumn leaves all round – both on the trees and on the ground below.

One night in November

I was sitting cross-legged on the floor late one evening. Sleep deprived and tired after hours of holding out my arm on the Ouija board, my mind was already wandering when the hallucinations began. Unlike later events, these drifting visions didn't feel real, which means they should technically be called 'pseudo-hallucinations'. Music was playing on a portable record player, although I've forgotten what it was; probably Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin or Grateful Dead. Whatever it was, it turned into multi-coloured patterns pulsing with the rhythms, interspersed with incredibly sharp and detailed images of different places that came briefly and disappeared. Then a tunnel formed and I began rushing along it, accompanied by a thunderous noise as though I were a horse galloping down a tree-lined avenue towards a distant light.

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I wrote that all this lasted ‘ . . . for about half an hour – 12:00 to 12:30 – and then the transition came.’ So it’s clear that I immediately sensed the difference between what I took to be familiar drug effects and something quite new. My feet seemed to be far away and I sensed a wall of drifting whiteness passing right through me. What I saw with my eyes open ceased to make sense, so I closed them and kept them closed as I felt as though I was rising up to the ceiling and gently drifting about. I could still hear the music and the others talking but they seemed ever so far away, and when Vicki asked if I’d like some coffee I couldn’t reply. So she left the room.

Alone with Kevin, he asked me the strangest question, ‘Where are you, Sue?’ As I tried to work out where I was, everything suddenly cleared. I was near the ceiling and looking down. I could even watch myself – the body down below – reply. I seemed able both to control that lumpen body and to watch it as though it were someone else, and I continued speaking like this for most of the next three hours. I wrote, ‘I was somehow quite able to conceive of being in the two places at once, or rather to be in one place but to still have the knowledge and perception of the body in another.’ My vision now was nothing like those hallucinations of colour and shape or even the tunnel of leaves: it was real. Looking down from up there the scene felt as real, even more real, than looking out of my eyes had seemed all my life.

Soon I saw the silver cord, a shiny greyish-white thread, slowly bending and moving. The ‘me’ up there seemed to be made of a similar substance, only denser and more solid, and the cord stretched away from my tummy down to the neck of the body below. Everything in the room seemed clear and normal and, with Kevin’s encouragement, I set off to explore the world outside. I whizzed up through another room and out into the night sky. As I flew over the college roofs a tiny flicker of scepticism urged me to take a good look at the ancient gutters, downpipes and chimneys and then I was off.

Some of my travels are rather tedious to recount as I flew about for ages in what I took to be the astral planes – even then wondering whether this was the real physical world or some kind of mind-created astral version that looked like the physical world. But my

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encounter with an island in the Mediterranean stands out in my memory.

As I approached the island I could see its shape, which was almost star shaped with very sharp points, but the shape seemed to be changing all the time and pulsating with the music. I became even more excited and tried to tell the others what I was seeing as I got closer and closer. It was at this point that I discovered what was to be of such importance later on – that I could change shape at will. So far I had been aware that I could produce hands at will, but now I was able to lose my bodily shape altogether and become any shape I wanted. I stretched out over the island and watched it changing shape. Then from being a flat thin shape, I thought my way down in among the trees. For the first time I got a little scared as I thought the cord might get tangled up and broken in the trees: however I soon found that it could pass among or through the trees with no difficulty whatsoever and that I wouldn't have to worry about it at all. I was then again a little scared because it was all dark and . . . treacly, under the trees. Feelings of pleasure and displeasure were very exaggerated and the feeling of being in that thick darkness was intense. However as soon as I discovered that I could move up again at will, I lost the fear and was enjoying going into and out of trees. Another impression I had of the island was that it had one hundred trees. I was really excited by the funny idea of there being exactly that number.

Learning to control my shape and size meant that I could float flat on the surface of water, lie on sharp rocks, or leap up crumbling cliffs without touching them. And all the while I could still hear the music back in Vicki's room. This didn't seem odd, 'nor did it seem at all difficult to concentrate on so much at once.'

At one point I had the powerful impression that everyone below me on the ordinary earth was working terribly hard – that they were striving needlessly. This new world of thought seemed so much more real than the world of dragging bodies around and getting exhausted.

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I felt overwhelmingly sorry for them while also realising that I would have to work like that again one day. If I hadn't written this down I might have forgotten this little oddity because it seemed to have no significance at the time. Now I see it differently.

At times I grew frightened. When I dropped down among trees or between tall buildings the atmosphere was dank and dark; I feared I might never escape. Buffeted by waves, I thought I might drown. Yet I was gradually learning how to control my movements and escape anything I didn't like. There was a sense of effortlessness about all this: all I had to do was think of something or somewhere and I would be there. Yet there were oddities about this 'travelling by thought'. If I looked down, I moved upwards and if I looked up, I moved down. But to move horizontally I had to look where I wanted to go. For shorter distances I could just think about where I wanted to be and arrive there almost instantly or in short hops. For longer distances I flew way up high and at great speed with very little control.

On one such journey I arrived back in Oxford and said 'hello' to Vicki and Kevin, who were still there, patiently listening to my rantings. I briefly opened my eyes but the conflict with my inner vision was too great. Somewhat reassured that I could get back if I wanted to, I set off travelling again.

It was on the second return to my body that everything changed again. I could see Vicki, Kevin and the room quite clearly but when I looked at my own body, I was shocked. It was a strange brown colour and had a jagged edge around the neck where the head had been. Intrigued, I found myself landing on the edge like a fly, before slipping inside. All this, as far as I can remember, was great fun. I swooped about, exploring what seemed to be an empty shell, zooming up and down the legs and into the feet. I made so much noise that Vicki got angry and told me to shut up, whereupon I told her to take 'that body' away. By now I had lost any sense that this body was really mine or that I could control it.

I suppose it was the desire to get back to normal that led to me trying to get bigger, to fill up that empty shell and regain control. But this attempt failed spectacularly. Instead of growing to the right

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size and taking control of my body again I simply grew and grew, and kept on growing. I expanded out through the room and through my friends, through the building and the streets, through the underground places of Oxford, all of England, and ultimately the earth. I wrote that I 'had the wonderful experience of being able to look at the earth from being all round it', an ability I can only vaguely imagine in retrospect. And from there I just kept on expanding until there was nowhere to go. Expanding ever faster but going nowhere, I was simply everything that was, and nothing else existed.

It is hard to describe these final stages. They are, as so many mystics say, ineffable. But I can try to say something and hope that it isn't too much affected by other experiences that have happened since. Being everything was more like being a vast space than a collection of things – more like being everywhere and nowhere as an unknowable spaciousness in which everything happens but nothing happens. If that sounds odd, I can say that neither time nor space had their ordinary meanings any more. Things happened but they did not happen in any recognisable framework of time and location. It was as though everything were just as it should be and complete, yet still ever changing. I had the sense of knowing things or being taught things which I can now say nothing at all about. I had the sense that this was obviously how things should be even though I had never realised it before – a sense of rightness and peace; nothing to be done, nowhere to go.

By now Kevin was worried and started asking questions. What was I doing? Could I see anything else? What came next? They seemed silly questions – after all, this was 'it'. Yet somehow they changed everything. As I struggled to answer it seemed as though I was swimming up through some kind of white mist or cloud to gain the slightest glimpse of another world. Through this veil there seemed to be a great wide open plain and from all around I sensed that someone or something, or some kind of awareness was observing my pathetic little struggles with mild and kindly amusement. The words 'However far you go, there's always somewhere further,' echoed in my mind as the plain disappeared. And that was that.

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Exhausted, I could take no more. Vicki was longing for bed but there was no way I could just snap back to normal. With Kevin constantly urging me on, I struggled and struggled to get back inside the body. At first it seemed easy but as soon as I opened my eyes I seemed to shoot out of the body again and end up wherever I had been looking. Then I had to start again to get back in, try again, fail; try again. Corners presented a special challenge as I seemed unable to understand how three dimensions could meet in one place. I kept talking to myself, saying, 'Wherever you go you have to take the body with you.' Or, 'You can only be in one place at a time.' Then gradually, after about three quarters of an hour, I found this other 'me' was more or less coincident with my physical body and I carefully stood up.

The room looked very strange and so did my friends. So did my own body. Looking down at myself, I could still see the whitish stuff I had been made of. It was more or less coincident with my body but not quite and still slightly moving. Round the others was a similar pale glow, as though they too had another body or a living aura. And further out than that was another body that I could feel with my hands but not see. Around Kevin it stretched a long way; around Vicki, rather less. Was this the occultists' aura that psychics could see and ordinary people could not? Had my third eye been opened? I played around with these sensations for some time before cautiously taking a few steps and setting off back to my own room. Vicki was greatly relieved.

Kevin said it would be dangerous to go to sleep because my astral body might leave again and be unable to return so he kept me awake until well into the next morning. I did finally sleep and as far as I know my astral body did nothing of the kind. But I felt very weird indeed. As I cycled around Oxford I seemed to be watching myself from one side and almost fell off my bike. In a tutorial two days later my rather strict tutor told me to pull myself together and pay attention. As I recorded in my diary, she said, 'You seem to be floating off on a cloud somewhere,' and I blurted out, 'I am!' and then felt I had to give some kind of explanation. She seemed genuinely interested, so I told

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her more or less all about it, until eventually she said we were rather stupid to be messing around with drugs at such an unstable age.

So that was the experience that changed my life. That was the experience whose memory kept nudging me for decades to come; reminding me that I didn't understand; making me dissatisfied with our scientific understanding of the world and the mind. That was the experience that kept me asking questions and more questions. It still does.

First questions

Had I really travelled on the astral planes, I wanted to know. And what was the relationship between this astral world and the actual physical world I could see with my real eyes?

The next morning I went out enthusiastically to inspect the roofs and gutters and chimneys. I was shocked: the gutters were not the old-fashioned iron ones I had seen from above but modern plastic, and there were no chimneys at all. I cursed myself that I hadn't thought to look into rooms where I had never been so that I could check what they looked like. I was furious with myself for not having had the presence of mind to ask Kevin or Vicki to try ESP tests; to hide cards or numbers or anything at all in the next room or out in the corridor to test my psychic vision. Instead I had stupidly gone flitting off across the oceans to see distant cities that I could never check. I was angry that I'd not once thought to ask them to find a tape recorder and record what I said.

How I'd like that now. And we did have such things: as well as my Dansette record player, that could stack six LPs one above the other and play them with a scratchy needle, I had a small Philips cassette recorder, the latest technology from the 1960s. But no one thought to use it that night. So I checked what little I could around college and found it most frustrating. Much of what I had seen was exactly right while some small details were wrong. And there were other anomalies too. I remembered having passed up through another room above Vicki's as I would have had to do from my own ground-floor room. But Vicki's room was on the top floor, with no other room above it. I remembered it all so clearly yet I was wrong.

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Yes, I was disappointed, but somehow I accepted these discrepancies. The vividness and clarity of the experience and my powerful memories of flying free meant I could not believe this was all hallucinated. There had to be some other explanation. Perhaps psychic powers work in strange ways; perhaps the astral world is made of other people's thought forms that go on existing without them; perhaps psychics can pick up on thoughts created by others and so see the world as others see it. In this case there might really be a kind of telepathy but it would not be perfect, as I knew it was not. Seeing others' thoughts would always mean extracting them from the jumble of endless thought forms in the astral world. Clairvoyance would not be perfect either as it is thoughts that are seen, not physical objects.

And so I brushed off the many little anomalies and went on running the OUSPR for the rest of my three years at Oxford, reading more and more about psychics and occultism, Jung's theory of synchronicity, Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy and the idea of the Akashic records that store everything that ever happens. I studied the evidence for survival after death in the classics of early psychical research like *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (Myers, 1903) and *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney et al., 1886). I studied the work of modern parapsychologists J. B. and Louisa Rhine, who invented the field of parapsychology and coined the phrase 'extrasensory perception' (Rhine, 1935). When offered the chance to do a PhD at Surrey University, I began another such society and invited more students to join Ouija board sessions, Tarot reading evenings, crystal gazing, table tipping, metal bending and other such fun pursuits. And all the time I was trying to work out how seeing the astral worlds could fit with science.

Mind beyond the brain?

My best idea, and the foundation for my PhD, was my very own 'memory theory of ESP'. It looks completely implausible now we know the basics of how memory depends on neural networks, dendritic growth and changes to synapse strengths, but I like to think it was at least a little more plausible back in the 1970s.

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My idea was that memory is not stored in the brain at all but in some kind of psychic field potentially accessible to everyone; memory would then turn out to be a special form of the more general process of ESP. We find it easier to remember what happened to us because our brains now are more similar to our own brains in the past than they are to other people's brains, and similarity is what counts. This is why memory is easier and more accurate than ESP, even though they are essentially the same process. This is also why twins and close friends or lovers are better at ESP than unrelated people. It might even be why so many ESP experiments fail to find any effects and why the astral plane is not identical to the physical world.

I set to work with great enthusiasm, and some initial success, but my optimism and self-confidence were soon knocked by reality. As I delved into more reading, I discovered that my great theory was far from original. Lots of people had explored similar ideas before me. There was Henri Bergson's (1896) idea that the brain is more like a filter than a memory store; H. H. Price's (1939) 'psychic ether hypothesis' accounting for hauntings, Whateley Carington's (1945) 'psychons' that are created by thought but not confined to the person who created them; and William Roll's (1966) 'psi field theory'. And I wasn't the last: Rupert Sheldrake's (1981) highly popular 'morphic resonance theory' is yet another example and we'll meet several more new ones in the murky world of NDE research. But they all face enormous theoretical difficulties, not least in determining their physical basis and finding ways to test them.

Then there was my own evidence, or rather the lack of it. My PhD research focused on the similarities between memory and ESP but when, year after year after year, I failed to find any ESP, I could not even test for this comparison (Blackmore, 1980a, 1980b, 1981a). I sub-mitted my thesis, *Extrasensory Perception as a Cognitive Process*, in 1979 (Blackmore, 1980c). It described nearly thirty experiments which provided no evidence whatsoever for ESP and no solutions to the dilemmas presented by psychic claims. Of ESP, it concluded 'that which appeared so difficult may not after all exist' (p.350). In other words I had neither proved nor disproved anything, had made no

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progress at all with my theory, and still had no idea how to explain my experience.

But I did know something: I could still remember vividly the sensations of flying above the world, of leaving my heavy body behind, of being light and flexible and moving by thought alone, of ceasing to be separate from the universe. I had thought I could understand this by devoting myself to parapsychology but I was wrong. Parapsychology had, after all, proved to be a red herring (Blackmore, 1986a). I was left with my memories and even more unanswered questions.