

CONSCIOUSNESS BEYOND THE BODY

EVIDENCE AND REFLECTIONS

ALEXANDER DE FOE

EDITOR



CONSCIOUSNESS BEYOND THE BODY: EVIDENCE AND REFLECTIONS

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"This remarkable book serves as a metaphor for the current status of this enigmatic field – the efforts of psi researchers to transcend and expand mainstream understandings of living systems. 'Consciousness Beyond the Body' is unlike anything I have read in the parapsychological literature and it is especially needed in order to understand the 'how' and 'why' of OBEs."

– Professor Alejandro Parra, Ph.D., Faculty of Psychology, Universidad Abierta Interamericana

"It is a rare pleasure to read a book on the out-of-body state from a variety of different perspectives by experts in the field. 'Consciousness Beyond the Body' not only shows how collaboration between renowned authors is possible, it also provides an exciting glimpse at what such a collaboration can accomplish. From theory to practice and controversies, 'Consciousness Beyond the Body' provides a rich and up-to-date account of out-of-body states. Anyone with an interest in these mystifying, yet universal experiences, will find this book of great value. I highly recommend it!"

– Frederick Aardema, Ph.D., Research Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Montreal

"Having spent a considerable amount of my time personally researching the OBE studies of Karlis Osis and Alex Tanous, I can thoroughly appreciate the depths and complexities of studying such phenomena. The evidence on the whole suggests that perhaps these experiences are not purely internal processes. While in an OBE, in some cases, it appears that information is obtained by some aspect of consciousness leaving the body – information of which the percipient would not have otherwise known about by using conventional sensory means. 'Consciousness Beyond the Body' is a welcomed anthology of varying contemporary research on the out-of-body state and first hand experiences, which I believe will be great use to scholars and students of today."

– Callum E. Cooper, Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes, University of Northampton

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**OPENING REMARKS, NATASHA TASSELL-
MATAMUA**

About one year ago, I wrote a piece about near-death experiences (NDEs) and their profound implications, for a popular media website. The responses to the piece couldn't have been more polarised. I received a barrage of criticism about how NDEs were not real, how 'real' researchers wouldn't even entertain studying such an area, and how such research is an embarrassment to the scientific establishment. Thankfully, the critiques were balanced by some very supportive responses, many by people who had had NDEs or who knew someone who had one. Others were from academics, researchers, and health practitioners congratulating me on being 'brave' enough to do research into NDEs, and how in and of themselves NDEs are an important area of research with multi-disciplinary implications. Alexander De Foe – the editor of this book and author of Chapter 12, was one of those positive respondents. Since that time, I have become familiar with Alex's research into out-of-body experiences (OBEs), and as a result, have been fortunate to expand my knowledge and understanding of these phenomena.

I first became acquainted with the concept of OBEs as a result of my research into NDEs. NDEs are profoundly transformative, subjective, psychological occurrences that involve the transcendence of spatiotemporal boundaries, and typically occur in those who have experienced a close brush with death. OBEs are a commonly reported aspect of NDEs. As stated in Chapter 1 of this book, a defining feature of the OBE is the sensation that one, or at least one's conscious perception, has floated away from one's body. That is, somehow a person is able to have complex and often very lucid perceptual awareness, from a position that feels external to the physical body.

Within the context of an NDE, the individual having the OBE might report watching resuscitation efforts or surgical procedures being performed on their physical self. A particularly compelling and well-known example is that of Pam Reynolds, who reported having an OBE during surgery to remove a giant basilar artery aneurysm from her brain. She later recalled with accuracy, details of the surgical tools used during her surgery, as well as other specifics of the surgical procedure and conversations between the medical staff – all of which occurred at a time when her brain was verifiably impaired and non-functional (i.e., there was no EEG activity). Others have accurately recounted the location of personal items misplaced by medical staff while they were unconscious. Renowned Dutch cardiologist, Dr Pim van Lommel, recounts in his seminal study of NDEs in survivors of cardiac arrest in the Netherlands, the case of a patient who had his dentures removed while in coma, so he could be intubated. A week later, once the patient was stable and able to talk, he came across the nurse, indicating he had watched him remove his dentures and place them in a 'crash cart'. The dentures were subsequently found in the location explained by the patient, much to the dismay of the nurse who recalls the patient was in a precarious comatose state, and could not possibly have conscious awareness of the dentures being removed, let alone where they were placed. Still others have suggested the ability to perceive sight and sound from a disembodied position. An intriguing example was recently reported by Dr Sam Parnia as a result of the AWARE study (mentioned in Chapter 7). The patient, a 57-year-old man who had suffered ventricular fibrillation, described witnessing resuscitation efforts on his physical body from a position of awareness located in the corner of the room. He later recalled hearing a noise during his OBE – the same noise produced by a

machine three minutes into the patient's cardiac arrest! His medical records corroborated his recollection as an accurate representation of the events and sounds that occurred during his resuscitation.

Of course, not all OBEs happen within the context of NDEs, but rather can occur across a range of non-life-threatening situations. While NDEs are reported by about 10-20% of survivors of cardiac arrest, OBEs without NDE appear to be much more common, with studies indicating high incidence rates across a range of different populations and cultures, as noted in Chapter 1. Not only do they appear to occur relatively frequently, OBEs may have a common catalyst, and can be either induced or spontaneous. Because the authors of this book all have experiential knowledge of OBEs – that is, they have all had an OBE (most have had many more) – they are in a position to speak directly to the phenomenology of such experiences. Recounting examples from personal experience, they are able to differentiate the OBE from lucid dreaming and sleep paralysis, as is discussed by Ed Kellogg in Chapter 3 and Robert Waggoner in Chapter 10. First instances of OBEs, which often occurred during childhood or in the later teenage to early adulthood years, are fondly recounted. Importantly, the authors speak to the spontaneity of their initial OBEs, and how, over time and with practice, they have been able to refine techniques that now enable them to induce OBEs at will.

The authors' descriptions of how the OBE often starts, including a strong vibration and some sort of 'buzzing' sound, are not that dissimilar from some NDE accounts. The fact that differing authors with experiential knowledge of OBEs identify a common genesis to the OBE, and that they have a way to consistently induce OBEs using specified techniques, is academically interesting and certainly appealing to my research-oriented mind! I'm always searching for novel approaches to studying NDEs and OBEs, and importantly for clues they might give about conscious processes. Perhaps the common catalyst and specific techniques used to induce OBEs are key? Perhaps OBEs point to a common understanding about consciousness? Perhaps OBEs suggest consciousness can and does exist beyond the confines of the physical body? Perhaps they suggest we have the ability to control, or better terminology might be to 'co-create' (as inferred in Chapter 6 and 9), an experience in which our conscious perception is able to journey freely and without reservation, beyond our physical being?

Such propositions may sound fantastical to those less aware of the literature surrounding these extraordinary states of consciousness that are OBEs. But, for those engaged in active research of such phenomena, these propositions – while incompatible with many dominant assumptions regarding consciousness – are logical implications of the accumulating evidence. Yet, according to prevailing models of consciousness, OBEs aren't 'real' – they simply are not possible. How can anyone have conscious perception from outside one's own body? When discussing my NDE research, I often find the dialogue typically moves – whether I like it or not – in the direction of claims about the 'realness' of the OBE component of the NDE. Questions, or rather I should say statements, often put to me by other academics and researchers include: "There's no scientific evidence to indicate they're real", "They're just hallucinations or tricks of a dying brain", "OBEs can be entirely accounted for by the brain – after all, everything starts with the brain!". Such discussions often conclude with a continued insistence that OBEs conflict with

current understandings about consciousness, that they have some neurological correlate, and that we (academics/researchers) should maintain the very 'scientific' assumption that OBEs will be explained from a biological basis in the fullness of time. Any other explanation not in accord with this reductionist and materialist stance, should be ignored.

As a researcher, I'm not saying such arguments shouldn't be debated. After all, a basic premise of the scientific endeavour is to continually question and re-question, in the search for wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of phenomena. But, I am frequently astounded by such dismissive brush-strokes about the 'realness' and cause of OBEs - mainly because they suggest a lack of familiarity with OBE literature and theories regarding causality of these experiences. A body of work, some anecdotal and some experimental, speaks of cases of 'verifiable' OBEs – verifiable in the sense that another person was able to perceive the presence of an OBEr, and later verify this to others. Some of these examples are described by Robert Peterson in Chapter 5. Among causality theories, physiological explanations are admittedly quite prominent, and suggest biological mechanisms – especially neurological processes in the brain – can account for OBEs. Cerebral anoxia, hypoxia, or hypercarbia, certain neurochemicals, and certain brain areas (such as the temporo-parietal junction, as discussed by Ryan Hurd in Chapter 4) have been theoretically implicated in the manufacture of the OBE. Yet to date, there is no reliable empirical evidence to indicate any such neurological mechanisms or causal models can sufficiently explain the totality of the OBE experience.

While some discussions I've had have been critical of the lack veridicality of OBE studies, an inability to produce empirical evidence does not equate to an absence of phenomena. As Jurgen Ziewe proposes in Chapter 8, sometimes it is a matter of refining methodology and processes. Although I often find myself unintentionally pulled into the murky waters that are discussions about the nature of consciousness – waters in which there is little hope of emerging without some struggle against the torrent of 'a priori' assumptions – to me a more suitable approach would be to direct interested parties to a comprehensive book about OBEs, written by those with experiential knowledge and theoretical understandings of the experiences.

That's why this book is so important. For those academically-minded, the book should provoke critical reflection on what the OBE is, and theories regarding its causality. It will facilitate questioning of the dominant stance of consciousness arising from neurocorrelates, and enable the reader to entertain the possibility OBEs point to consciousness being at least capable of disembodiment, even if we don't currently understand how. It may even agitate ideas for future research into OBEs. For those who are familiar with OBEs, this book provides a balanced and in-depth insight into these phenomena – which includes discussions of how such experiences might come about, how regularly they occur, and what they mean for those who have them as well as those who do not. For those who have had what they think is an OBE and are searching for answers about "what happened to me", this book will provide some comfort. Comfort to know you are not alone, that many others have had these experiences, and that others still are interested in them in a non-judgemental way.

Understanding the nature of human consciousness is arguably the most profound issue in modern neuroscience. What is consciousness? How does it arise? Which parts of the brain are responsible for particular mental activity? Such questions are at the forefront of research into consciousness and its currently elusive nature. Responses to these questions are not that dissimilar to those I encounter in the course of conversations I have about my own research into NDEs – and such responses are very much grounded in a materialist-reductionist philosophy – one whose basic premise advocates consciousness as an embodied entity arising solely and exclusively from a functioning brain.

The implications of such a premise are that consciousness cannot exist independently of the body, and consciousness cannot exist without the neurological activity produced from a non-impaired and well-functioning brain...Yet, OBEs challenge these basic inferences. At the very least, as academics, researchers, scientists, and interested parties, we should not be afraid to embrace the profound implications of OBEs; many of which are described in Chapter 2 and 11. Rather, we should be open-minded enough to accept that further exploration of OBEs could pave the way for some of the most fruitful discoveries relating to the nature of consciousness...Interestingly, even though it has been more than a year since the piece I mentioned at the beginning of this foreword was initially published, it is still one of the most commonly read pieces on the website! Interest in extraordinary states of consciousness such as NDEs and OBEs is clearly quite prevalent. And this makes for a promising future...

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INTRODUCTION, ALEXANDER DE FOE

Ten years ago, when I was in my late teens, I had a unique experience that sparked my interest in altered states. Upon falling asleep one evening, I felt unstable within my own body. The boundary between my body space and the room around me seemed somewhat fuzzy, and at one stage it felt like I had four sets of arms; two physical, and two other arms overlaying my body. It felt as though I could mentally move the other two arms.

After trying to move the two non-physical arms, I started to experience my sense of consciousness floating away from my body, and seemingly found myself standing outside the house. The experience was extremely lucid and I was near convinced that I was actually standing outside, and not lying in bed where my physical body was located.

I walked around the garden and along the street outside. I then felt a sense of elevation, as though I could fly upwards at that very moment. Right then, I ran along the street and jumped up. As I jumped, I began to lift off the ground, flying up towards the clouds. The experience was so exhilarating and realistic, yet at that very moment I knew that I was not in fact flying. It was this realisation that caused me to become aware of my body lying in bed again. I found myself back in my bedroom almost instantaneously.

I'm not certain whether this encounter was an out-of-body experience (OBE), a type of dream, or an experience that could be classified somewhere in between. One thing was for sure though, it felt so lucid and compelling, beyond the degree of realism in any kind of dream that I had experienced previously. The experience was so surreal and emotionally-charged that it remains in clear memory until this day. It was this very encounter with altered states that set me on a lifelong search into the broader nature of mind.

I was living in Perth, Western Australia, at the time. In my search for knowledge about my experience, I quickly came across the local Australian mystic and author, Robert Bruce. Bruce is one of the most prolific writers on OBEs not only within Australia, but also internationally. I read his books, participated in his workshops, and practised inducing OBEs personally for a number of months. During that period in my life, I had numerous mind-away-from-body experiences which furthered my interest in the exploration of consciousness. I was surprised at the time that the discussion of altered states was seldom engaged with in our society, aside from the interest in certain specialised groups and esoteric circles.

My curiosity towards OBEs and altered states eventually led me towards the scientific investigation of these unique and fascinating human experiences. In my early twenties I was influenced by Lance Storm at the Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research, Vladimir Dubaj at the Australian Parapsychological Research Association, and other well-known researchers who had extensive experience investigating altered states. In 2011, I joined Monash University's Psychological Studies Department and designed an honours project examining OBEs. As part of my research, I surveyed 194 OBEers about their accounts. From 2012 onwards, I pursued a doctoral project in experimental psychology, with a focus on OBEs and perception.

Throughout my PhD candidature, it quickly became apparent to me that there are many conflicting perspectives about the OBE; there is much disagreement on the topic, not only amongst scientists, but also in the broader public. Some people believe the OBE is a form of

cognitive aberration, a hallucination of sort, while others believe that OBEs could constitute a perceptual illusion. An alternative hypothesis suggests that one's mind, or consciousness, can actually travel beyond the confines of a physical body. Many varied and alternative theories have been presented.

I was particularly interested to note the stark differences found in esoteric literature on OBEs when compared with the views presented in scientific papers on the topic. In many ways, it was as though mystics described the experience in a totally different manner to scientific descriptions. I wondered, were they even talking about the same experience? It seemed to me that spiritualists were predominantly interested in investigating the far-reaching potentials of the OBE, focusing on the prospect of multidimensional states of consciousness. On the other hand, many mainstream scholars aimed to explain how the experience constituted a hallucination or perceptual anomaly. Yet again, it seemed that even authors coming from similar theoretical roots disagreed about this one fundamental issue: the essential nature of an OBE.

It was at this point in my life that I began to see the crucial need for the book you are reading now. I recognised many excellent researchers doing great work on OBEs, but most seemed to conduct their investigations in isolation, with little cross-collaboration. I saw a need for a contemporary edition on OBEs that consisted of a combined effort, with a joining rather than further convergence of ideas. I was also keen on inviting contributions not only from researchers, but also from those who have had OBEs firsthand. The OBE is such a compelling experience of altered awareness that I felt the focus on praxis and application was imperative. I sought to invite prolific writers from related fields as well, such as consciousness explorers and sleep researchers. And so it was, in July 2014 the 'Consciousness Beyond the Body' project was born.

This book was never intended to be a purely academic work, but rather a volume aimed towards the general public that would be approachable, honest, and grounded in observable evidence. The aim of the book was also to remedy some of the errors made in prior literature which has been far too indulgent in complicated belief systems and highly embellished anecdotes of OBE. However, it would also seek out to avoid a purely scientific discourse. Rather than presenting a materialistic explanation, I strongly believed in examining all facets of the experience from an open-minded, yet balanced, point of view. I envisioned that the book would be an excellent go-to source for readers learning about OBEs for the first time, as well as those who have had some of their own experiences who are looking to delve further. Now that I am reading the final proof of this volume, I am pleased to see that the project has achieved this very purpose.

Readers who wish to explore the nature of OBEs will find this book a breath of fresh air in contrast to many other works with a strong ideological slant; whether scientific or esoteric. Likewise, those who are seeking a more scientific approach to the OBE, but would prefer not to be overwhelmed by the technical lingo in papers on the topic, will hopefully find this work an approachable and enjoyable read. And, although it is difficult to regard any written work as

'neutral' in its perspective, you will find a number of unique perspectives that offer a balanced overview of theory, evidence, and practice in this book.

The three main sections in 'Consciousness Beyond the Body' focus on each of the above areas of investigation, with four chapters dedicated to each key topic: theory, evidence, and practice. I have always found that when studying any subject of interest that it's important to jump in with both feet, rather than merely taking an armchair scholarship approach. Hence, it is my hope that after reading the book, you will have 1) learned something new, 2) developed a unique perspective on the state of empirical research in this field, and 3) had a go at exploring altered states personally.

The book begins with Section I, 'Theories of the Out-of-Body Experience'. The chapters in this section are dedicated to exploring theory, explanations, and hypotheses to conceptualise OBEs. Nelson Abreu and Luis Minero (Chapter 1 & 2) commence the book with an examination of common characteristics of, and explanations for, this unique human experience. The authors advocate for a direct and experiential understanding. In Chapter 3, Ed Kellogg endeavours to demarcate the OBE as an experience distinct from other related altered states; in particular, lucid dreams. In Chapter 4, Ryan Hurd concludes the section with an evolutionary psychology perspective on OBEs.

Section II, 'Evidence for Verifiable Out-of-Body Travel', examines the science behind OBEs, canvassing anecdotal and experimental research. In particular, each chapter centres on the question of whether personal consciousness can, or cannot, in fact leave the confines of a physical body. Robert Peterson commences Chapter 5 with an examination of some of the evidence which suggests that consciousness could continue to exist outside of the confines of the physical body and brain. Peterson later examines counterevidence and concludes the chapter with a tempered analysis of the state of research on this topic. Preston Dennett follows with Chapter 6, which explores the broader role of anecdotal evidence in OBE research, as well as how accounts reported around the world have shaped popular belief and theory. In Chapter 7, Graham Nicholls follows with a multifaceted analysis, in which he introduces his own verified accounts, critiques experimental research into the topic, and offers suggestions for new ways of thinking about the OBE. Finally, in Chapter 8, Jurgen Ziewe concludes with an alternative explanation for OBEs. Ziewe offers some insight into why scholars have struggled to study the experience in laboratory-based research in the past.

Section III, 'Personal Benefits of Out-of-Body Exploration', presents chapters that examine the personal and practical benefits of having OBEs. This section offers a glimpse into the world of OBErs who have self-induced experiences. It focuses on how the experience can increase our creativity, help us navigate the unconscious mind, and work with altered states in order to facilitate emotional and spiritual healing. Readers are offered practical reflection tasks and avenues for exploring the nature of OBEs firsthand. The section commences with Clare R Johnson's work in Chapter 9, which places the OBE in context of a broader spectrum of human consciousness. Johnson offers a number of useful solutions for those who experience fear related to their OBEs and provides practices to cultivate creativity in the out-of-body state.

Robert Waggoner follows in Chapter 10 with a new hypothesis which suggests that our consciousness fluctuates on a spectrum. Waggoner posits that OBEs do not necessarily arise as isolated experiences, but may be regarded on a broader continuum of altered states. In Chapter 11, Preston Dennett continues with further practical explorations; in particular, he examines how OBEs might relate to psychological and physical health. Finally, in Chapter 12, I present a philosophical chapter on local and non-local consciousness, as well as a practical evaluation of modern technologies that can facilitate the self-induction of OBEs.

Ultimately, this book offers an integrated approach to the OBE, examining the theories, experimental research, as well as personal benefits of the experience. Bearing this in mind, some readers may find certain sections of more interest than others. Thus, the book must not necessarily be read in order from start to finish. You might wish to start with certain sections of interest first, and to revisit other parts of the book later.

It should be noted that while the book is a rather extensive compilation of chapters on this topic, there are certain elements which are not covered in major depth, such as a broad number of OBE induction techniques, for instance. Although the book predominantly deals with OBEs, it should also be acknowledged that there are other experiences of consciousness beyond the body that are beyond the scope of the discussion here – such as accounts of mediumship and anomalistic information transfer, to name a couple. In those cases that readers feel the book has only scratched the surface on related areas of interest, they may wish to conduct their own extended research afterwards. The references and reading materials authors have cited in their respective chapters provide some excellent starting points for exploring further.

As a final word before we move into the main content, I would like to applaud each of the authors for adding a strong contribution to the individual chapters in this volume. Although not all authors may agree entirely in their viewpoints of the OBE, I believe that open and honest cross-disciplinary dialogue is a move in the right direction. It is with this combined effort that we can begin to understand the nature of this fascinating experience, together. Finally, I would like to thank you, the reader, for taking an interest in this topic. The consciousness spectrum is vast, and it is my hope that readers who examine this topic also spark a lasting personal curiosity into the broader nature of mind.

SECTION I: THEORIES OF THE OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE

We may treat of the Soul as in the body – whether it be set above it or actually within it – since the association of the two constitutes the one thing called the living organism, the Animate. Now from this relation, from the Soul using the body as an instrument, it does not follow that the Soul must share the body's experiences: a man does not himself feel all the experiences of the tools with which he is working. – Plotinus, 204-270 CE, 'Enneads' (translated)

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS AN OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE?, NELSON ABREU

The out-of-body experience (OBE) earns its name from the defining sensation of moving away from or finding oneself already away from the body. When attempting to understand the OBE, we can begin with the obvious: it is an experience. As such, it presents a natural difficulty for academics: these experiences are internal or subjective and, hence, not fully accessible to physical measurement or recording.

How can scientists know what OBEs are like? Scientists can study anecdotal and historical accounts of people who claim to have OBEs and survey samples of the population. Through this indirect approach, researchers do not experience the phenomenological richness of the experience firsthand.

Throughout this chapter I shall canvas the prominence and characteristics of OBEs, the psychological impact of such experiences, neurological correlates, and a phenomenological approach to OBEs. These discussion points shall will form the foundation for the following 11 chapters, which endeavour to unpack the nature of OBEs and their theoretical, evidentiary, and practical aspects.

First of all, I should state that an armchair scholar approach to the OBE insufficient and that scientists must also seek to have the experience themselves. The main advances in our understanding of these experiences may come as more and more researchers learn to have OBEs themselves to examine the qualities of the experience firsthand. This way, scientists can make observations of the multidimensional nature of consciousness, individually and even in groups. By comparing notes, an evolving, relative consensus can be developed, so that we can take science where our instrumentation does not reach – at least for now – the ‘extra-physical’ levels of existence, closer to consciousness itself, well beyond the physical universe as we know it.

The OBE could be the tool to show that our reality is not merely physical. The difficulty is that proof of OBEs as ‘real’ experiences of consciousness leaving one’s body cannot be easily seen and shared. Hence, the OBE must be experienced. As we shall later see, the proof is in the pudding.

Few people would question whether we dream. When it comes to OBEs, this isn’t the case, since very few people have the authentic experience with some frequency. One of the ways we address this at the International Academy of Consciousness (IAC) is by training individuals to have experiences more often, rather than relying on spontaneous instances. Fortunately, experience shows that individuals can apply techniques and have more OBEs. So, once people achieve the OBE, whether spontaneously or intentionally, what do they report?

Characteristics and incidence of OBEs

The defining, but not sole, characteristic of the OBE is that it involves the sensation of floating away from the body or becoming aware that one is at a distance from the body (Alvarado, 2000). Typically, one feels a second, usually more subtle body, and may observe its partial or total, gradual or sudden separation from the physical body from the first-person perspective. One may see the physical body from a distance or not. One may feel or see a connection between the physical body and this second ('astral' or 'emotional' body). The projection can be partial (such as seating up with this second body, while still feeling the numb, physical body; or floating above the physical body) or more pronounced (projecting from a few feet away, no longer feeling the physical body, and as far as outer space).

OBEs are sometimes preceded by a number of sensations, which can vary from experience to experience and from person to person (Alvarado, 1984). According to accounts, the sensation tends start suddenly and unintentionally, during or following a number of possible altered states which include but are not limited to:

- while falling asleep or waking up
- during sleep, including after becoming more alert during a lucid dream
- after meditation
- after sex, yoga, or other intense physical activity
- during hypnotic state (self-induced or otherwise)
- while under the influence anaesthesia or certain psychedelic substances or entheogens
- as a result of sensory, sleep, food or water deprivation
- due to external electromagnetic stimulation or gravitational or mechanical forces

The OBE has been reported and documented by the most diverse cultures throughout time. Anthropologist Dean Sheils (1978) concluded that some form of a belief in OBEs is a feature of most cultures. Sheils found that 54 of 60 (90%) cultures studied made some mention of the phenomenon. Of these 54, 25 (46%) claimed that most or all people could travel beyond the physical body. An additional 23 (43%) claimed that a few among them were able to do so. Three cultures expressed a belief contrary to OBEs (0.6%), suggesting no belief in this phenomenon. In a further three cultures the possibility of OBEs was admitted. From this evidence, we can see that prominence of the OBE is evident in both ancient and modern cultures.

We can observe that different persons throughout history have had experiences and continue to have OBEs. These experiences occur in persons independently of their culture, education, financial situation, religion, credo, sex, or age. There are reports of OBEs observing relatives or even their pets floating about their bodies during some stages of sleep, suggesting that the experience may be as natural as breathing or sleeping, though not always with awareness and recall.

Myriads terminologies are available for OBE-related definitions and characteristics in different languages, cultures, and bodies of knowledge. For example, having the experience of projecting out-of-body is known as 'astralwanderung' in Germany. The Ancient Egyptians had a term ('kha') for the 'second body' described as a more subtle double of the physical body used during a projection. In India, the term 'sutratma' corresponded to what some designate as the silver cord, a structure thought to link the physical and astral bodies.

Other expressions have been used to describe OBEs: from projection of consciousness to those that may have esoteric or religious connotations such as 'astral projection', 'astral travel', 'soul travel', 'spirit walking', 'unfolding', 'dream visions', and many more. The projection of consciousness has been discussed in nearly all philosophical schools, including: Shamanism, Hinduism, Vedas, Yoga, Ancient Egyptian, Kabbalah, Buddhist (Mahayana and Theravada), Sufism, Early Islam, Early Christianity and Hagiography, Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, Spiritism, and Spiritualism, Umbandism, and Voodoo (see Vieira, 1999).

Now, these schools, traditions and cultures, span through several millennia. So, the following question could be posed: what percentage of the worldwide living population at a given time have had an OBE? Numerous statistical surveys done in the past century, in at least 7 countries (United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Iceland, Italy, Australia, and Brazil) in 4 continents revealed that millions may have had at least one OBE in their lifetime. Based on these surveys, a conservative estimate of 1% of the Earth's population would represent 70 million experiencers.

Surveys provide us with a sense of how common the OBE is in the general population. There are cultures, like Sri Lanka, where the phenomenon is discussed in school (as part of Buddhist tradition) or in the media, and people may not discuss it as much due to its banality – knowledge of its existence is so widespread as to make it an uninteresting topic of conversation. In other cultures, people may fear talking about the phenomenon for fear that their mental soundness or religious faith may be called into question. This lack of discussion may lead one to think the OBE is infrequent. Surveys, such as those depicted in Table 1, paint a different picture.

Table 1. Incidence of OBEs.

Source	% of OBEs	Sample size(s)	Date of research	Location of research
P. Giovetti	37%	300	1982	Italy
S. Blackmore and D. Bierman	18%	191 (students)	1982	Holland
S. Blackmore	12%	321	1981	United Kingdom
S. Blackmore	13%	216 (students)	1981	United Kingdom
S. Blackmore	14%	155 (students)	1981	United Kingdom
G. Gabbard, F. Jones, and S. Twemlow	10% (1)	339 (college-educated)	1981	United States
H. Irwin	20%	177 (students)	1980	Australia
E. Haraldsson	8%	902	1977	United States
J. Palmer	14%	341	1974	United States
C. Tart	44%	150 (marijuana users)	1971	United States

C. Green	34%	380 (students)	1967	United Kingdom
C. Green	19%	115 (students)	1966	United Kingdom
F. Banks	45%	800 (church-goers)	1962	United Kingdom

In 1999, at the '1st International Forum of Consciousness Research' in Barcelona, IAC research-practitioners Wagner Alegretti and Nanci Trivellato presented preliminary findings of an online survey answered by internet users interested in the subject:

- 1,007 (85%) of the first 1,185 respondents reported having had an OBE
- 37% claimed to have had between two and ten OBEs
- 6% claimed more than 100 such experiences
- 45% of those who reported an OBE said they successfully induced at least one OBE by using a specific technique
- 62% of participants claiming to have had an OBE also reported having enjoyed non-physical flight
- 40% reported experiencing the phenomenon of self-bilocation (i.e., seeing one's own physical body whilst outside the body)
- 38% claimed having experienced self-permeability (passing through physical objects such as walls)

The most commonly reported sensations experienced in connection with the OBE were falling, floating, repercussions (e.g., myoclonia: the jerking of limbs, jerking awake), sinking, torpidity (numbness), intracranial sounds, tingling, clairvoyance, oscillation, and serenity.

The sleep paralysis and OBE correlation was later corroborated by Kevin Nelson at the University of Kentucky in 2007. The study discovered that people who have OBEs are more likely to experience sleep paralysis, which is often seen as a terrifying experience by novices. More experienced OBErs, on the other hand, tend to see sleep paralysis as a herald of another impending OBE and, therefore, face it with calmness and even a measure of enjoyment.

Is it possible that certain people are physiologically more prone to having sleep paralysis and that this experience may in fact facilitate OBEs? This conclusion has not been ruled out, but it is worth observing that the majority of OBEs are not accompanied by sleep paralysis and that not all episodes of sleep paralysis result in OBEs.

It remains unreasonable to state that the OBE is illusory just because there is a possible physiological correlate or even a possible trigger (e.g., such as paralysis of the limbs). On the contrary, more information about physiological triggers of OBEs could help facilitate OBE induction in the future, collecting more information about its objectivity, rather than ruling it as imaginary.

We have established that the OBE is a relatively frequent occurrence that has been reported throughout history. Surveys and anthologies of anecdotal accounts reveal that even though the OBE takes place when one's body is asleep, it is not merely perceived as a common dream of floating away from the body. Experiencers can report feeling at least as lucid as during

the waking state. In other words, many experiencers strongly believe that the experience is real, or that, at least, it feels more realistic than other sleep-related experiences – sufficient enough to make the OBE more memorable and remarkable than common dreams.

Is there a way for us to test whether the OBE is imaginary or a 'real' phenomenon? If we, for instance, gathered evidence that we can have a shared experience during an OBE, with awareness – the ability to decide and communicate – this would be amount to at least a personal form of evidence. If we have shared experiences with another OBEr and if both recall it, we would be able to compare notes after the OBE and realise that certain unlikely facts can be corroborated. This would support – at least for the experiencers in question – the hypothesis of objectivity of the OBE, a critical question explored in Section II of this book. If we experience this type of confirmation several times, it would make it difficult to dismiss the OBE as illusory.

Some have pointed to experiments that mimic aspects of the OBE as evidence of their illusory nature (Blanke, Ortigue, Landis, & Seeck, 2002). Yet, the OBE is characterised by rich phenomena that cannot be adequately reduced to one or two sensations. If we were to isolate one or two aspects alone in a laboratory, such as seeing oneself at a distance through a camera and head display, this would not equate to an OBE. A typical OBE takes place during the sleep state and can involve many more sensations, such as:

- the distinct sensation of exiting the physical body
- floating through the ceiling
- travelling to what looks like a completely different place
- seeing in 360°
- feeling light
- not having to breathe
- observing 'para-arms' or 'astral arms' that are luminous and translucent
- having the distinct impression of telepathic exchanges with someone else

The OBE cannot be characterised by merely vividly imagining that one perceives someone else's body or to see one's own body through a headset display, and OBEs typically do not take place while one is fully awake. Such experiments using camera or virtual reality head-displays, sound or other sensory stimuli could, however, end up facilitating the induction of OBEs. While 'body swapping' experiments, such as those conducted by researchers like Olaf Blanke and Henrik Ehrsson (which aim to trick one's senses into acquiring a different visuospatial perspective) are unable to prove or disprove the OBE as an objective phenomenon, such experiments may make the OBE more widely acceptable as a normal, healthy, and helpful experience. If such body swapping technology can help to facilitate OBEs, the increased number of OBErs and frequency of projections could enhance scientist's abilities to conduct successful controlled experiments.

Psychological impact of OBEs

Aside from arguing the verifiable aspects of OBEs, studying this phenomenon would no doubt provide valuable insights into the human mind. There is nothing quite as profound as having the experience itself. However, setting aside the matter of whether the OBE is veridical or not, it is interesting to stress that it would remain a worthwhile subject of study and practice even if we do conclude that it is imaginary. Whether or not the OBE encompasses a 'real' experience of one's consciousness beyond the body, it is clear that OBEs have historically had a profound effect on individuals.

Take, for instance, Plutarch of Chaeronea who wrote about Aridaeus, a reportedly dishonest man with a bad reputation in his community. He fell and hit his head against a rock in 79 CE, remaining in a coma for a couple of days. During this coma, Aridaeus, also known as Timarchus, perceived himself outside his body. He later described meeting and talking to a female spiritual mentor or guide. During this experience, Aridaeus observed another realm which was inhabited by beings in a low-awareness, disturbed, unbalanced, or negative psychological state – a sort of post-mortem psychosis. Eventually, he felt a force pulling him back inside his body when he was about to be buried. After what appears to have been a near-death experience (NDE), whether we consider it real or not, it is reported that Timarchus transformed himself into a charitable, ethical, peace-loving, respected citizen in his community, in contrast to his previous reputation (see Montenegro, 2015).

These positive changes are commonly associated with OBEs, which can sometimes occur as part of a NDE. In several studies, nearly all NDErs reported a strong decrease or complete loss of the fear of death as the result of their NDEs (Sutherland, 1990). Nearly all experiencers (up to 98%) acquired a certainty of life after death (Flynn, 1982). NDEs resulting from suicide attempts are not usually followed by repeat attempts (Sutherland, 1990). Spiritual growth, a loving attitude, the concept of more spiritually evolved beings or a Higher Power or Source, greater inner peace, and a sense of purpose in life characterise the changes most meaningful to NDErs (Flynn, 1982). The overwhelming majority of NDErs express a strong increase in their concern for others – around 80% in one survey (Bauer, 1985) – along with a renewed sense of life meaning or purpose (Musgrave, 1997). Surveys indicate that a majority of experiencers report an increase in psychic or healing abilities following their NDEs (Sutherland, 1989; Greyson, 1983) – an observation that rings true when I think of personal experiences and that of reports from students and colleagues.

Even if OBEs cannot be regarded objective phenomena, for millennia they have been shaping history as they inspire writers, artists, inventors, philosophers, scientists, rulers, theologians and religious prophets. More and more people are discovering the OBE can be a thoroughly enjoyable experience: whether that means visiting Madagascar without a passport, communing with dolphins underwater without breathing, or being awestruck by the beauty of the Earth from outer space without hitching a ride from NASA. Whether these experiences are 'real' or not is very important from a philosophical point of view, but we should not lose sight

of the fact that the OBE can still be wonderfully stimulating, without the use of drugs and without spending a penny.

It is worth stressing that the OBE tends to feel real enough to be self-evident, much more vivid than a dream or the kind of imagination or visualisation that one might engage on-demand. In other words, projectors are confronted with the sense that to dismiss the OBE as illusory is no different than to call into question physical reality. In other words, the lucid projected state can seem at least as real (if not even more so) than the waking physical state.

When we examine collections of accounts by the likes of Bozzano, Crookall, or Montenegro, or better yet, when we have our own experiences, we can appreciate a complexity and level of lucidity that is only comparable to physical reality. In other words, the OBE, when it is sufficiently conscious, has a sort of self-evidence: the same way that we perceive that we are fully awake and this moment is real and coherent, we can have the same sense in those OBEs.

The OBE often feels real enough to cause a lasting, transformative effect. We have moved forward from the time that OBEs were stigmatised as a demonic occurrence by some religious authorities and later as pathological, narcissistic, or dissociative states by early psychiatry. Today, the OBE is largely considered a relatively common, harmless, naturally-occurring altered state that 10 to 20% of the world experiences at least once in their lifetime. The OBE may be spontaneous, intentional, forced (e.g., NDE), and it may possibly be assisted (2). Regardless of the type of projection, surveys indicate that the vast majority experience positive, transformative effects. For instance, Kenneth Ring's work on NDE/OBE effects led to the recognition of a fairly consistent set of changes, such as:

- mitigation of the fear of death
- greater appreciation for life
- higher self-esteem
- greater compassion for others and feeling of connectedness or oneness
- a heightened sense of purpose and self-understanding
- desire to learn and mature
- greater ecological sensitivity and planetary concern
- feeling more intuitive or 'psychic' or having a more holistic perspective

Clearly, rather than reflecting a dissociative personality, the OBE tends to be profoundly integrative, expanding our sense of oneness with fellow beings, with the very fabric of Reality, not unlike the 'overview effect' experienced by astronauts in awe of the Earth from outer space. We have established that the OBE is, by and large, a positive experience. Is there any evidence to the contrary? University of Virginia's Bruce Greyson has described some circumstances where changes in attitudes and behaviour can lead to difficult personal situations. Most of these, however, have to do with the adjustment to 'ordinary life' in the wake of such a transformative

experience. If one's worldview is shaken to the core, this could lead us to questioning one's professional life, relationships, associations, and priorities in a dramatic way.

While re-examining one's life tends to be, overall, a constructive outcome of OBEs, it could cause what some term a positive form of stress. In some cases, an individual may lack the maturity to handle the dissonance between what the OBE seems to reveal about life and life they have been leading. This could lead one to try to seek to repress these newfound insights in order to remain 'normal' and fit in, possibly generating some deep-seeded unhappiness. The effects could lead to conflict, professional or academic difficulties due to lack of interest or rejection of the previous activities, or even a dramatic rupture with the previous life, rather than a more measured, gradual transition or adjustment. One could neglect physical responsibilities and opportunities in order to obsessively pursue extra-physical realities, rather than seek a balanced life.

As mentioned, the vast majority of OBEs – especially NDE-based OBEs, are, however, positive. The most common response to an open-ended question about the most significant change resulting from the NDE was 'spirituality' or 'spiritual growth' in a study conducted by Australian sociologist Cherie Sutherland (1990). Sutherland interviewed fifty NDErs and specifically asked them to differentiate changes in their spirituality from changes in their religiosity. Participants largely rejected describing themselves as "religious" but did describe themselves as "spiritual".

The participants in that research reported a "dramatic change in religious affiliation, especially from organised religion of whatever denomination to no religion" (see Sutherland, 1990, p. 24). Although no person described their NDE as a religious experience, 70% did describe it as a spiritual experience. Researchers have found that distressing NDEs are relatively rare (Greyson & Bush, 1996) and seem to ultimately be considered positive in the sense that they trigger positive insights and stimulate positive changes (Rommer, 2000).

The OBE as an altered state with neurobiological correlates

The effort to define the OBE in neuroscience remains elusive. There simply has not been much neuroscience and physiology research done with conscious projectors. Results have been inconclusive due to the limited number of studies and subjects, as well as limitations of sleep laboratory research. Studies have mostly been suggestive of further research lines that could be pursued.

OBEs seem to occur in conjunction with a prolonged, deliberately produced hypnagogic state (stage 1 on EEG spectrum). Such prolonged states are not normally seen in the laboratory. Charles Tart's (1998) research into six studies of OBErs provided the first indication that the OBE was, at least in these cases, correlated by brainwave activity that was not typical of wakefulness, stage 1 sleep, rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, lucid dreaming, or any other previously studied altered state or sleep stage. In other words, not only is the OBE subjectively different, it is also objectively distinct (in terms of its neural correlates).

Modern EEG feedback techniques have shown that subjects can learn to produce increased alpha rhythm, and to slow the frequency of their alpha rhythm. Could producing theta and slowed alpha rhythms ('controlled drowsiness') help produce OBEs? Though not widely verified with replicable laboratory research, successful OBE practice suggests this, as the theta rhythm tends to create a 'body sleep, mind awake' condition. Likewise, as some hypnotherapists have been able to induce OBEs (see Meyerson & Gelkopf, 2004), and hypnotic trance is often associated with an increase in theta rhythm, this lends support to the notion that the drowsy pre-sleep state is conducive to the OBE.

Mexican surgeon, neuroscientist, and OBE practitioner Carlos Bernal established a standardised methodology for the repetitive induction of OBEs through the use of sensorial stimulus together with the training of brainwaves via neurofeedback (see Abreu, 2013a). He developed a technique consisting of training an individual to consistently generate gamma waves in the cortex area of the brain, producing a state of mindfulness and associate it with unconscious sensorial stimulus. Once the individual is exposed to those stimuli during the REM dream phase, this induces lucidity of consciousness during the oneiric state.

Anecdotes of OBEs cast doubt on the assumption that the OBE can only occur during a specific sleep stage. In fact, NDEs indicate the OBE can happen with negligible brainwave activity. The EEG spectrum is a complex phenomenon that varies in terms of frequency, regularity, wave shape, spatial distribution over the brain, and interareal phase relationships, making the limited body of study tentative, at best.

Many conventional scientists trust in the results of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans more than anecdotal evidence of phenomena they do not often experience. The fact remains that even as we discover the indicators of potential OBE using MRI scans, this would not prove that the neural and physiological patterns were causing an OBE. Experiences occur in the realm of consciousness, beyond our ability to directly measure and record them. It is often assumed that consciousness must arise from physical processes, but, as Graham Nicholls points out in Chapter 7, no one has ever proven this.

Rather than being a cause, neurobiological activity during OBEs could be perceived as a concomitant effect of a transcendental experience. In this case, the OBE would cause certain physiological and neural states, rather than the other way around. Just because an OBE may be triggered by a physical cause, this does not rule out the OBE as having an objective component.

The scientific method is often misunderstood, or even misused in order to defend an existing paradigm, in an abuse of the limitations of current technology. Microorganisms existed long before the microscope. Countless generations have spoken of what they had dreamt during their sleep long before images could be mapped to an individual's neuron circuitry so as to reverse-engineer what that individual was dreaming into images. The fact that no current technology can measure subtler vehicles of manifestation of one's consciousness should not render them impossible. Moreover, the fact that there are so many accounts describing similar characteristics of secondary bodies or vehicles for consciousness (both structurally and

functionally) should at least beg the question whether there really is something here for us to explore.

Incorporating a phenomenological approach: The proof is in the pudding

It can be argued that conventional-paradigm researchers who make a dismissive judgment on the nature of OBEs often do not experience the phenomenon firsthand regularly enough, if ever. Thus, it is argued here that the nature of the OBE can be further explored through a combination of physical measurement and direct experience – the phenomenological or first-person research approach.

Physical and physiological measurements can provide, at best, secondary indications or manifestations of what we want to observe. Since we do not currently have technologies that allow us to observe OBE phenomena (at least not yet), we can learn through corroboration of multiple observations by multiple projectors. Rather than depending on the accounts of others, who usually find it difficult to translate the exotic sensations, perceptions, and events they witness, in the phenomenological method the researcher him/herself develops the ability to induce lucid projections to investigate extra-physical realities firsthand.

In my experience, as well as a number of NDE and OBE after-effect accounts, learning to have OBEs seems to facilitate other extra-sensory perception (ESP) faculties as well. Scientific conclusions could thus be reached through relative consensus of experiences of thousands of other projectors. Such experiences could include cognition of physical events or other information, which may possibly be obtained even through what is largely thought to be exclusively subjective: sympathetic exchanging or sharing of thoughts and feelings and enhancement of mental acuity, which are reported in many OBEs.

OBEs' accounts could also include simultaneous projections in which researchers can explore in groups, and use direct or indirect detection of projectors in a room (through human or animal clairvoyance, sensitive technologies in existence or to be developed), among other schemes. Even if we do not know how this occurs in detail, projections can provide us with a rough sketch of how the consciousness and the brain interact. Lucid projectors (as well as clairvoyants and the practitioners of numerous vital energy, or chi, practices) observe a system or 'body' of subtle energies that seems to form the interface between the physical body and a more subtle body (the psychosoma or emotional body, commonly referred to as an astral body).

The interactions of this vehicle (energosoma, chi, etheric body, pranamayakosha) seem to be responsible for interpersonal or transpersonal and parapsychic or paranormal phenomena. How, exactly, does energy and information flow to and from the physical body? Is there an 'astral' brain or para-brain that the brain communicates with? What is the nature of this intermediate structure referred to as chi, prana, bioenergy, etheric body, among many other terms? Better answers to these questions could emerge when these two discourses begin to collaborate, namely; neuroscience and physics from one side, and projectiology and parapsysics from the other.

Each answer in OBE research generates more questions that remain, such as: why does consciousness need a secondary astral body to communicate with a brain? Is consciousness inserted in the para-brain or does it use yet another interface? If so, why? If these bodies exist in the same space-time, are they in different frequencies or densities of reality or materiality with different degrees of insubstantiality? In other words, is the OBE reality merely part of a multi-material reality rather than entirely non-physical or extra-physical? Rather than a post-material paradigm, a pluri-material worldview may be emerging (see Abreu, 2013b).

Objections to the objectivity of chi and the astral body

The aforementioned questions were raised by framing the OBE as revelatory of consciousness having more than a single body or vehicle of manifestation reflecting its ability to manifest beyond our material realm. Such a model assumes that the 'chi' energy that is felt and seen in and out of body is real. It assumes that the astral body that is perceived is real and that the realms that are visited during OBEs are veridical, as well – places we may 'inhabit' between lives, for instance, and where we can encounter beings who have passed on and may be readying to return to the material realm.

Could all projections be extensions of our own consciousness? The cosmos, material and otherwise, can be seen as a theatre or technology of consciousness, aiding our evolution or development, providing environments for us to interact with and become more complex and refined. There is no way to scientifically test this model, but OBEs may be suggestive of a type of idealism: a multidimensional reality as a reflection of a multidimensional consciousness, without which there would be no one to even verify and use that reality.

Materialist reductionism, on the other hand, reducing the OBE (and consciousness) to neural correlates is a futile effort. The materialistic, reductionist, physicalist, Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm presupposes that consciousness and all its attributes and manifestations like thought, will, and emotion are creations of the brain. These attributes are assumed to be a result of biological evolution, itself a result of natural selection of random mutations in DNA, the biological blueprint for life which is said to have developed by chance. It is quite possible that the opposite is true: that consciousness is not matter-energy, but rather, it is an increasingly intelligent, evolving, complexifying, organising, ordering, anti-entropic, syntropic, living entity that can neither be created nor destroyed, but that drives biological evolution.

The reductionist paradigm also presupposes that a non-material source of consciousness is preposterous, because everything around us seems so solid: why evoke entities that cannot be physically posited? One hundred years of quantum physics have, however, refuted the 'billiard ball' idea of reality, which stubbornly remains the way most people still regard the world around them. In his latest book, 'The Observer Effect', physicist and para-physicist Massimiliano Sassoli de' Bianchi makes the case that Reality is not limited to our perceived space-time and that at the nanoscale it is constantly manifesting and vanishing from our limited sub-reality. So, if even the foundations of physics, which are beginning to look more and more like concepts than objects, are not likely to be limited to Euclidean space, which includes the body and its

brain, why insist that consciousness cannot also exist beyond our limited, perceived material reality?

Reducing consciousness to energy is tantamount to reducing it to matter, since matter and energy are two forms of the same concept. Suffice to say, for now, that quantum physics, while not fully explaining consciousness, certainly presents such challenging anomalies that make consciousness beyond the brain (or even beyond our perceived space-time) seem not as shocking by comparison to measurable quantities that seem to randomly appear out of thin air, and just as easily vanish or to affect one another in ways that defy classical limits.

[T]here's a more insidious form of human-centric ontology, as found in many version of scientism. On the one hand, scientism insists that human consciousness is nothing special, and should be naturalized just like everything else. On the other hand, it also wants to preserve knowledge as a special kind of relation to the world quite different from the relations that raindrops and lizards have to the world. Another of putting it... for all their gloating over the fact that people are pieces of matter just like everything else, they also want to claim that the very status of that utterance is somehow special. For them, raindrops know nothing and lizards know very little, and some humans are more knowledgeable than others. This is only possible because thought is given a unique ability to negate and transcend immediate experience, which inanimate matter is never allowed to do in such theories, of course. In short, for all its noir claims that the human doesn't exist, it elevates the structure of human thought to the ontological pinnacle. – Graham Harman

Psychical phenomena, too, present challenges to scientific prejudices, such as:

- individuals whose presence may enhance or inhibit psi abilities in others
- experiments in which a control group of animals or plants also appears to benefit from bioenergy exteriorisation to the experimental group, thereby masking the difference in the two groups
- the challenge of apparent retrocausality, whereby information can be interpreted as flowing from probable future events (though this is not necessarily the most plausible interpretation)
- the variability in performance in psi against the expectation of strict replicability; apparent 'travel' of information across vast distances

All of these are considered anomalies, physical and psi, because they are viewed through limited, outdated perspectives. We may find they are in fact quite reasonable and normal as we uncover more suitable models of reality for both the nanoscale and consciousness-related phenomena. However, rather than attempting to conflate such phenomena, overlooking their phenomenological differences, we should recognise that they do appear to work through related mechanisms, but they are subjectively different.

Chi and the astral (or 'energy') body may not be entirely immaterial, having some secondary properties that may cause physical effects or interferences that may be detected with instrumentation. As technology advances, new breakthroughs could well be made. Controlled, remote perception research is ongoing but infrequent. More controlled, joint projection experiments would be helpful as well.

The future

Methods and facilities to promote research into OBEs are evolving. One recent development is the first laboratory specifically constructed to facilitate the induction of OBEs: the Projectarium. Located at IAC's Research Campus in the Alentejo region of Portugal, it is a large spherical space with a walk-way that allows one to lay down with one's head at the centre. Individuals who have never had OBEs have experienced their first partial or full OBEs there, and those with more experience often report that the process is intensified and accelerated. The lack of edges helps individuals lose their sense of special limitation; an adjustable memory-foam mattress supports the body and promotes the sensation of weightlessness without the mess of floatation tanks, whose users also report OBEs from time to time. Sound- and vibration-proofed and kept at near-darkness, it is ideally suited for OBEs.

Additionally, there are new techniques and technologies in development, including acoustic and visual methods, adding to the rich history of techniques in the field from thousands of years of human experience. Examples of technology that could enrich our understanding include functional magnetic resonance imaging [Alegretti], virtual-reality [Blanke] and vibroacoustics [Anderson] which were all presented at the International Congress of Conscientiology in May 2015. If the reader wants to know more about what the OBE is like and wishes to obtain more insights as to its nature, the most fruitful course of action will be developing his or her lucid projectability and to support laboratory research.

Fortunately, regardless of the development of the science of OBEs, one's personal development depends on personal motivation. More OBEs will only help with the development of our collective understanding. Personally, those starting out can benefit from dialogue with other experiencers, books, and training courses by experienced coaches, and reduce the amount of time and effort required to achieve results.

The OBE is certainly worth the effort. Having OBEs can set us on a journey of trying to better understand our life. The OBE may provide us a glimpse into realities that most people are not aware of, yielding new perspectives and insights to re-imagine the world.

When we see ourselves as consciousness that exists outside the physical body, this continuity and connection between ourselves, our bodies, essence and all living things becomes apparent. With this integrated view of life, all life becomes more valuable and precious, worthy of care and development. Through out-of-body travels, we can see ourselves as a multi-dimensional consciousness in the process of evolution along with other beings. With this realisation, we may become more connected in a cosmic way to fellow beings. With a planet at a crossroads of crisis and opportunity, that may be the most important reason to study and practice the OBE.

Notes

1. In the questionnaire, 85% of OBEs reported their experience as "agreeable", 43% said it was "life's most important factor", 94% said that the OBE felt like more than a dream, and 66% reported that their life changed as a result of the experience.
2. Assisted OBEs occur presumably with the help of another projected individual or by an extraphysical individual, one without a body, who currently 'inhabits' the extraphysical environment.

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CHAPTER 2: THERE IS MUCH MORE TO US THAN MEETS THE EYE, LUIS MINERO

What is the nature of our essence or soul? This is one of the most fundamental questions that has occupied thinkers, scientists, and philosophers throughout centuries. In this chapter we will explore how out-of-body experiences (OBEs) can contribute towards a broader understanding of our nature as human beings.

Who we think we are helps shape our current research on self, independent of our approach: experiential, physicalistic, philosophical or any other. Thus, I will discuss the current interplay between these different approaches to arrive at a better footing on OBEs and current research into this phenomenon. Also, by relying on direct observations from OBEs, I would like to describe some of the main characteristics of our essence independent of the physical body. Thus, the objective is not to rely only on the non-physical experiences, but to incorporate such observations to our physical observations and to reach deeper conclusions. With these realisations in hand, I want to touch on the life-changing benefits that OBEs, and also near-death experiences (NDEs), have on individuals and/or the main reasons why many people want to develop such an ability.

Although some of the ideas and experiences I shall be documenting here are not the consensus amongst all OBE researchers, such as the travel to objective non-physical worlds, accessing information from past lives, and so forth, such observations will be based on the consensus of many OBEs and colleagues who have supported the accounts herein with their own corroborations. The reader will then be left to decide on what the OBE can tell us, if anything, about the nature of self and consciousness.

The OBE and us

First, what do we make of the OBE? Reactions to this phenomenon vary greatly. Some individuals dismiss OBEs as a hallucination, others would rather not even think about them, and still others do not really know what to say about the experience. At the same time, there are scientists with a more conventional materialistic approach, who try to frame such phenomena as produced strictly by the biochemistry of our physical body (i.e., a lack of oxygen, lack of integration of brain processes, hallucination from drugs, and others). Other individuals may interpret the OBE as a religious experience, which in certain cases is bestowed to them by a higher power. Yet others try to explain such accounts philosophically and psychologically: "they must have some internal need to have an OBE if it they say it occurred to them".

Discourse centred on OBEs can generate a somewhat polarising discussion, in part, because the experiences go beyond the regular real world physical dimension. Being aware with all of one's memories outside of one's brain? Moving through walls? Flying? Being in a different

reality or plane of existence? Meeting a deceased relative? Certainly all of these ideas go well beyond what our physical life and observations have shown to us about the nature of reality. We are familiar with our physical body, with walking, with seeing through our eyes, smelling through our nose, gravity, and breathing and many others. For many people, all of the ideas about OBEs seem at least too new, too different, and too far from their mainstream perspectives to digest them.

All of those aspects may be difficult to conceive, until an OBE happens to us! Experiencing being fully aware outside the body and the sensation of floating close to the ceiling, or recognising that we do not have the constant noise the physical-body machine makes while it breathes, or just feeling that sensation of freedom, allows us to understand the OBE differently, deeper, and naturally in a more realistic fashion (Minero, 2012).

Likewise, having an OBE can help us not only to better understand the phenomenon, but to gradually derive from it more refined ideas about our nature. The answer to the complex, very important and fundamental question of 'am I only a physical being?' takes on a very different perspective after an OBE. We may even feel sometimes as if we are literally the prisoner in Plato's classic allegory of the cave, who was just recently freed and experienced an entirely different reality. And likewise, we may find ourselves struggling to find ways to explain the OBE reality to those who have not had the experience.

Can the OBE give us a different perspective on consciousness and the self?

As human beings we have the tendency to arrive at conclusions that are modelled by our experiences, references (memories), and our understanding. Thus, all of these create our model of thinking, our paradigm. To a certain extent, an intriguing question here might be, is there really a way for us to escape our references, biases and prior experiences? It is perfectly logical to understand the reason a conventional scientist might ask for physical data on the OBE in order to validate its real-ness. For these scientists, their thinking paradigm will make it very difficult to incorporate data which is formatted in a different fashion. Also, it is extremely challenging to provide physical data for a phenomenon that is not physical in nature.

Thus, when certain areas of the brain are stimulated, individuals may report seeing their body from a different perspective, or smelling different scents (a specific flower, lemon, etc.), or feeling as if they are going through a tunnel, and many others. Such experiments are used sometimes to convey the conclusion that the OBE is not objective and is only happening in the mind of the OBEr (Blanke, Ortigue, Landis, & Seeck, 2002; Ehrsson, 2007). Of course, it cannot be forgotten that just because such brain stimulation may produce memories or visions of real events, it does not necessarily mean that the real event does not exist. , in other words, the fact our brain can be stimulated in such a way that we start experiencing the smell of a particular flower does not mean that the smell of that particular flower does not exist in real life. The same applies for tunnel visions, or visions of our own body, or any other image which may have OBE-like elements. More in depth examples are provided in Section II of this book.

More importantly, from the beginning, some scientists seem to think about OBEs in this manner: "I understand people as physical beings and I will try to find evidence to support this". Therefore, the scientific model or approach used to study OBEs could already be restricting the understanding of the phenomenon.

Some physical evidence for the OBE can be collected, and as this topic will be dealt with in further chapters, I will explore it in brief here in relation to the idea of who we are, how we see ourselves, and how the OBE can expand this perspective. Following from Nelson Abreu's argument in Chapter 1, I would say the ideal scenario is one in which researchers have already had their own fully aware OBE (at least one). Of course, the idea of having a consensus from the majority of the scientific community in understanding the OBE as an objective phenomenon is not something that affects our individual experiences. Thus, I, as a researcher while I am in an OBE, do not think "since there is not a scientific consensus for this phenomenon, I should return to my physical body". Far from it, I take advantage of the OBE, exploring many of its possibilities and benefits – several of which we will explore further ahead in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 9-12.

As Nelson Abreu also pointed out in Chapter 1, one of the interesting aspects of the OBE is that it is an ability that can be trained and developed. What I observe in the thousands of classes I have taught (on OBE development, techniques, benefits, inner-development consequences, bioenergetic exercises and more), is that as any other activity in our life, learning how to have an OBE is a matter of receiving some information, dedicating some time to it, and the capacity goes on developing gradually. It becomes like a sport, whereby our performance is improved by practice and perseverance.

Therefore, any conventional scientist could induce their own OBEs, which might well convince him or her of the existence of consciousness beyond the body. However, in certain instances their paradigm and conditioning work against this. They find themselves in a catch-22 type of situation: the belief the OBE can be explained physically does not help in putting the effort to develop the skill, and without the practical experience of the OBE the more physicalistic mindset has a hard time evolving further. Some of these cases (certainly not all) remind us of the classic story of Galileo and some of the Catholic Bible scholars of the time, who refused to peek through Galileo's telescope to observe for themselves whether Jupiter had moons circling around it, or whether the Moon had mountains; and thus, upon not having this direct observation by themselves, they could continue defending their theories in line with the popular paradigm.

The OBE as an objective phenomenon

I subscribe to the idea that the OBE is an objective phenomenon, in which individuals separate from their physical body – leaving it at rest – while they can have real experiences in several realities. This understanding follows from having had decades of OBEs, and having observed events outside the body that have confirmed to me the validity and objectivity of the OBEs. For those readers who are more philosophically inclined, and in order not to assume that

the physical reality is objective, I would say, the OBEs are as objective as the physical reality is. Furthermore, colleagues and students of mine have arrived at the same conclusion once they have their own experiences (Alegretti, 2000). Going a step further, as a scientist, I would state that the hypothesis of the OBE being an objective phenomenon better explains the wealth of OBE cases that have already been reported. Theories based on neurobiology or biochemistry can only explain a smaller percentage of OBEs (see Chapter 5-8).

A colleague and university professor in one of my lectures, after citing Ockham's razor (1) asked me, "Could it be possible that on some psychological or unconscious level, people who have OBEs, report them because they have the need to have them and it is more likely a very vivid dream?". I would have to say that it is possible that some people may report OBEs because they have the need to classify them as such, and that it is possible that they classify an OBE which was really a very vivid dream of an OBE (2). Such is the world of what is possible; since many things are possible – even beyond what we can conceive right now. Yet, even if some of those out-of-this-reality experiences could be explained by such philosophical/psychological reasons, this does not mean that they are all due to these factors.

Nature has always had a way of surprising us. And, as we study it further, we find more of its complexities and subtleties. And furthermore, some of the new findings of how nature works are so surprising and they go very much so against common sense. A good example of this is subatomic particles. We could not have imagined that electrons could be broken down into subatomic particles – and so many of them. It was such a surprising finding that it took some time for scientists to get used to such idea and especially to get familiar with the very different behaviour of the subatomic world. Thus, just because something is very surprising, very new and against common sense, this does not mean it cannot be true. Nature keeps on surprising us (and it will continue to do so).

A side note on evidence of veridical perception

Although the veridical and verifiable aspects of OBEs will be discussed in Section II of this book, let me in brief mention the importance of this topic for our general discussion of OBEs. There are a number of reports of OBEs in which individuals describe how they saw something outside their body (that they could have not known otherwise) and how they were able to confirm it once they came back to their body and went to the actual physical place (Esquivel, 2009). I, myself, have had several of these types of experiences; even some which are as 'simple' as seeing during an OBE the types and colour of the cars that were parked 2 blocks away from my apartment on a specific night, and then returning to the body and physically going and confirming what I had observed outside the body. Also, there are many cases of two individuals having OBEs and meeting outside the body (joint OBEs), having a shared experience, and then remembering and talking about it after returning (Denning & Phillips, 1992; Haymann, 2003). I have also had a few of these experiences – even with a group of people. Both, with OBEs which are later physically confirmed, as well as with joint OBEs, the objective phenomenon theory explains such occurrences well, while other theories fall short. Note: refer to Section II for further discussion on the veridical aspects of OBEs.

The OBE as an extension of self

What can the theory of the OBE as an objective phenomenon tell us about ourselves? The first thing it will tell us is that we are more than our physical body, and that there is certainly more to us than what our physical eyes can see. This already leads to the realisation that we may need to rethink our idea of self-identity: who or what are we?

At a very personal level, because of how fundamental it is for human beings to have a relatively solid understanding of identity, the fact that a phenomenon can have the potential to turn many of our fundamental ideas upside-down can make many people uncomfortable. Yet, it is important to note that this is exactly what evolution is: the refining, sophistication, or development of a concept into a better, newer, and more encompassing one. In this subchapter I will explore some of the main implications.

Awareness

One of the first things we realise in a fully-aware OBE is precisely that we are conscious. In terms of awareness, we realise at this moment we are reading these words that we are conscious that we are physically awake. At the same time, we know what dreaming feels like and we know we are not dreaming and not in an OBE when in the ordinary physical waking state. We can even be in a lucid dream, and at that moment, we know we are not awake and we know we are dreaming. By the same token, when we are present in a fully aware OBE, we also realise that this is not a dream and that this is not the ordinary waking state; yet, we exist, are aware and conscious. How is this possible?

It can be argued that awareness is independent from the physical brain. Thus, we can realise while outside the body, that we have with us all of the mental faculties we express in the physical reality: logic or clarity of thought, control over ourselves, clear perception, memory, ethical considerations, decision-making ability, and others. Furthermore, we can learn new information outside the body without our physical body or brain seemingly being involved in the process; neither in the process of perception of the information, nor in its analysis, nor in its memories.

I can think of several examples which support this, for instance as 'simple' as the example I gave above of observing the types and colours of the cars that were parked a few blocks away from my apartment. At the same time, we realise that our physical senses do not have the ability to visually perceive something that is two blocks away while we are inside an apartment and with many walls in between us and the target. Thus, these perceptions went beyond the physical body.

Vehicles of manifestations

Let us explore further considerations. While projected outside the body, as we see ourselves, we might realise that we are in a body that looks very much like our physical body in appearance. However, it looks a little more subtle and translucent. This body has received many names like 'astral body', 'psychosoma', 'double', 'emotional body' and others. The psychosoma

seems also to be an objective aspect of ourselves (i.e., like our hand); meaning, a tool or a vehicle we use for manifesting outside the body in other dimensions or realities.

Many, many OBEers and many, many near-death experiencers (NDEers) have reported visiting deceased relatives and other deceased individuals while outside the body (Atwater, 2002). These non-physical individuals exist at this moment without their physical body, since such a body was already deactivated or discarded. Many of these non-physical beings remember with greater or lesser detail their prior physical life, which is also evidence that we can remember without our physical brain. Furthermore, many times they remember not only their terminated life, but even past lives (Alegretti, 2000).

Through observations and the consensus acquired by many OBEers, we come to the realisation that what we are – our essence – something independent of the physical body. In different circles we have called it by different names, such as soul, spirit, energy, atman, the consciousness, intelligent principle, and others. It is at this moment, however, difficult to name what this essence is, or to explain it fully. However, several of the attributes of our true nature (i.e., the intrinsic sense of consciousness) can already be described.

As mentioned above, when we leave the physical body during an OBE, we find ourselves manifesting the great majority of our time with the psychosoma (or astral body). This second body is lighter, brighter, and has unique abilities. If we are in our bedroom, we may simultaneously see two of our bodies: the physical body lying in bed and another, subtler body, floating in mid-air, from where we (the consciousness, soul) are manifesting at the moment. This attribute of the consciousness to be able to use different bodies can be regarded in terms of our multivehicular nature (Alegretti, 2000). We possess four vehicles of manifestation that have been reported already in the classic OBE literature many times:

- 1) the physical body
- 2) the energetic body (also etheric body, energosoma, bardo body, bioplasmic body, pranamayakosha, and others)
- 3) the psychosoma or astral body
- 4) the mentalsoma (also intellectual body, mental body, and others)

We observe that each one of these bodies have their unique features which allow us to manifest consciousness in different realities. The consciousness uses these vehicles of the consciousness depending on the reality it wants or needs to interact with. Thus, it is difficult for the physical body to interact with the non-physical planes, and likewise, it is difficult for the psychosoma to interact efficiently with the physical reality. When in the psychosoma, we are generally unable to touch or grab anything physical; we go through walls, our feet do not make contact with the ground, and so forth.

An idea that can help us to put this model in proper context – which can also be useful to keep in mind for people who want to have OBEs in order for them to disconnect easier from the physical reality – is to think and realise that the consciousness, our true nature, has never

touched the physical reality (3). Our physical body is the one interacting with the physical reality; however, if we are not the physical body, then it follows we have never touched the physical plane. We use this biological robot that helps us to go through the human existence to interact with the physical world, and we get used to it, but ultimately, the body is not us.

Multidimensionality

A third attribute we can discuss is our multidimensional nature; that is, our capacity to manifest in different dimensions. As far as we know, there are a great number of extra-physical or non-physical dimensions all waiting to be explored (Denning & Phillips, 1992). People already experience changing reality dimensions with the process of being born and dying. The OBE simply allows for a much more constant multidimensional interaction than other states or paranormal phenomena.

There are thousands of non-physical realities which can be visited in an OBE. These are the so-called spiritual planes, astral planes, alternative planes of existence and others. Certainly visiting and experiencing them is quite eye-opening in terms of understanding our nature and what we, as a soul, are all about. Some dimensions look similar in appearance to the physical dimension, while others can be quite different and more abstract compared to our physical world (Buhlman, 1996).

Self-awareness

Next, we can discuss one's experience of self-awareness, which is a subset of consciousness. Because awareness is something outside the body, it can fluctuate, and thus we can appreciate more the condition of being very conscious outside the body in order to try to understand its nuances.

Self-awareness infers one is aware of one's own existence and that one is an individual. In some instances outside the body, I am very connected to another reality, for example a small forest, and I can feel inside me the animals and trees growing. Furthermore, I know they can feel me. This process is sometimes referred to as 'auric coupling': our energetic fields or auras fuse and thus we are energetically inside one another. However, even though we are connected to such a level, I do not lose my sense of identity. I know 'I', my essence or my consciousness, is very interconnected at this moment to this larger reality. Thus, the consensus that I and most of my colleagues who have these experiences arrive at is that awareness is something we have and that develops over time.

Multiexistentiality

Another important characteristic of consciousness is its multiexistentiality; or in other words, its ability to have many lives. Many studies into recollections of past lives provide compelling documentation that we have had many existences (Alegretti, 2000). The process of being born and of dying can be further explored during an OBE. Several OBEs, including me, have also visited non-physical dimensions where individuals before being born are planning

their main tasks, projects and/or lesson for their upcoming life. Likewise, through an OBE, individuals can have a deeper perspective into dying, the NDE, the tunnel-effect, and many other aspects of the death and dying process.

We seem also to be in constant evolution. Consciousness is learning and developing itself through experiences, mainly physical life experiences, but also non-physical ones. It seems that we develop across many lives. A life could be analogous to a school day for a child (Stack, 1998). Thus, just like children go through hundreds of school days in their educational process, the consciousness as well seems to be undergoing many lives in an evolutionary process. And, just like the main objective for children for going to school is to further their education, perhaps the main objective for why we have many lives is evolution. I would argue that most of us are still going to have countless lives ahead in order to mature further.

Benefits of exploring our broader true nature

Spending time outside the body has a profound effect on the lives of OBEs or NDEs; in no small part because their perspectives become broadened. After all, when considering the cranial cavity where our brain resides, it could literally be said that thinking while in an OBE is the only true way of thinking outside the box. Naturally, the more we explore and the more time we spend outside the body, the more we understand the nuances of life as a consciousness or soul and all of its ramifications. Thus relying on these observations, let us address some of the benefits and perspectives, among many others, which become expanded.

Identity

As discussed above, our sense of who we are changes; as well as our understanding of everybody else. There is a difference between theory and practice. We are that complex as human beings. Though most people agree that they are more than the physical body, they may also regard an emotional or spiritual self, but in practice, in the day-to-day, many of these same people behave as if we are only this physical body, with only physical concerns and objectives.

We can thus see how a post-OBE understanding plays out in the expansion of our sense of ecology and our environment. We are rightfully concerned about the stress our way of life and overpopulation is placing on the environment. We realise that all of us need to make major changes so as to stay within a sustainable condition. In many circles, we hear the question and challenge, "what kind of world do we want to live for our children?", though this is a fair question, combining it with our understanding that we will have many lives ahead, the question could also be, "what kind of world or resources do I want to find in my next life?".

Usually, human beings have a strong tendency to identify with their surroundings and those people closest to them. Thus, part of who we are is the city and country we were born in, the language we speak, the education we have received. We are sometimes willing to go the extra mile for somebody very close to us. However, once we realise (and remember) we have already had many lives before in different contexts and places, we can come to the conclusion

that 1) we are not only the product of the experiences of only this current life, and 2) we probably already had lives in many different countries and many different religions, and more than likely we defended those places and ideologies the way the people in them are currently doing it.

The OBE helps us to overcome our current life conditioning and to be able to see ourselves in a broader context (see Minero, 2012). Thus, we are able to extract and recognise our essence from our current country, race, religion, gender, language, family position, social class and others; and we realise that we are the sum of all of those experiences and not just the current states of being. An interesting consideration is if in the next life we are born in a very different country with a different tradition and culture; how conditioned will we be become by that culture?

If we entertain the past/future life hypothesis, this question leads us to consider: how can we diminish the influence in future lives of certain cultural aspects that might be undesirable? Trying to look for an ideal common denominator of what to strive for, which goes beyond this one single life is also something the OBE helps us with. Otherwise, we realise that if we do not put effort against the pressure of conditioning, we run the risk in our next life of becoming mainly the product of that other culture. This implies that we would be acting less as our essence or consciousness, and from a very practical stance, we may end up doing things we disagree with right now!

We observe from individuals that undergo a NDE – which is in many instances a forced OBE – how much they change intimately (Atwater, 2000). Their priorities and their outlook in life becomes different after experiencing another reality directly. Besides what we have spoken about above, the vast majority of these individuals change for the better in several life areas. As Nelson Abreu highlighted in the previous chapter, most of them become more humane and try to be more helpful. They place a great emphasis on relationships and on the well-being of others, and are less concerned with social status, money or power. They usually volunteer more for several different causes, trying to make a greater social impact.

Losing the fear of death

Most OBErs/NDErs lose the fear of death. Yet, losing this fear – in and of itself – has several other ramifications. Individuals have small phobias, fears and/or insecurities (and sometimes not so small), which originate from the fear of death and dying; these secondary phobias have been stopping them from accomplishing several goals during the course of their life. Thus, when the fear of death is lost, these other issues have no reason for existing, and many of them disappear as well. As a result, these individuals become less afraid of making mistakes and less fearful in general, more open, sincere and authentic in their manifestations, more stable, grounded, confident, and emotionally secure. And, though several of these aspects are difficult to measure, this loss of fear, in turn, makes them more effective in their life, and they themselves acknowledge this (Atwater, 2000).

Life tasks

An important effect that is also observed is that after their experience, OBEs/NDEs have a greater sense of purpose and go about their activities with more energy. In NDEs, this tends to occur because during their experience they get a glimpse of their life task, or life purpose. Individuals get an idea of some of the specific main reasons and/or initial intentions behind why they decided to incarnate in the first place. Thus, though for several OBEs/NDEs the change in perspective and activities in their physical life is subtle, for many of them, it represents a more drastic change. Several individuals change cities, professions, or several other aspects in their lives. In many instances they mention directly: "I know what I need to do know, and it was not what I was doing, that was not the reason why I came into this life" (4).

Most people – if not all – ask themselves at one point or another in their life, what is it that I came here to do? What is my purpose? The OBE helps us to have a greater perspective of our soul-centred objectives, which we can combine with our physical goals, in order to arrive at a more informed decision about the direction of our own life. Though the full discussion on how these perspectives evolve as we develop goes beyond the scope of this chapter and book, we can observe how the OBE as a tool allows us to see a greater reality and how relevant the development of this skill can become. The experiences outside the body will, in a very constructive fashion, challenge our preconceived understanding and knowledge.

Meeting other beings

Let me mention here a final – but not less important – aspect of OBEs and NDEs – which would certainly be considered a positive benefit by most people. During OBEs and NDEs, many individuals describe meeting a more evolved, developed and positive being, who wants to help them. These benign beings have received many names, like mentors, spirit guides, helpers, angels, beings of light, and others.

One of the most interesting areas of the OBE phenomenon is the possibility to interact face-to-face with a spirit guide. They seem to be old friends of ours, with their own evolutionary trajectory, just several steps ahead of us (Bruce, 1999). At that moment, we can also consult issues and receive advice from them. The presence of the spirit guides is usually very calming, reassuring, and conscious. Their presence seems to elevate our level of awareness, and our understanding of several issues becomes clearer. Though this topic also goes beyond the scope of this book, it is interesting to note that this is one of the main reasons why people want to develop OBEs. And, we realise that what the guides want is to give us examples and information that will enrich our life and help us to evolve – this is commonly referred to as spiritual development. In many instances, these guides are those who give us ideas and help us to remember some of the main tasks we had planned for this life.

Conclusion

The OBE is a tool to help us to observe the other side of our reality. With our physical observations, we are limited to experiencing only a fraction of reality. We can be outside the body with the same level of consciousness and mental faculties we have right now in our ordinary waking state. In order to have these non-physical observations, we do not need to lose our logic, discernment, and criteria. On the contrary, these faculties become even more relevant at that stage because we need to interpret a reality that seems to be much more complex than the physical reality. Therefore, by relying on OBEs we are not able to know and see it all, but we are able to increase exponentially our area of observation and information, and thus the understanding of ourselves.

Notes

1. The scientific law of parsimony is a problem-solving principle which suggests that the simplest explanation is usually more accurate. For example, if a researcher has two hypotheses to choose from, they should select the hypothesis with the fewest implicit assumptions in order to test a given theory.
2. I have seen some of my students classify a dream as an OBE, and upon further analysis, they themselves come to the conclusion that this specific experience under study was just a dream.
3. This notion of self-as-consciousness can also be useful to keep in mind for people who want to have OBEs, in order for them to disconnect more easily from the physical reality.
4. This quote is from the 'The Day I Died' documentary which aired on BBC in 2002.

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CHAPTER 3: OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES AND LUCID DREAMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH, ED KELLOGG

Some controversy has arisen on the nature of out-of-the-body (physical) experiences (OBEs) and lucid dreams (LDs), which many people lump together into a single category. Although OBEs and LDs have similarities, they also exhibit significant differences. In this chapter I'll primarily focus on the phenomenology of my own experiences, although other reports of OBEs as contrasted with lucid dreams, generally show good agreement with the phenomenology I shall describe.

So how do OBEs differ from LDs? To begin, many people who have had OBEs vehemently deny not only that they had a dream, but also claim to have actually left their physical bodies. By the first criterion alone OBEs fail to meet the most basic definition of lucid dreaming, that individuals realise that they dream while they dream.

Do people really leave their physical bodies? From a phenomenological point of view, the question of 'what really happens' in a hypothetical 'objective reality' seems beside the point. From this perspective, OBEs and IBEs (in-the-body experiences) have the same ontological status. But do OBEs differ in significant ways from LDs with respect to their phenomenological characteristics? In my experience, they do.

Researchers in the fields of inner experience, subtle energies, and anomalous phenomena in general often find themselves handicapped by unrecognised personal and cultural prejudices about the subject matter under study. No matter how rigorously one applies the scientific method, hidden assumptions can obscure promising avenues of approach, as well as the significance of collected observations. The disciplines of phenomenology and of general semantics can provide methodological tools that can significantly reduce covert personal and cultural biases (1).

In my case, by systematically keeping me aware of the depth of my ignorance and the fallibility of my assumptions, it has kept me open to possibilities I would have otherwise closed off. By directly applying the tools of phenomenology and of general semantics to inner experience, I believe that researchers can enhance their mindfulness of covert prejudices, foster a more open-minded attitude, and gain a better understanding of the phenomena they study.

The phenomenological method

Phenomenology as a discipline aims towards clearly seeing and rigorously describing the essential structures of one's life-world, which includes not only what one experiences in ordinary waking consciousness, but in other states of consciousness as well. Throughout history people have attempted to make useful 'maps' of the universe in which they found themselves based

on their own experiences. Such maps often served a religious purpose as well as a practical one, but among scientists today the predictive value of a map has become the criterion of choice. Unfortunately, like everyone else, scientists carry a burden of covert bias as to the fundamental nature of things; what phenomenologists describe as the 'thesis of the natural attitude' (Husserl, 1973).

Basically, this meta-schema describes our ordinary everyday attitude towards the world. For example, the beliefs that we live physically as human beings in 'objective reality', that physical objects exist independent of our awareness of them, that events juxtaposed in space-time exist in some sort of a cause and effect relationship, and that we experience a physical universe directly and without significant distortion. The natural attitude has many points in common with what researchers like Charles Tart (1986) refer to as 'consensus trance', a trance programmed by, and hidden within, the deepest structures of one's culture and language.

To disassociate themselves from the natural attitude, phenomenologists perform the *epoché*, a 'transcendental phenomenological reduction' which requires a fundamental shift in perspective by consciously and intentionally suspending judgment. Peter Koestenbaum described this process in his introduction to 'The Paris Lectures' (Husserl, 1975):

Husserl's unqualified and radical empiricism is evident when he writes 'we must not make assertions about that which we do not ourselves see ... For confirmation we must always turn to *zu den Sachen selbst*, to the things themselves, where "*Sachen*" or "things" refers not to any physical objects but to any presentation or phenomenon whatever that may confront the ego in consciousness ...'

Thus, the *epoché* brings about a radical suspension of belief in one's ordinary, deeply ingrained, and usually unconscious attitude toward one's life-world. A detailed description of the *epoché* lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but as a very crude approximation one can test the absolute certitude of a judgment by seeing if one can doubt it.

For example, at this moment you might say "I sit in a chair", by which you mean a chair existing in an objective physical reality. Can you doubt this? Well, perhaps you hallucinate your experience due to hypnotic suggestion, find yourself caught up in a very realistic dream, or experience some sort of advanced virtual reality in a computer simulation. None of these possibilities seem likely, but you recognise their essential possibility and can, in fact, doubt.

However, after the *epoché* one might state "I experience myself sitting in a chair" and this statement remains proof against genuine doubt, in that one's lived experience in itself invalidates the process of doubting before it can properly begin. The *epoché* allows one to move towards greater lucidity in ordinary waking consciousness, and as such it can serve as both a model for and a preparation towards the development of lucidity in other states of consciousness as well.

In ordinary dreams, I usually continue to hold onto the usual assumptions inherent in my everyday attitude towards the physical world. For example, if I want to leave a room, I'll walk through a doorway, rather than go through a wall. In a lucid dream – but not necessarily in an OBE – I bring at least one of these assumptions to a halt, that what I experience takes place in an objective, physical world. However, this major insight only begins the task involved in a true

epoché, as I may still operate through a residuum of unquestioned beliefs and assumptions left over from the natural attitude (Kellogg, 1989, 1999). Husserl termed this automatic, and many layered making sense out of the world 'functioning intentionality'. This ordinarily effortless and on the whole congruent identification and labelling of objects and situations, taken for granted in waking physical reality, continues to operate to a greater or lesser extent even in LDs and OBEs, depending on the degree to which one becomes mindfully aware of its operation, and manages to suspend judgment.

Rather than simply replacing one set of unexamined beliefs with another, from a phenomenological viewpoint true lucidity requires that we give priority to the territory of experience. This means that we revise our maps to fit our territories, instead of distorting our perceptions to fit our preconceptions. The *epoché* can help in accomplishing this task.

General semantics

Unfortunately, even those who attempt to rigorously hold onto a more phenomenological attitude can find themselves tripped up by the habitual structures and assumptions inherent in language. To minimise such distortions, I use a more phenomenological language called E-Prime (E') that more accurately reflects my experience while minimising hidden assumptions (Kellogg, 1987; Kellogg & Bourland, 1990).

E' refers to an English language derivative that eliminates any use of the verb 'to be' (basically am, is, was, are, and were). The use of E' has clarified many aspects of my scientific and phenomenological work, and made obvious many covert assumptions that ordinary English usage had concealed. In essence, E-Prime consists of a more descriptive and extensionally oriented derivative of English that automatically tends to bring the user back to the level of first person experience. E-Prime fosters a worldview in which the user perceives situations as changeable rather than static, and where one's language indicates possibilities rather than false certainties. I've found it a useful tool for working with anomalous experiences such as dreams and OBEs, in that descriptions written in E' significantly reduce the distortions and hidden assumptions inherent in ordinary 'is' English.

A comparison of LDs and OBEs

Given the phenomenological differences described below, I do not consider OBEs as simply a kind of lucid dream. Of course differentiating OBEs and LDs depends very much on how one defines them. In my case I've differentiated them based on my own experiences and reasonably careful observations.

I avoid using the terms 'astral travel' or 'astral projection'. Although 'astral travel' may mean something specific for an individual, in the literature it serves as a catch all phrase that includes many different kinds of experiences. For example, books using the term 'astral projection' might use it to refer to an exercise of the imagination, to hypnagogic visions, vivid dreams, lucid dreams, and what I would specifically designate as OBEs. Overall, my own OBEs

show good agreement in many respects with the descriptions of others, such as Robert Monroe (1971).

In this chapter I'll share some comparative phenomenological observations, focusing on my personal experiences. I've recorded and indexed well over 35,000 dreams, several thousand of which qualify as at least minimally lucid (knowing that I dream while dreaming), and around 100 OBEs, some of which occurred spontaneously, but many of which I incubated intentionally. As I've described the phenomenology of my lucid dreaming in great detail elsewhere (for example Kellogg, 1992, 2011, 2012), I'll begin by focusing here primarily on the phenomenology of the out-of-body state as I've experienced it.

Childhood experiences

Although I vaguely recall having lucid dreams as a young boy, I don't remember any specifically. On the other hand, I clearly and vividly recall a number of what I would now characterise as OBEs, where I would go flying around and about our house, over the lawn and across the back field – usually at low altitude – less than 6 feet up. These experiences felt intensely real – just as real as if I had physically flown. This, for me as a child, led to some confusion.

On the one hand I knew – absolutely knew – that I could fly. Yet for some strange reason I could only manage to do this while asleep. I had no success flying when awake – as one attempt that I made of flying from an upper bunk bed one night proved quite dramatically. However, this set up an early awareness for me of, on the one hand knowing with inner certainty that I could do something, and on the other hand finding out that in waking life I could not actually do it. The tension between these two indisputable facts created in me a need and a drive towards understanding.

An 'Out-of-the-Arm Experience'

I stopped having spontaneous OBEs at about the age of ten. However, in my sophomore year in college I unexpectedly had a partial OBE. I'd received a Transcendental Meditation (TM) initiation, and after receiving the mantra, the teacher instructed me – in fact warned me – to limit my meditations to no more than 20 minutes or so. I did this for a while, but then intrigued rather than put off by his warning I did a marathon meditation session to see what would happen. About two hours after beginning I came back to physical awareness, still sitting in a half-lotus position, but completely paralysed. Although I had my eyes closed, I could see the room. Not expecting this, and a bit panicked, I tried mightily to move and finally, with a wrenching sensation, managed to lift my right arm up before my eyes.

But something looked quite wrong, as I could see through the arm – it had a faint golden colour, and while I could feel it and move it at will, I could also see and feel a second right arm, paralysed, lying in my lap. I believed that I had separated the arm of my subtle body from my physical body, and feared that I might do myself permanent damage if I couldn't put the two arms back together again, so I tried frantically to merge them. After a few minutes I finally

managed this, my body paralysis ended, and I found to my relief that my right arm now worked properly. I felt chagrined that I had panicked the way I had, instead of seeing this as an opportunity to try for a full-fledged OBE. Although I did other prolonged TM sessions after that, they never again had this effect.

After graduating from college, and having read my way through all of the books on OBEs I could find at the time, including 'The Projection of the Astral Body' (Muldoon, 1929), 'Astral Projection' (Fox, 1962), 'Out-of-the-Body-Experiences' (Green, 1968), and 'Journeys Out of the Body' (Monroe, 1971), I spent the summer focusing on developing and regaining the ability to have OBEs I'd had as a child. As an aside, although none of the techniques I read about worked for me, I eventually did succeed in developing my own technique that worked reasonably well (for those interested, refer to the supplement material at the end of this chapter).

Sleep paralysis

I discovered that my TM 'Out-of-the-Arm Experience' had strong commonalities with what researchers called 'sleep paralysis' (Cheyne, 2002), but which after a number of experiences of this type, I now identified as a pre-OBE state, a transition state between the physical reality waking state and the full out-of-body state. In this transition state I feel fully awake, but find I cannot move – my physical body has become paralysed. I can see and hear, but although it seems like I do this physically, I sometimes see and hear things not physically present. And although I can see, my physical eyelids remain shut. For example, I see a room that looks like my physical bedroom, but I may also see other entities in it – from 'ghosts', to 'angels', to 'aliens'. Many others have reported experiences like these during sleep paralysis.

In my early experiences in this pre-OBE state, I often felt waves of energy rushing up and down my body, and heard a buzzing vibration sound. Experientially my consciousness had dissociated from my physical body and associated with a second non-physical body, but the second body in which I found myself often still seemed attached to the physical. If I could intentionally speed up the vibration/wave, my second non-physical body became unstuck, and I could move away while the physical body remained in place, by 'rolling out' of it, or by floating out of it. During all of this I felt fully awake in a similar way to that of when physically awake.

Sleeping position

In contrast to lucid dreams, I soon noticed that almost all of my spontaneous OBEs took place from the lying on my back position. My LDs usually take place from either the lying on my side (either way) or lying on my stomach positions. While I've had lucid dreams lying on my back, these have occurred more rarely.

Examples of OBEs

Let's begin by looking at an early intentionally induced OBE of mine that illustrates some distinctive elements:

Stuck in the kitchen door

Lying on the bed, fully conscious after doing my OBE induction technique, I hear the usual hissing sound. It grows louder and rougher until I feel it as a loud vibration – not smooth, but I now feel my two bodies have separated slightly, out of coincidence. I do a ‘roll out’ and partially go through a wall. I start towards the kitchen on my hands and knees, sometimes sinking into the floor. I feel the carpet as my hands go through it. I try to stretch my arm, but it remains solid in shape, even though it seems insubstantial enough to sink through the floor. I stand up and will ‘to see’ but nothing happens. I become a little angry, and partially open my eyes to see, but close them again, lest my physical eyes open as well, which has happened before when I seem too close to my physical body. So I decide to go outside and get far away from my physical body before trying to open my eyes. I go straight through some chairs and the table as I crawl to the door, but with difficulty, as I seem too dense to go through them without resistance. At the door I begin to go through, but become stuck half way through, with just my head and arms on the other side. I become a little angry at my lack of full control and panic slightly, and try to reverse course, not wanting all of the time and effort I put into inducing this OBE to go to waste. However, I don’t seem far enough away from my physical body – my emotional upset triggers a recall and I get pulled back into my physical body, having only accomplished getting myself stuck in the kitchen door.

Senses: Exteroception – touch, pressure. Movement – rotational and linear acceleration, Proprioception - body position.

This OBE began with a hissing sound and a vibration, phenomena that occurred in earlier OBEs, but which occurred less and less as I gained experience. I’d guess that the vibration occurs when one tries ‘shifting gears’ to go out-of-body without engaging something like a clutch. With time practitioners may learn to shift smoothly, without grinding. In one of my early experiences, aside from the noise, I also felt an incredible energy charge – like hundreds of thousands of volts – roaring up and down my body. It felt so violent that I felt convinced that when I came out of it I’d find my teeth shattered. Afterwards I had two separate memories for the same time period, one memory of my physical body lying peacefully and absolutely undisturbed in bed, and another, of my second (OBE) body undergoing violent and extremely intense vibrations.

After I rolled out of my body, I tried to crawl out of recall range, as I’d learned from experience that until I get out of range, about 10-15 feet (where the sensation of having two bodies disappears), any emotional upset will usually result in my awareness getting reeled back in. As I crawled, I sank through the floor with a very peculiar sensation, of not only feeling my hands go through the floor, but of feeling the floor go through my hands as both occupied the same space. Because I could find no other term that described this unique and unprecedented sensation, I made up one: ‘zorching’.

In contrast, in LDs, when I put my ‘dream hand’ into a dream wall, it feels like putting my hand into mud, and I don’t experience this intermeshing sensation. In this OBE, my body felt sort of semi-dense, halfway between solid, where it feels almost physical, and a subtle state where it can pass through walls with no difficulty or transition sensation at all. Because of this, I ended up getting stuck in the door when my second body became a little too dense to pass through it. As far as the return goes, as an adult, I’ve had many OBEs in which I’ve repercussed back to the physical suddenly and even violently, which feels similar in some respects to the feeling of jerking awake that I had as a child when I fell – too rapidly – asleep.

Partial OBEs

I've had a number of 'partial OBEs', in which, for example, the legs of my second body have separated from my physical legs, and float above them. I can sense both pairs of legs, but can only intentionally move the non-physical pair. I find these experiences amusing rather than harmful. I've had this experience dozens of times. An example:

I wake up in bed from a flying dream, to find myself paralysed, feeling the familiar bodies out of coincidence sensation. I decide to try to get out by floating my [second] body out of my physical body by chanting "I'm floating higher and higher" to get it out of effective recall range so I can have a full-fledged OBE. This sort of works, as my [second] body legs go up, but the two bodies still remain attached on the upper half, which looks pretty ridiculous. I can move these legs at will, but my physical legs remain paralysed. I involuntarily open one of my physical eyes and see my room, but my bodies do not immediately reintegrate, instead the legs of my [second] body remain floating and separated for a few minutes before the two bodies reintegrate, the paralysis disappears, and I can physically move.

Three bodies

In my phenomenological lifeworld I've experienced myself in three different bodies: 1) a physical body (which I'll call the first body) which feels the densest and most stable; 2) a second body, the OBE body that feels quasi-physical, and can vary in density; and 3) the dream body, the most subtle and mutable of the three.

I've experienced these three bodies in reverse sequence, like a series of Chinese boxes; lucid in my third (dream) body, waking up in my second OBE body, floating outside of the physical, and then finally back to my physical body in a two stage 'waking up' process. Just as an OBE body apparently comes out of the physical, so may the dream body come out of the OBE body, in an 'out-of-the-out-of-the-body' experience. Some metaphysical systems teach that we have seven or more bodies, like layers on an onion, each more subtle than the next. I can't speak to the existence of all seven of these 'higher bodies' but I have certainly experienced three. For example:

Realistically flying in a dream when I wake up, but not in my physical body, but in my OBE body floating above it. Although I don't see a cord, I feel tethered to my physical head, on the bed below. I chant 'I am lighter and lighter', and begin to rise, but still feel connected to my physical body below, in fact I feel both bodies at the same time, I feel one body floating upwards, but my physical body staying on the bed unmoving. I float higher, but try too hard to go beyond the range of physical recall and return to waking physical reality.

Afterwards, aside from realising that I'd just experienced three phenomenologically distinct bodies in sequence, I also understood that the very realistic physical sensations of flying in the dream had most likely originated in the OBE body floating about in my room at the same time. This would seem analogous to what happens when a dreamer experiences sensations that originate in the physical body (like hearing a sound, or having a full bladder) while dreaming.

The cord

Does the second body have a cord, as experiencers have sometimes reported (Muldoon, 1929; Fox, 1962; Monroe, 1971)? My results in this respect have proven mixed. In some OBEs I've seen a cord, but only when I've looked for it. It originates between my shoulder blades,

where I've also felt a swelling, and while reasonably thick and easy to grab close to my body, it seems to rapidly taper to fishing line size within a foot or two and then to become invisible.

...lying on bed in an OBE – decided to get up and take inventory of my 'astral' body. I felt surprised when I feel that I have on clothes like the ones I'd gone to sleep with, but these 'clothes' have a texture and feel like my body, as they felt extremely elastic and light. I reach between my shoulder blades to feel for a cord [as Monroe had described] but instead discovered a large swelling, as if my back had gotten pumped up with air. This surprised me so much I stopped looking for a cord, and instead explored the texture of this body – which felt like extremely fine elastic but non-stick chewing gum.

Senses: touch, movement, hearing, and one other sense, like seeing but not at all as clear or distinct.

I did have one OBE that in an indirect way corroborated the existence of a cord, and of its function in recalls. In this OBE I found myself in a sort of Castaneda-like 'Journey to Ixtlan' environment, where I met some beings who tried to convince me to join their after-life church. I pointed out that I couldn't join because I hadn't died yet, showing them that I still had a cord. The leader said "no problem", got out a pair of large silver shears, and cut the cord. I intensely realised that I had a lot to do on Earth, and raced after the cord, having read that if you had your cord cut in an OBE you'd die. I found both ends – which had expanded to visibility, and tied a knot connecting the two, hoping this would work. I then proceeded to have the longest OBE I've ever had.

Normally, my OBEs would only last a few minutes, and never more than a half hour, before I would involuntarily find myself reeled back in like a fish to land in my physical body. In this case this didn't happen. Subjectively at least, hours passed. Finally, this worried me and I intentionally followed the cord back to my physical body where with some difficulty I got back in, to find myself hardly able to move for some minutes – not paralysed, just sluggish and uncoordinated. After that experience, I did not have any spontaneous or successful intentional OBEs for over 6 months.

The OBE body, the LD body, and their phenomenal worlds

My OBE body generally seems a close counterpart to my physical body, stable in form, resistant to change, made of some sort of elastic semitransparent whitish material, that can feel either very light or very dense. I rarely have on clothes. I automatically feel a very strong and defined sense of embodiment, with a reality tone directly comparable to that experienced in my physical body, something that almost never happens in LDs. In general, a strong proprioceptive and kinaesthetic sense of my body seems primary, although vision can also prove extraordinarily vivid and clear.

On the other hand, my body in LDs seems far more mutable, can vary widely in size and shape and even in species. Although it may look similar to my physical form, it usually appears complete with clothes, and seems easy to intentionally change. As far as my senses in LDs goes, these can vary widely, from having a vividness and intensity comparable to, or even superior to, my physical senses, to nothing at all. A feeling of embodiment and/or vision usually predominates. Despite this, my proprioceptive and kinaesthetic sense typically seems vague and incomplete in LDs when compared to OBEs. Less frequently, in some LDs other senses such

as hearing, smell and even taste can come strongly into play. I've never experienced taste or smell during an OBE, but as I've only had a 100 or so such experiences, this seems too few to draw any general conclusions. On the other hand, the *zorching*/intermeshing sensation that I've felt when I put my hand into a wall during an OBE feels quite unique, and has no physical – or dreaming – counterpart for me.

Psi

In the 1960s a series of controlled scientific studies at the 'Maimonides Dream Laboratory' demonstrated that subjects could repeatedly tune into randomly selected external targets through psi in their dreams (see Ullman, Krippner, & Vaughn, 1973). A meta-analysis of post-Maimonides studies of psi-dreaming by other researchers confirmed this finding (Sherwood & Roe, 2003). I've had many examples of evidential psi in both my LDs as well as in my OBEs, so the presence of psi does not serve as a particularly useful way to differentiate between the two. At this point I would only say that both lucid dreams and OBEs can bring through valid information not available through physical sensory channels, and that neither seems strictly subjective in the reductionist meaning of the term.

Environmental stability

In my experience, environmental stability in out-of-body reality (OBR) behaves much more like waking physical reality (WPR) than lucid dream reality (LDR). When I take a second and even a third look at objects in OBR, objects stay very much the same, which does not seem the case in LDs, where for example, one can't usually read the same page twice.

Unlike in LDR, 'magic' does not work very well in OBR. My body shape seems relatively immutable, and although I can fly (and go through walls) if I speed up my vibrational rate sufficiently, I've had very poor success with psychokinesis, transformations, materialisations, and so forth; tasks which I can usually perform with ease in lucid dreams. In OBEs, I've had little success in changing my body shape, or in manifesting clothing, which appears automatically in LDR.

Time

I experience time in WPR as one dimensional, which one might imagine as a time-flow represented by a point moving in one direction on a straight line with my subjective 'now' comprising an interval ranging from a fraction of a second to a minute. On the other hand, for me 'dream time' has both one and two dimensional components (Kellogg, 1989). Instead of likening time to movement on a straight line, dream time corresponds more to a two dimensional plane with the forward edge corresponding to the future and the backward edge to the past. Thus, I may experience dream events out of (logical) sequence, and may even experience the 'beginning' of a dream at the 'end'. Time in lucid dreams generally seems much more linear than in non-lucid dreams, though it still has a two-dimensional component. On the other hand, my experience of time in OBR, like in WPR seems solidly one dimensional, and not particularly dream-like.

Seeing the physical world in OBR

In many accounts of OBEs, it seems clear that experiencers unquestioningly assume that they perceived the physical world during their OBE(s). If so, how? They no longer see through their physical eyes, with a retina, rods, cones, and specialised pigments (like rhodopsin) specifically suited to detect visible light. When we see during an OBE, we presumably do so using different mechanisms. Based on my own OBEs, I assume that my non-physical body resonates/interacts with a non-physical world analogous to, but not identical with WPR. If so, my non-physical eyes do not see the physical world at all, but instead perceive its OBR counterpart. However, just as my physical body has a similar but not identical form to that of my OBR body, so might the physical world have a similar but not identical counterpart in the OBR world. Sometimes the match appears almost perfect, but if I pay attention, I will notice small discrepancies – the mantle of the OBR living room of a friend I visit might have an object on it that his WPR mantle does not – perhaps something from the past in WPR that somehow left an ‘imprint’ there, or from who knows where.

Also, some people who have OBEs report that when they look for their physical body, as I have, that they either see nothing, or only see the body as a shadow or as a shrunken shell. Some see this as evidence that the experiencer did not have a genuine out-of-body, but in this I disagree. If one assumes that one’s non-physical self has sight adapted to seeing non-physical matter, it follows that perception of the physical body as such would not occur – instead one would only see whatever subtle matter remained in the physical body’s space. According to this reasoning, the more completely one gets out-of-body the less that one would see in the space of the physical body left behind.

Waking up and memory

Although my state of consciousness during an OBE feels very similar to that in a fully lucid dream, my memory of an OBE has an exceptionally vivid and enduring quality. This stands in marked contrast to the memory of even my most fully lucid dreams, which tend to fade unless I make a strong intentional effort to remember them after waking up. Furthermore, I actually don’t experience ‘waking up’ as such after an OBE, rather just a return of my consciousness to my physical body. The lack of the transitional sensation of waking up and the clear and unforgettable quality of my memory of an experience serves as a kind of litmus test for me, verifying that I’ve had an OBE and not a dream.

An unusual after effect: Losing the fear of death

Finally OBEs – but not lucid dreams – often absolutely convince those who’ve had them that they can exist without a physical body. They often lose their fear of death, as has happened in my own case. Those who’ve had OBEs often report that they enjoy life much more, with a different core attitude towards it – an effect that may last a lifetime. An even more pronounced effect happens after NDEs, which often include OBEs as well.

Betwixt and between categories

So, if OBEs and LDs have such distinct characteristics, how does it come about that some people – even research scientists – somehow conflate the two? I see three main reasons for this.

First, although I've focused in this chapter on differences, OBEs and LDs obviously also have a number of strong similarities. Second, once someone has had a sufficient number of OBEs, they may begin to have dreams of OBEs, just as they have dreams that can convincingly counterfeit WPR experiences. At this point I've had more dreams of OBEs than OBEs myself. Oftentimes I find that researchers (especially those who have little or no personal experience of OBEs themselves) include 'dreams of OBEs' in their data pool, which often leads them to the mistaken conclusion that OBEs just seem a kind of dream. Because of this, until I gained a greater understanding of the phenomenology distinguishing lucid dreams and OBEs, I initially only considered an OBE genuine if I maintained a continuity of consciousness from lying down in bed to experiencing myself leaving my physical body, while maintaining full conscious awareness throughout the process.

And third, just as sleepwalkers can have dreams while unknowingly moving about physically (incorporating the physical sensations they feel into their dreams) I believe that 'sleep-OBEs' can and do have dreams while unknowingly moving about in their second body, incorporating those sensations into what they dream about as well. I gave an example of one of those dreams above, in which I experienced a flying dream with very realistic sensations, from which I woke to find myself in an OBE floating above my physical body.

Conclusion

Table 2 sums up nine experiential variables that differ significantly between my OBEs and LDs.

Table 2. Characteristics of OBEs and LDs based on personal observations.

Characteristic	OBEs	LDs
1) Typical physical body position during the experience:	Lying on my back.	Lying on my side or stomach.
2) Experience often begins with:	Sleep paralysis. Intense vibrations.	Normal sleeping sensations.
3) Identified as a dream during the experience:	No.	Yes.
4) Reality tone:	Very high, even hyper-real. Also feel a very strong sense of embodiment.	Variable, but while typically vivid, often lacks 'solidity' and fine detail. Usually seems a bit sketchy.
5) Environmental stability:	Almost as stable as physical reality. If I leave a room and later return, the room typically remains the same.	Mutable. If I leave a room and later return, the room usually will have changed, often drastically.
6) The phenomenal body:	Stable. A close counterpart to my physical body, stable in form, made of	Mutable. Usually humanoid, but can vary widely in size, shape, colour, and even species.

	some sort of elastic semi-transparent whitish material.	
7) 'Waking up' sensation after the experience:	No. I already feel fully awake during an OBE, and instead simply experience a change of location of consciousness into my physical body.	Yes. At the end of even the most fully lucid dream I still 'wake up', with a significant alteration of consciousness, just as I do from other dreams.
8) Memory of the experience:	Compared to LDs, my memories of OBEs seem almost indelible.	Memories of LDs, like any dream, tend to fade right after waking up.
9) Losing the fear of death after the experience:	Yes. After my first fully conscious OBE as an adult I lost my fear of death because I now knew, in some sort of inarguable way, that I could exist without a physical body.	No. I had a number of lucid dreams before having any OBEs as an adult, and they did not have this effect.

Given the limited number of OBEs I have to work with, the phenomenology detailed here may not prove definitive even in my own case, let alone for others. Having a critical mass of systematically descriptive reports from a broad range of experienced practitioners might go a long way in clearing away confusion in this area, in finding robust common denominators, and also in bringing to light new and important variables.

Despite compelling evidence to the contrary (Ullman et al., 1973; Sherwood & Roe, 2003; Van de Castle, 1994), many people still consider dreams as strictly subjective fantasies manufactured by the sleeping brain. Conceptually reducing OBEs to dreams – even to lucid dreams – even now serves as an effective way to discount their objective value and potential ontological significance. However, in this chapter I hope to have clearly shown that in my own case that OBEs belong to a category of experience easily differentiated not just from dreams, but from lucid dreams. Neither 'fish nor fowl' – the OBE realm has similarities to both the physical environment and lucid dream state, while also having characteristics different from both.

Notes

1. For more information about the phenomenological method, general semantics, and their application to dream-work, see Kellogg, 1989 and 1999 in the reference list. Also, you can find all of the author's papers cited in the reference section online at <https://independent.academia.edu/EdKellogg>.

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Supplement: An OBE technique

Note: Using the technique described below, I succeeded in eliciting an OBE in about 1 out of 3 attempts.

Exercise:

- 1) Lie on your back, in a semi-comfortable position keeping the head and spine aligned. This means comfortable enough to relax, but not comfortable enough to go to sleep. If you normally fall asleep on your back, try this position without a pillow, or using a book wrapped in a towel as a pillow substitute.
- 2) Use whatever techniques you know to relax deeply, such as slow deep 1/2 inhale/exhale breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, hand warming, and so forth. When you have relaxed let your breathing follow a natural rhythm.
- 3) From this point on, for at least the next two hours, you'll need to refrain from any voluntary movement. Basically, you want to keep your mind awake as your body falls asleep. In order to do this, you need to choose an activity to keep your mind alert and occupied in a manner that will not interfere, and that may even enhance, the natural process of your physical body falling asleep.

I recommend the following: As you inhale repeat the word *en/er/gise* and 'perceptualise' (visualise and sense) the energy rushing from your feet up the back of your body to the top of your head. On the exhale repeat the word *op/ti/mise* and perceptualise the energy rushing from the top of your head down the front of your body to your feet. Repeat continuously. Do not control your breathing rhythm, but only the perceptualisation pattern accompanying it. Alternatively, you might want to perceptualise the energies moving inside your body, moving up to the head on the inhale, and down to the feet on the exhale. When your physical body has gone to sleep it will feel catatonic – immovable. Stay calm and gently try to roll out of your physical body in your more subtle second body. If this doesn't work easily, try willing or imagining yourself to a floating position near the ceiling.

Optimal Conditions: This procedure probably works best if attempted after 3 or 4 hours sleep in the early A.M. hours, when the mind feels refreshed but when the body still undergoes the biochemical conditioning of your normal sleep cycle. Get up, walk around, and read for 15 to 30 minutes. Don't overdo it – you want to reactivate your mental faculties to just over the threshold of what you consider your normal 'conscious waking' state.

CHAPTER 4: TOWARDS AN EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY OF OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES, RYAN HURD

This chapter is a thought experiment about the potential for an evolutionary function, or functions, for out-of-body experiences (OBEs). What do evolutionary theories have to add to the discussion of OBEs? Is it possible that OBEs arose to meet a specific need or needs that may be central to human survival? Is it possible that there were social benefits of OBEs in some evolutionary environments deep in the prehistoric past that played a role in sexual selection? Or are OBEs just one more cognitive spandrel, that is, a tendency that is neither beneficial nor counterproductive to survival? These are some of the questions this chapter will address.

Before we get into these questions, I will describe the cross-cultural features of OBEs as well as their neurological correlates and many points of entry, and comment on what we can reasonably expect a new science of consciousness to accomplish in arriving at a better understanding of OBEs.

Features of the OBE

The defining cross-cultural and historical feature of an OBE is the realistic experience of perceiving the environment from outside the physical body (Blackmore, 1987). The term 'out-of-body' is meant descriptively, not as a theoretical assumption. The sensation is felt, seen, and heard, and, more rarely, may also involve new smells and shifts in perceived temperature and air pressure. The effect can be confusing, disorienting, and include bizarre shifts in gravity as if one is spinning in an amusement park ride. Sometimes there are strong vibrational effects as well (Metzinger, 2005). Some reports of OBEs also mention a distinct sensation of slipping out of the perceptual body (Van Eeden, 1969; Crookall, 1976).

Visually, imagery in OBEs can include precise impressions of one's home environment to less accurate representations that are more similar to the imagery seen in ordinary REM [rapid eye movement] dreams (Green & McCreery, 1993). Mentally, the experience often occurs with a high degree of clarity that results in OBEers adamantly making the point that it was not like a dream; those who have OBEs tend to be clear-headed and retain their total cognitive function during their experience (Blackmore, 1987). However, a subset of OBE reports also have a "dreamlike quality, as if being aware in a dream" (Metzinger, 2005, p. 68).

The secondary cross-cultural feature of an OBE, which not everyone reports but is widely known around the world, is seeing one's body from a perspective spatially removed from the body. This is the converse of the 'doppelgänger effect', also known as autoscopy, in which one hallucinates a body double. OBEs are also dissimilar to heautoscopy, which is when a second body projection is created, but the OBEr is not certain with which one to identify (Occhionero, Natale, Martoni, & Tonetti, 2012). Rather, in some OBEs, while the sense of self appears to be

distant from the body, there is not always a secondary or duplicate body image, merely a non-embodied witness (Green & McCreery, 1993).

There are many other tertiary features of OBEs, but their presence or absence does not add or subtract from the basic definition of an OBE. In my opinion, many of these features, such as seeing a silver cord emerging from the perceived body, may be culturally and historically bound, and may represent cognitive expectations that blend with the given experience, in line with the unconscious processes that construct similar visionary perceptions (Rossi, 1972; Sparrow, 2013; Hurd, 2011). To be certain, there is no one 'pure' or culture-less OBE; each one is a real, human moment with its own peculiarities that may relate to the experiencer's unique psychological set and cultural setting. Further, the grouping of features I have outlined above may actually represent several overlapping phenomena.

I have had quite a few OBEs in my life, the first at age 14. This personal experience has allowed me to remain open to a number of strange things that can happen in the span of a human life, even though rationally I cannot explain them. In writing this chapter, I am not advocating a certain worldview as more correct than another. My approach is agnostic: open to considerations outside of the accepted scientific order of the universe, but also sceptical.

When it comes to the evolutionary psychology of altered states, it does not matter if OBEs are in fact 'real' – by real, I mean that a part of the mind wanders from the limitations of the body into consensual, or shared, reality. Do OBEs have an ontological reality or do they represent a collection of folk psychology beliefs built up from a naïve interpretation of their expression? I don't know. What matters is that these interior experiences can be seen to have long-lasting effects on the beliefs and behaviours of individuals, and have had a dramatic effect on the socio-cultural stage as well, especially concerning the basic questions of life, death, and survival of consciousness after death.

The authenticity of the OBE, it turns out, is important on the social stage, where our declarations affect the larger community, and therefore can transfer back to the individual social benefits or costs. From this perspective, it appears that OBEs do have a privileged effect today, on individual and cultural levels. Yet the question remains, did OBEs have a similarly strong hold on our ancestors' minds as well? And how did these phenomena arise?

First we must establish the widely accepted facts about OBEs and their prevalence in human societies. Also, we must place OBEs in a larger perspective, as one state of consciousness that exists on a spectrum of possibilities that are produced, or accompanied, by measurable alterations of core sleep mechanisms that are shared by all mammals.

The many roads to OBEs

About one out of ten of the general population has an OBE once in their lives (Alvarado, 2000), and close to one of five in college settings (Irwin, 1985). In general, OBEs for healthy persons are often associated with deep relaxation, meditation and Stage 1 sleep, as well as REM intrusion into wakefulness (Blackmore, 1986b), which has also been termed hypnagogic

hallucination (1; Mavromatis, 2010). In a broader sense, OBEs are deeply associated with sleep mechanisms, or 'somnolence', which is why they are also reported by meditators and hypnosis patients.

OBEs also occur in psychiatric settings, in which case they are termed hallucinations. They may be more common in patients with schizophrenia than the general public, although imprecise definitions of OBEs has hampered this observation (Blackmore, 1986a; Metzinger 2005). OBEs are also regularly reported in general anaesthesia during surgery or other medical treatments in which the subject loses consciousness or is subjected to a drug-induced fugue state (Nelson, 2011; Blanke, Ortigue, Landis, Spinelli, & Seeck, 2004). Recreational drugs such as dimethyltryptamine, the tryptamines, ketamine, and cannabis are also associated with OBEs (2).

However, there are several other interesting triggers for spontaneous OBEs that do not fit patterns described above. First, they can be induced through visual confusion, such as mirrors and virtual reality glasses (3). Secondly, scientists have induced OBEs in subjects by applying transcranial stimulation, in which a low power current or magnetic current is directly applied to the scalp (Saroka, Mulligan, Murphy, & Persinger, 2010). Thirdly, OBEs can be spontaneously triggered by intense physical activity, such as rock climbing or long-distance running (Alvarado, 2000). Finally, they can be triggered by physical and psychological trauma, as well as sudden death anxiety. It is this last trigger grouping of OBE – their spontaneous, trauma-related dimension – that may hold the most promising key to their evolutionary heritage.

Neurological correlates to OBEs

Researchers have been able to pin-point the areas of the brain that are associated with OBEs by clinically studying the brain activity of people who have spontaneous OBEs, those who have suffered damage to the brain, as well as creating a variety of in-lab situations that can result in OBEs.

Taken together, studies along those lines suggest that OBEs are mediated by a part of brain known as the temporo-parietal junction (TPJ). The TPJ is part of the brain stem, which maintains the body's sense of balance. This part of the brain is part of the vestibular system, or the inner ear. It integrates the information from our senses, and creates a model that determines the position of the body in relationship to the environment. When a brain structure in the TPJ area known as the right angular gyrus is stimulated, the brain temporarily loses its ability to integrate all the information of the senses, resulting in feelings of floating, spinning and shifting gravity (Blanke et al., 2004).

Other studies have shown that people who are prone to spontaneous OBEs also have brain interference in between the TPJ and the prefrontal cortex, the part of the higher brain that is largely associated with self-awareness and higher ordered thought (Blanke et al., 2005). It appears, therefore, that the TPJ has an important role in creating and maintaining a stable sense of self, and its disruption can lead to shifts in how the self is constructed.

OBEs are largely visual in nature. This suggests that selfhood – in both its ordinary and more extraordinary forms – is maintained by creating a consistent visual metaphor that blends

the information from the vestibular system and the higher brain (4; Winkelman, 2010). This effect is known in cognitive psychology as 'crossmodal symbolism', which hypothesises that internally-generated mental imagery is manifested as a metaphor for the various senses and bodily processes that are active in the moment (Hunt, 2005). This metaphor may be necessary for a unitary sense of self to arise. But when some bodily information is blocked, for whatever reason (such as trauma response, REM sleep, or drug use), in this line of reasoning, the visual metaphor creates the experience of separation from the body (Cheyne & Girard, 2008). These neurological observations are also reinforced by the association of spontaneous OBEs with sleep paralysis and hypnagogic hallucinations, which also involves interference between the frontal lobe and lower brain as well as an association with REM sleep (5).

A few years ago, I had an OBE while wearing a high-tech headband that measured my brainwaves via EEG and determined my stages of sleep. This headband, while not perfect, had some peer-reviewed validation that showed it can detect sleep stages at about the same accuracy as a group of sleep scientists working with raw polysomnographic data (Kelly, Strecker, & Bianci, 2002). In my experience, I fell asleep after a brief awakening and felt my body become paralysed. When I tried to sit up, I felt myself lift out of my physical body. I floated above my bed and melted into the window. I entered the thin pane of the glass and hovered inside its boundaries, and then I woke up and wrote down the time from my bedside clock. According to my sleep gear, when I was floating above my bed, my brain was in REM sleep (Hurd, 2011b). I would not say, however, that this experience felt like "just a dream".

Again, let me reiterate once more what has been stated in Chapter 1 and 2 on the point that neurological information neither confirms nor denies the actual, or ontological, status of an OBE as an experience that occurs outside of the physical body. Rather, neuroscience studies show us exactly how the brain mediates the expression, and constraints, of perception as it relates to consciousness. What consciousness is, how it comes to be and where it goes are questions that neurology, in its present form, cannot answer.

The relevance to the neurological correlates of OBEs for the present discussion is that the strong correlation of OBEs to the parts of the brain that are known to construct the self – as well as the mechanisms that are related to lucid dreaming and sleep paralysis suggests that OBEs, like all conscious experiences, are constructed and not to be taken as stark 'reality'. Of course, the same could be said for waking, rational consciousness. We do not perceive the world, but rather we perceive constructed models of the world and ourselves, and these models are associated with physiological constraints. If we cannot accept this premise of psychophysical relativity, then an evolutionary psychology of OBEs may be impossible to construct. Still, brain activity is not the only constraint on OBE expression. As we shall see, the evolutionary context of OBEs also draws from other bodily systems as well as long-standing cultural contexts.

The features of OBEs across cultures

The consistent expression of OBE phenomena around the world reinforces its heritage as a product of the brain/body, but this of course does not speak to the experiences' depth and

their tremendous effects on societies. Transpersonal anthropologists discuss core spiritual experience as neurognosis – a neurologically determined effect that leads to meaningful and metaphoric alterations of consciousness that can, in turn, lead to new kinds of knowledge (Laughlin, Charles, McManus, & d’Aquili, 1990). OBEs are therefore generally classified as anomalous experiences; other cross-culturally verified experiences in this category include lucid dreaming, past-life experiences, near-death experiences (NDEs), mystical experiences, and synaesthesia (6; Wildman, 2009).

The cross-cultural universality of OBEs has been widely established by anthropologists and historians. From indigenous hunter-gatherers to nomadic pastoralists, and from complex horticulturalists to industrialised peoples on all continents, OBEs are recognised as phenomena that are not the same as ordinary dreams (Counts, 1983; Winkelman, 2012). In many indigenous cultures today, medicine men and women suggest they have the ability to leave the body when they choose, usually during public displays that include dancing, drumming, or chanting. Others lie down and journey in private, reporting their successes upon return.

All of these medicine men and women can be said to apply OBEs for the classic purposes of shamanism, which is a contested term, but that in general is about gathering information from otherworldly sources to use for healing and gaining power. Meeting otherworldly figures – ancestors, divine figures, and plant spirits – is a large part of the experience for these traditional applications of OBE. While this is not a key factor for most OBEs in the West, it is in fact a core feature in NDEs, which is a complex visionary experience that overwhelmingly begins as an OBE (Nelson, 2011).

With trepidation, I must also include the association of OBEs and dark sorcery, or ritual action at a distance for the purpose of cursing or harming others. For example, the Mohave peoples in Eastern California described how the dreamer is said to fall ill due to “certain harmful adventures the soul experiences in the dream... which may also include the invasion of the psyche by an alien power, such as that of a witch, of an enemy, or a ghost” (Devereux, 1966, p. 224). Dark sorcery associated with active ‘soul flight’ has more recently been described in the Chepang people of Nepal as well as the Semang-Negrito of Peninsular Malaysia (Riboli, 2014).

Animal transformation is another phenomena related to OBEs in many indigenous societies, in which the visionary leaves the sleeping body and enters into an animal form such as a bird or jaguar. Interestingly, this aspect of OBE is infrequently noted in the West, except in historic court documents in the persecution of witchcraft. Most famously, transformation into a werewolf, or ‘lycophany’, necessarily involves leaving one’s body and then entering into another mode of selfhood, or alter ego (Lecouteux, 2003). These unusual features are important as they could provide another key to evolutionary arguments of OBE phenomena.

On genuine experiences: Real OBEs versus dreams of OBEs

So far, I have established that OBE phenomena are deeply tied to sleep and relaxation mechanisms as well as traumatic disassociation responses. OBEs often co-occur with other sleep phenomena such lucid dreaming, sleep paralysis, and hypnagogic hallucinations without sleep

paralysis. Sometimes sleep paralysis with hypnagogia can grade into an OBE and then lucid dreaming within a single session.

But are all OBEs that occur around sleep actually dreams? Are OBEs essentially hyper-aroused REM dreams in which the dreamer mistakes the dream for reality? I find this explanation unsatisfactory because sleep-related OBEs are historically and cross-culturally associated with anomalous events such as uncanny access to privileged information or mutual dreams (Sherwood, 2002). There are numerous other characteristics that distinguish OBEs from ordinary dreams. Unfortunately, while there have been clinical trials that suggest veridical (that is, verifiable) information-gathering during OBEs (see Tart, 2009), these reports have not yet convinced the mainstream scientific community (The 'verifiable' aspects of OBEs will be canvassed at length in Chapter 5-8).

There are many cultural assumptions about what constitutes OBEs as well as dreams, and what we should be paying attention to, after all. In indigenous cultures, anthropologist Charles Laughlin (2011, pp. 183-184) observes:

Discovering one is either out of one's body, or in one's body and aware of the fact, in the dream seems far less salient in polyphasic dream cultures where the focus within the dream is wandering and seeking distinct and edifying experiences.

In indigenous societies, dreams are considered valuable, but in the West, dreaming is often thought to be meaningless and insignificant. The West also has very little vocabulary for extraordinary dreams, although that taboo is finally loosening in clinical dream research (Kuiken, 2007).

Regardless of how to define the boundary between dream and reality, it is quite likely that one's mode of entry into an OBE plays a role in the properties of that state of consciousness and the possibilities of that experience. There may well be several phenomena here with overlapping characteristics. For example, an OBE associated with sleep paralysis is likely to grade into a lucid dream (Metzinger, 2005), while an OBE associated with fight-or-flight responses and low blood pressure is likely to follow the classic narrative sequence of NDEs: out-of-body sight, tunnel of light, and contact with supernatural figures or a heavenly scene (Nelson, 2011). Movement may be more restricted in spontaneous OBEs compared to self-initiated experiences (Blackmore, 1986). Others seem to have hidden rules that the experiencer must find out to proceed.

Evolutionary theories for OBEs

There are currently a few evolutionary theories for OBEs. Each one focuses on a different aspect of the experience, but what they all have in common is an assumption that OBEs posed some sort of advantage for our ancestors that influenced the passing on of traits and behaviours, either through enhancing survival rates or improving sexual selection. This advantage would have to have been tempered over a long span of time, in the realms of hundreds of thousands of years, perhaps before we were fully 'human', even though OBEs might not produce an advantage today in our modern environment.

Technically, those who argue for an evolutionary theory are suggesting that OBEs (and altered states in general) are evolved psychological mechanisms, or a process that exists because it solves a “specific problem of survival or reproduction recurrently over evolutionary history” (Buss, 2004, p. 50). True evolved psychological mechanisms are narrow in focus, designed to influence specific and measurable behaviour, and largely operate outside of the domain of conscious awareness. They occur spontaneously and automatically when certain conditions are met. Overall, a proposed psychological mechanism solves problems, and the hypothesis for a mechanism is testable and falsifiable, with data coming from a wealth of objective and subjective sources such as archaeological records, comparative cultural studies, psychological tests, self-reports, historical records, and neurological studies.

This thought experiment is certainly preliminary and incomplete as there are many gaps in our knowledge about how altered states of consciousness have affected our evolutionary path, if at all. Keep in mind that we do not know if the common altered state of consciousness known as dreaming sleep (REM) is adaptive. In fact, scientists still debate the biological function of sleep in an evolutionary context (McNamara, 2007).

The NDE: Trauma and dissociation

The first evolutionary theory introduced here postulates that OBEs may have evolved long ago in our evolutionary past as part of a trauma mechanism. This may come as a surprise for those whose OBEs are relaxing times spent laying on the bed, but let’s remember that OBEs often are the first stage of an NDE, in which a person is close to death – and in some cases clinically dead – and undergoes an extraordinary and multi-layered psychological experience. Sometimes the OBE is the only feature of the NDE, in which case we could simply call this a trauma-triggered OBE.

As mentioned earlier, neuroscientists have noted a particularly strong association with NDEs and the sudden loss of blood pressure, which might account for the reason that cardiac patients are prone to NDEs. In all mammals, when blood pressure suddenly drops, or when oxygen levels in blood drop precipitously, a switch in the brainstem is triggered that causes a dissociation response (shock), flooding the brain with acetylcholine, the neurotransmitter that controls and maintains REM sleep. REM sleep is the stage of sleep in which we not only dream, but also can experience hyper-realistic visions such as doppelgänger effects, ancestral visitations, and succubus attacks (7; Hufford, 2010).

The drop into intruded REM causes an animal to become outwardly docile when a severe injury has occurred. A key discovery is that blood pressure also drops quickly in moments of extreme panic, and this may be enough to trigger this REM intrusion into waking life. As neuroscientist Kevin Nelson (2011) suggests: “Remaining quiet and still when the injury is severe and inescapable may be an effective survival strategy – playing possum, playing dead, ceasing to struggle” (p. 198). Makes one wonder, when a gazelle goes limp in the lion’s jaws, is it having an OBE or simply experiencing some dissociation? We will probably never know.

The OBE may also have a benefit beyond predator/prey or combat relations. For example, people who partake in high-risk behaviours like mountaineering report that the mental clarity of their OBE allowed them to perform manoeuvres with unusual calmness and steadiness. Philosopher Thomas Metzinger (2005) believes that severe emotional stress could be the trigger to cause a "representational division of labor" (p. 69) so that the self is removed from the body in order to stop accessing pain while making important life-or-death decisions. The scores of OBE accounts of patients in major surgery come to mind, with their clear perception of what is happening to their bodies without the overwhelming pain and dread.

Surprisingly, OBEs are not only triggered in times of bodily trauma, as one might expect, but also in times of intense fear and anxiety when no actual harm has come to the body. Greyson (2000) suggests that NDEs in this context can be considered a normal dissociative response "in which a person's self-identity becomes detached from bodily sensation" (p. 460).

However, we must be careful not to confuse the 'healthy' dissociation of OBEs with depersonalisation, or the uncanny sense of feeling unreal. In a clinical sense, depersonalisation is an emotional quality that relates to a witnessing 'self' observing an active and functioning self with a profoundly disturbing change in emotional quality that is typically flat, unpleasant, and experienced as panic and emptiness (Simeon, Knutelska, Nelson, & Guralnik, 2003). In contrast, in OBEs the functioning and observing self are united, albeit not localised within the perceived body. Also, emotional qualities in OBEs are generally much more positive, not distant or flat. In fact, subjects often say they feel "more real" than ever (Blackmore, 1986a, p. 616). Thus, the dissociation effects of OBEs are in fact not the same as depersonalisation, and these two phenomena occur in different groups of people with different age and sex distributions (Hufford, 2010).

Proto-concept of the soul

Metzinger's (2005) work suggests that the OBE shatters our individual worldviews, and may even be responsible for profound social and cultural effects, including allowing ancient humans to first visualise a 'soul' that is separate from the body. As Metzinger pointed out, because the OBE is so authentic an experience, and the neurological triggers are so commonplace, the OBE could have allowed our ancestors to envision the body as a vessel for a separate core self, and also to convince others they were telling the truth.

This concept, arising in modern humans, and perhaps also 'Homo sapiens neanderthalensis' (Neanderthal), could be the one of the main reasons for the initial practice of ritualised burial. Essentially, the line of reasoning here is, if the soul can separate from the body, then there may be a place we go after we die and the treatment of the body after death might play a role in this process. Metzinger (2005) calls this experientially-backed theory-making 'folk-phenomenology', or a prescientific "way of referring specifically to the contents of conscious experience, as experienced from the first-persona perspective" (p. 58).

The proto-concept of the soul, characterised by naïve realism ('if it feels real, it is real'), deeply influenced not only prehistoric peoples but continued to have an effect around the world

with new, more sophisticated dualisms of mind/body running all the way through Western philosophy (for example from the Greek 'pnuema' to the Cartesian split). For this reason, Metzinger (2005) believes that the OBE is a 'neurophenomenological' archetype. Although not strictly an evolutionary theory, the OBE as protoconcept for the soul suggests that these experiences continue to provide meaning, depth, and multiplicity for human lives.

Ritual Healing Theory

For the sake of argument, let us assume that the OBE and its sister states of consciousness (lucid dreaming, hypnagogic hallucinations, and trance states) did provide some survival value to our deep ancestry. Is it possible that these core trauma mechanisms could have served a secondary function that promoted their effects as millennia passed and as we became more human? This is where Ritual Healing Theory comes in.

According to the above line of reasoning, in our deep hominid past, the inborn ability to dissociate was further honed by natural selection. Dissociation, in general, allowed our ancestors to cope with stressful situations not only in the wild but also in human group dynamics. These relaxing effects could "evoke placebo responses and healing" (Winkelman, 2010, p. 245). After all, it is well-known that immune response can be dampened or heightened through psychological processes. This hypothesis assumes that dissociation is the key to hypnosis – also known as trance, the ability to modulate one's own and other people's consciousness – and that this ability brings evolutionary benefits.

Sociologist James McClenon (2004, p. 121) summarises the theory:

Shamans conducted rituals that allowed those with dissociative abilities survival advantages and these individuals passed on dissociation genotypes more frequently. These processes caused the frequency of genes related to dissociation to increase. Experiences linked to dissociation (apparitions, waking and sleeping ESP, out-of-body experiences, and psychokinesis) were shaped and became more prevalent.

I especially think the core spectrum of extraordinary events that are associated with REM should be highlighted again here, as it has been repeatedly demonstrated that those who are prone to OBEs are also prone to lucid dreaming and sleep paralysis; in fact lucid dreaming is the most consistent predictor of OBEs (Alvarado, 2000). These sleep-related mechanisms are today often considered disturbances rather than callings, and frequently repressed with dream-killing pharmaceuticals.

Similar to Metzinger's (2005) theory that OBEs are responsible for a proto-concept of the mind as 'soul', the ritual healing theory goes on to suppose that these extraordinary human experiences are directly responsible for beliefs in spirits and the afterlife, creating the neuro-cultural bed for shamanism, or the set of reliable ritual practices known around the world to alter consciousness for the purposes of healing. Shamanistic practices were part of the package for Homo sapiens for the last 30,000 years, and "continued selecting for dissociative and hypnotic genotypes, further shaping the physiological foundations for anomalous experience, religion, and ritual healing" (McClenon, 2004, p. 121).

Note that, unlike in the dissociation theory for OBEs, the individual who ostensibly could go out of body himself does not need to pass on genetic material for the OBE advantage to persist to the next generation. Rather, it is the patient who is selected by his or her immune system's relative ability to respond to a healer's treatment (that involves hypnosis). The patient survives, passing on the traits for hypnotic susceptibility to the next generation. These two theoretical mechanisms could both have reinforced OBEs at separate intervals in our evolutionary journey; they are not mutually exclusive.

A functional theory of OBEs?

This last theory I would like to present is not drawn from OBE research, but rather nightmares and other extraordinary mental events, including sleep paralysis visions. However, the theory could be sensibly extended to OBEs, as it outlines an evolutionary argument for how, exactly, healers and those with special abilities can transform a genetic profile of a population over time. Evolutionary psychologist Patrick McNamara (2008) believes that REM-dreaming nightmares could have developed a secondary psycho-social function once brain development allowed for the spoken communication of our interior experiences.

Known as the 'functional theory of nightmares', strong nightmares produce information – transmitted as anxieties, fears, and powerful visual imagery – relevant not only for the individual but also the social group. Further, nightmare imagery is compelling, and cannot be easily faked. In line with 'costly signal theory', McNamara's (2008, p. 103) functional theory suggests:

... many of the signals produced by the nightmare can be and should be construed as costly signal –emotions or mental simulations that produce daytime behavioural dispositions that are costly to the dreamer and that signal "quality" (or ability to bear distress/resilience) in the dreamer.

Why is dream content relevant? McNamara (2008, p. 98) suggests that information from "dreams, visions and nightmares" is important precisely because it concerns the religious, healing and "mythopoetic practices" of the tribe. Dreams, in general, have a problem-solving function, and tend to focus on the concerns, issues and preoccupations of dreamers (Domhoff, 2003). In an evolutionary sense, dreams predict threats and choices in a complex eco-social environment (Barrett 2007; Valli et al., 2005). OBEs, as communicated to peers as authentic moments, most likely operated under similar constraints, and those who had OBEs in the prehistoric past were given deference, especially if their experiences revealed new information for an individual or group. Therefore, individuals who had extraordinary experiences were able to display this 'costly signal' and increase their status or social prestige as they were funnelled towards healing roles within the community (see McNamara's work for a more detailed explanation).

Towards an ecological stress theory for OBEs

McNamara's (2008) focus on extraordinary dreams and nightmares is on their compelling characteristics, and the likelihood that influential dreamers were also eloquent, charismatic and intelligent in a general sense. However, let us not give OBEs short shrift when it comes to

supplying veridical information in the prehistoric environment. Despite the fact that we cannot ascertain, from an evolutionary psychological perspective, if we really leave the body, one of the applications of OBEs in indigenous settings today is the seeking of specific information.

These healers, much like our prehistoric ancestors, intend to have a vision, do so, and then predict weather, advise when to move seasonal camps, and discover, against mind-boggling odds, unique combinations of plant medicines for health and healing. Over time, the quality of this type of information can also not be compellingly faked. Yes, shamanistic healers also use sleight of hand and other visual displays of trickery, but at the end of the day (or the era), successful healers are those who can invoke a healing response in their patients, increasing their longevity and the survival of those alleles that modulate these immune responses.

As OBEs are associated with bodily stress and trauma, we can also extrapolate that the prehistoric environment, especially times ripe with warfare, ecological stress and loss of habitat, would promote the environmental triggers for OBEs, dreams, and visions in genetically susceptible individuals. Social upheaval and unstable environments are a major aspect of our deep history, and we can expect that the use of extraordinary dreams and visions, including OBEs, were key to charismatic leadership in times of rebellion, revolution, and assimilation. Indeed, religious revitalisation movements that integrate a defeated culture's symbolic system with new colonial social realities are often fuelled by otherworldly visions (8). These dreams, visions, and otherworld journeys allow communities to generate new myths by drawing strength from the old ways, and at the same time to integrate new cultural symbols in a way that is authentic and life-giving.

Conclusion

In modern times, millions of people buy books and attend workshops about how to have an OBE. This appetite for an altered state experience is not unusual in itself – after all, most animals will get themselves inebriated if they can (Linden, 2011). There is novelty in experiencing the world in a new way, and where there is novelty, there is information, and sometimes, knowledge. Today's popular quest for the OBE involves techniques promoted that are based on relaxation. For this reason, the evolutionary arguments laid out here may seem completely out of place. At first glance, the modern environment is so different from the ancestral ecosocial environments that we have spent 99% of our time on this planet as a species.

Meanwhile, however, thousands of patients a year continue to have spontaneous OBEs on the operating table, when running a marathon, and when facing traumatic wounds and horrors in the theatre of war and revolution. When we consider the global picture, despite all of our comforts and technological assists, we still live in a world rife with ecosocial tensions, in which people still regularly have contact with uncanny information and otherworldly spirits. What role can OBEs play in the modern world, given its potential heritage as a dissociative canary in the coalmine?

Keep in mind, one possibility is that OBEs might not possess an advantage at all, but rather are neurological 'riders' that have come with the package of our multi-tiered brain. Regardless, I reject that OBEs are selfish experiences that merely show us what we already know, a naïve projection of a mental model, an empty dream. Indeed, regardless of the question if spirits are ontologically real or we really 'go' out of body, OBEs and extraordinary experiences in general have been shown to permanently alter individuals' core beliefs about life, death, and our role on this planet (9). I am also sceptical of theories that hold up OBEs as the cutting-edge of humanity that could solve our problems through some process of 'spiritual ascent'. Clearly, some cultures promote OBEs and extraordinary experiences, and others, not so much, and this pattern has been ongoing, conservatively speaking, for the last hundred thousand years.

The relevant question is: how will we apply this special way of knowing? OBEs ground us by showing us the heavens. As long as we are determined to talk about our journeys, we will continue to meet ourselves and transform human culture along the way.

Notes

1. Hypnagogic hallucinations occur in the drowsy pre-sleep state and can be characterised by vivid visuals, auditory distortions, and/or a kinaesthetic sense of crawling, movement, or vibration across one's skin, as well as variations of these; these hallucinations typically occur and are not considered pathological.
2. A number of substances have been associated with OBEs: Dimethyltryptamine (Strassman, 2001), the tryptamines (magic mushrooms), ketamine (Hansen, Jensen, Chandresh, & Hilden, 1988), and cannabis (Tart, 1993; see also Blackmore, 1986a in the reference list).
3. See the work of Terhune (2006), Ehrsson (2007), and Aspell et al. (2013) in the reference list.
4. The 'higher brain' can be regarded here as the frontal lobe, which is responsible for higher cognitive functioning such as planning and conceptualisation.
5. Refer to the work of Mavromatis (2010), Cheyne, Rueffer, and Newby-Clark (1999), and Magnan et al. (2010) in the reference list.
6. Synaesthesia is a rare form of sensory experience in which a person reports one sense occurring via the perceptual input of another (e.g., 'hearing' colour or 'tasting' sound).
7. In folklore, a succubus is a demon who takes the form of an attractive woman who enters the dreams of men in order to seduce them and 'steal' their energy. Accounts often report a sense of feeling drained or a loss of energy after waking from the dream. The male counterpart is termed an incubus.
8. See the work of Martin (1993), Tedlock (1999), and Irwin (2008) in the reference list.
9. Refer to Moody's (1975), Hinterkopf's (1994), and Lukoff's (2007) work in the reference list.

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SECTION II: EVIDENCE FOR VERIFIABLE OUT-OF-BODY TRAVEL

The brain itself does not produce consciousness ... it is, instead, a kind of reducing valve or filter, shifting the larger, nonphysical consciousness that we possess in the non physical worlds down into a more limited capacity for the duration of our mortal lives. – Eben Alexander, 'Proof of Heaven'

CHAPTER 5: DOES THE SOUL LEAVE THE BODY?, ROBERT PETERSON

Many people ask: “are out-of-body experiences (OBEs) real?”. In most cases, what they really mean to ask is, “does something really leave the body or is the OBE a purely subjective experience?”. It’s an important question. From the subject’s point of view, the OBE is very real. It’s often impossible to convince them otherwise. In fact, in several narrations, OBErs convinced themselves during the experience that they were actually awake and not in an OBE at all, at least until something happened to convince them otherwise, such as floating, passing through walls, or otherwise breaking the laws of physics.

Some experiencers say “seeing is believing”, but as parapsychologist and sceptic Susan Blackmore pointed out, the ‘experience’ of being out-of-body is different from the ‘fact’ of being out. The experience may be very realistic and have a lasting impact, but if it’s purely subjective, non-OBErs can still dismiss it as a specialised form of dream: a self-created hallucination cooked up by the mind. On the other hand, if something really does leave the body, this may have important implications for a ‘soul’ or an aspect of the personality that survives bodily death.

To find out if OBEs are veridical (a real, not illusory, perception of the physical world) first we need to address two questions: What qualifies as an OBE? And, what counts as evidence of its objectivity or reality?

The first question, “what qualifies as an OBE?” leads us to the notion of a continuum or sliding scale of awareness. Strong physical evidence suggests that varying amounts of awareness [perceived as non-physical] can exert influence away from our physical body (1). Studies of telepathy over the past hundred years have suggested that one mind can affect another from a distance, and various theories in the parapsychological literature have been asserted to explain that long-distance relationship. If something actually leaves the body to transmit the information in cases of telepathy, can OBEs be just a larger, more involved version of the same process?

Perhaps telepathy and OBEs are two different forms of remote sensory transmission on the same sliding scale. Remote viewing, in which evidence is collected and remote locations are ‘seen’ in the mind’s eye while the subject is still awake and aware of his or her physical body, would lie somewhere in the middle of such a scale. Perhaps as subjects lose awareness of their physical bodies in an OBE, their perception of this ‘quantum’ field of information is heightened to the point where the brain interprets it in terms of the five senses acting on a non-physical body (commonly called the ‘astral body’ in OBE literature).

Future scientific research may lead to the discovery of this quantum field of information, but since this is all only conjecture at this point, for the purposes of this discussion I’m going to restrict the discussion of evidence in OBEs to those in which there is no awareness of the

physical body whatsoever. In other words, the physical body seems to be just another inanimate object in the room. Although OBEs with partial body control or awareness may be just as valid as other OBEs, I'm imposing this restriction to minimise the possibility that the information was obtained by remote viewing, clairvoyance, telepathy, and other forms of in-the-body extra-sensory perception (ESP).

This unfortunately disqualifies some of the available evidence, such as the many successes of the late psychic Ingo Swann (Swann, 2002; Mitchell, 1981). In one experiment, Swann claimed to have travelled to the planet Jupiter in one of his 'OBEs' and identified rings around the planet in 1973, prior to the Voyager-1 probe's discovery of the actual rings in 1979. This is considered good veridical evidence of OBEs, but it doesn't pass the criteria set forth here, as Swann was still aware of his physical body during the experiment and could have received the information via other means.

It also disqualifies the Focus Level experiences described by proponents of The Monroe Institute [authors: Rosalind McKnight, Bruce Moen, Thomas Campbell, etc.]. In some of these cases the subject seems to have retained awareness of their physical body during these OBEs and could describe what was going on. Others have reported no bodily awareness, and yet they're seemingly somehow able to control their body, and even make it narrate the event remotely from the OBE state.

The second question, "what counts as evidence of its objectivity or reality?" is a shaky one, and one with a sliding scale that varies from scientific to anecdotal evidence. On one end of the spectrum is evidence obtained from controlled scientific experiments. Although acceptable by the average person, hardened sceptics can always discount that evidence for any number of reasons: the senses can be fooled, eyewitness testimony is notoriously bad, memory is not reliable, shortcomings of the methodology, cheating, and so forth.

On the other end, we have loose anecdotal hearsay evidence that equally hardened believers will accept as incontrovertible proof, despite its shortcomings. Yet even the loosest circumstantial evidence is not without value: it is enough to convince the average person, given that the evidence is sufficient and prominent. Case in point: most of us believe the dwarf planet Pluto actually exists, despite the fact that we've never had direct experience of it, nor even conducted a critical firsthand examination of the evidence to support it. What makes us so sure? Only the mountain of indirect evidence – books and papers from scientists, photographs, and gravitational measurements – almost all of which could have been faked. I might also add that OBEs have similar stockpiles of evidence: more than 175 books, hundreds of papers and thousands of eyewitness testimonials. Like, Pluto, we have no direct experience of the planet, but numerous people around the world (some prominent scientists) believe in its existence (just as in the case of OBEs).

I'm going to segment the discussion to follow into different categories of evidence based on this spectrum: laboratory experiments, anecdotal evidence from spontaneous OBEs and near-death experiences (NDEs: 2), evidence from OBE adepts, and indirect evidence. Some of these categories were derived arbitrarily, since some evidence fits into more than one category.

Note that by indirect evidence, I refer to evidence from a third party observer that suggests a person's OBE may have been objective. Note also that for the purposes of this discussion, I shall use the term 'adept' simply as someone who claims to have induced multiple OBEs at will (in full disclosure: I fall into this category).

OBE experiments in the laboratory

Most OBE adepts have received the same request multiple times: "travel to my house in an OBE and describe the object I've placed on my bedside table. That will prove you're able to leave your body".

The problem with this request is that it is unscientific. It proves nothing and has no value in a scientific sense. Why? First, people are too predictable: they leave the same things on their bedside table: alarm clock, keys, wedding rings, and so forth, so the system can be fooled by careful guesswork. Second, it is too easy to cheat: a certain amount of reconnaissance or detective work can fool the system. Third, it has no lasting meaning: it is all uncontrolled and based on word-of-mouth. These little bedside experiments usually never find their way to reputable scientists, and wouldn't convince them if they did.

Susan Blackmore encouraged OBErs to perform this exact experiment. She set a number of targets in her kitchen: numbers, words, and objects. An example she used is '34802 CAT', and a matchbox full of matches, but she periodically changed the information. Blackmore then invited OBErs to visit her home (3). She (1996) stated that "several OBErs have now had a go at it, but none had ever succeeded in seeing it. That is, so far. It is still there, and I keep on changing it" (p. 234).

Yet, anecdotal cases in which people claim to have accomplished variations of the above are plentiful. For example, I once received an e-mail from a man who had memorised the serial number of his desktop computer from an OBE state. Back in the body, he verified the numbers were correct. The evidence was convincing, but only to him. The correct answer can easily be brushed aside as a lucky guess (or a feat of long-term subconscious memory recall) unless, of course, it's repeated under laboratory conditions with strict controls to prevent other possible explanations. Clearly, verifiable information in OBEs should be studied in a controlled scientific fashion. Sadly, very few scientific experiments along these lines have been done on OBEs.

Charles Tart: experiments with Miss Z

One of the most well-known scientific experiments done on OBEs was conducted by Charles Tart (1978) in the 1970s. His subject, a young woman known as 'Miss Z' (to protect her identity) reportedly had OBEs three to four times a week on an ongoing basis. Tart studied Miss Z in his sleep laboratory for four non-consecutive nights, over a period of two months. Each time she was cabled to an EEG to record her brainwaves. The subject was also monitored for REM with a strain gauge taped over the right eyelid. Basil Skin Resistance (BSR) was also recorded on a Grass polygraph. Other measurements were taken as well. The wires were fairly

restrictive: if she sat up more than two feet, the cables would have been disconnected (they were still loose enough for her to turn over and get comfortable).

Every night after Miss Z was in bed with cables attached and equipment recording, Tart would go into his office, flip a coin onto a printed table of random digits (4). Wherever the coin landed determined five random digits, which he then wrote in two-inch high numerals on a piece of paper. He slipped the paper into an opaque envelope and used that to carry the number back to the lab. About 5.5 feet above Miss Z's head was a small shelf. Tart carefully slipped the paper out of the envelope and onto the shelf where she could not see it.

On the final night of the experiment, Miss Z had an OBE. At 5:50am, Tart noted that the occipital channel showed an enlarged, slow wave artefact, and the EEG looked like stage 1 (hypnagogic) tracing, with an irregular mixture of theta waves, random low-voltage activity and occasional isolated alphoid activity (brain waves of 1 to 2 cycles per second slower than her waking alpha) and occasional normal alpha. There was no REM at the time. At 5:57am, the slow wave artefact stopped and the EEG looked like stage 1 sleep with some eye movements, but she might also have been awake. At 6:04am Miss Z called out that the target number was 25132. This was the correct number [with all digits in the correct order]. The odds of doing this by chance are around 1 in 100,000.

Charles Tart: experiments with Robert Monroe

Charles Tart was a personal friend of Robert Monroe, author of three books on OBEs and founder of The Monroe Institute. After his success with Miss Z, Tart decided to experiment on Monroe in a different laboratory for nine sessions. Although he called him 'Mr X' for the study, Monroe later disclosed himself as the subject.

As was the case with Miss Z, Monroe was attached to probes and wires, which gave him a great deal of discomfort (according to Tart). When Tart wasn't there, Monroe was monitored by a laboratory technician.

Despite being uncomfortable with the wires and probes, Monroe did produce two OBEs in the laboratory on one of the nights. He did not claim to see the target number, but something interesting did occur. In his OBE, Monroe saw the technician unexpectedly talking with a man. After Monroe awoke, he got her attention. When he told her he had seen her with a man, she replied that it was her husband. Monroe asked if he was outside, and she replied that he was, that he came to stay with her during the late hours. He asked her why he hadn't seen the man before, and she replied that it was policy for no outsiders to see subjects or patients.

Anecdotal evidence from spontaneous OBEs

As mentioned in previous chapters, conservative estimates based on polls indicate that up to 20% of the general population have had one OBE in their lifetime. Many of them report some kind of evidence of out-of-body perception. The mountain of evidence is too big to quote

in any detail, but can be found in several books and periodicals. Some of these cases will be canvassed here.

The voyage of S. R. Wilmot

Some of the earliest anecdotal evidence of OBEs comes from the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), a British organisation dedicated to scientifically studying psychic phenomena. Founded in 1882, the SPR was the first society to conduct organised scholarly research into human experiences that challenge contemporary scientific models, among these, OBEs. One famous case which is quoted in several OBE books concerns S. R. Wilmot, a sailor who survived a great storm while sailing from Liverpool to New York. Here are some excerpts (5):

Upon the night following the eighth day of the storm the tempest moderated a little, and for the first time since leaving port I enjoyed refreshing sleep. Toward morning I dreamed that I saw my wife, whom I had left in the United States, come to the door of my state-room, clad in her nightdress. At the door she seemed to discover that I was not the only occupant of the room, hesitated a little, then advanced to my side, stooped down and kissed me, and after gently caressing me for a few moments, quietly withdrew.

Upon waking I was surprised to see my fellow passenger, whose berth was above mine, but not directly over it – owing to the fact that our room was at the stern of the vessel – leaning upon his elbow, and looking fixedly at me. ‘You’re a pretty fellow,’ said he at length, ‘to have a lady come and visit you in this way.’ I pressed him for an explanation, which he at first declined to give, but at length related what he had seen while wide awake, lying in his berth. It exactly corresponded with my dream....

The day after landing I went by rail to Watertown, Conn., where my children and my wife had been for some time, visiting her parents. Almost her first question, when we were alone together, was, ‘Did you receive a visit from me a week ago Tuesday?’ ‘A visit from you?’ said I, ‘we were more than a thousand miles at sea.’ ‘I know it,’ she replied, ‘but it seemed to me that I visited you.’ ‘It would be impossible,’ said I. ‘Tell me what makes you think so.’....

On the night previous, the same night when, as mentioned above, the storm had just begun to abate, she had lain awake for a long time thinking of me, and about four o’clock in the morning it seemed to her that she went out to seek me. Crossing the wide and stormy sea, she came at length to a low, black steamship, whose side went up, and then descending into the cabin, passed through it to the stern until she came to my state-room. ‘Tell me,’ said she, ‘do they ever have state-rooms like the one I saw, where the upper berth extends further than the under one? A man was in the upper berth, looking right at me and for a moment I was afraid to go in, but soon I went up to the side of your berth, bent down and kissed you, and embraced you, and went away.’

The description given by my wife of the steamship was correct in all particulars, though she had never seen it.

Phantasms of the living

In 1886, three of the SPR’s most distinguished members, Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers (two of the SPR’s founding members), and Frank Podmore published the book ‘Phantasms of the Living’. While the book covers a wide range of psychic phenomena, such as telepathy, it also contains evidence to suggest OBEs may be objective (or ‘real’). In some cases the non-physical body (commonly called the ‘astral body’) of a living person is seen as a ghostly apparition by another person, suggesting that a person’s body image has an objective counterpart. In the introduction of the book, Myers writes:

I refer to *apparitions*; excluding, indeed, the alleged apparitions of the *dead*, but including the apparitions of all persons who are still living, as we know life, though they may be on the very brink and border of physical dissolution. And these apparitions, as will be seen, are themselves extremely various in character; including not visual phenomena alone, but auditory, tactile, or even purely ideational and emotional impressions. All these we have included under the term *phantasm*; a word which, through etymologically a mere variant of *phantom*, has been less often used, and has not become so closely identified with *visual* impressions alone.

Many more narrations containing evidence of an objective astral body are given by Myers (1903) in his posthumous book, 'Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death'.

Robert Crookall's OBE case collection

Similar narrations can also be found in several books by author Robert Crookall (1979), a geologist who collected, studied, analysed and published hundreds of OBE accounts. Many of his narrations contain anecdotal evidence of OBEs. Here's an example (p. 96):

Case No. 93--Dr I.K. Funk's doctor-friend

Dr. I.K. Funk the publisher and theologian gave the experience of a physician well known to, and trusted by, him in *The Psychic Riddle*, (Funk and Wagnall's Co.). The doctor went to bed. His feet and legs became 'as cold as those of the dead' ...'All at once...for an instance I became unconscious. When I recovered, I seemed to be walking in the air. No words can describe the exhilaration and freedom and clearness of mental vision that I experienced. I thought of a friend who was a thousand miles distance and seemed to travel with great rapidity through the atmosphere. Everything was light...a peculiar light of its own, such as I had never known. It could not have been a minute after I thought of my friend before I was standing in a room with him. Suddenly turning and seeing me, he said, "What are you doing here? You were in Florida".' ... He approached the doctor's 'double' and the doctor heard the expression he used. He was, however, unable to answer.

...'I may add here that the friend referred to as having been seen by me that night was distinctly conscious of my presence and he made the exclamation mentioned. We both wrote the next day, relating the experiences of the night. The letters corroborating the incident crossed in the post.'

Reports from NDEs

NDEs often feature OBEs that are more dramatic than typical run-of-the-mill OBEs, and often contain convincing evidence of an objective component. There have been numerous cases in which people reported NDEs when they were able to accurately quote conversations between doctors and nurses during surgery, despite the fact that they were rendered completely unconscious by anaesthetics.

Some patients have described operating room procedures in detail, and even procedural blunders during their NDE. Sometimes they accurately reported events occurring in the hallway of the hospital or other patients' rooms. In other cases, NDEs are compelling in their own accord, as after several minutes of no brain activity whatsoever, some NDErs recollect vivid memories of an after-life plane or non-physical dimension. Such was the case in Eben Alexander's NDE.

Eben Alexander

Sceptics often argue that NDEs don't really provide proof of verifiable perception beyond the body because they are almost always the result of cardiac arrest, which doesn't prove that the brain stopped working; it could still be functioning, albeit, abnormally. Since EEGs only

measure activity on the surface of the brain, there could still be electrical activity during the NDE that's undetectable because of its distance from the skull surface. While that may be true in many cases, it doesn't explain the NDE of Eben Alexander (2012), which was documented in his book 'Proof of Heaven'.

Alexander, a brain expert and neurosurgeon, had an NDE due to E. coli bacterial meningitis, which is almost always fatal. The disease completely shut down the neocortex of his brain; the area recognised by scientists as responsible for all experience. If there was a purely biological explanation for consciousness, he should have experienced absolutely nothing during his NDE. Given that the author is a brain surgeon and expert on the topic, his account is impressive. He was a sceptic of his own patient's NDE claims until the experience actually happened to him.

Reports from OBE adepts

The vast majority of people who report OBEs can't induce the experience at will (Gabbard & Twemlow, 1984). But some people claim to be able to self-induce OBEs using various meditation and/or visualisation procedures.

It is unclear at this time whether there is a genetic predisposition toward OBEs or if anyone can learn how to 'OBE', but I surmise the number of OBE adepts has been growing steadily. In the early twentieth century, OBEs were thought to be a rare phenomenon. By the 1980s a handful of people claimed to be able to consciously induce OBEs. Today, in 2015, there are scores of OBE adepts and more than 175 books on the subject. This was undoubtedly influenced by one of the modern adepts, Robert Monroe, whose books and classes inspired many people to learn the skill (myself included).

Since they have more OBEs, adepts have more opportunities to obtain veridical evidence during their adventures. They often go through a phase where they need to prove to themselves the objectivity of their experiences. What experiments have they done and what evidence have they gathered?

In many cases, the evidence itself is pretty mundane, but the implications are enormous. The subject may only see an unexpected patch of grass (as in the case of Preston Dennett mentioned later), but the subject accepts their experience as concrete evidence that they were actually there seeing something from the physical world. This has a two-fold effect. First, it produces a compelling belief (for the OBEr) that their consciousness has indeed left the body, and second, that perhaps we can evaluate the validity of such accounts on a broader scientific podium. The latter conversation would no doubt challenge our presumptions about the physical body, consciousness, and the potential existence of a non-physical soul.

Vincent Turvey: séance visits

One of the earliest adepts (even before OBE pioneer Sylvan Muldoon) was a man by the name of Vincent Turvey who lived in the early 1900s.

At that time, Spiritualism was very popular in the United States and England. All over the two countries, people were holding séances in their living rooms, trying to contact the spirits of the dead. At that time, Turvey was one of the few people adept at OBEs, or astral projection, as it was called at the time. In 1903, he wrote a letter to a British newspaper in which he claimed "I leave my body and travel to places I have never seen..."

Sceptics were constantly trying to debunk séances and expose charlatans and fraudulent spirit mediums, so in an attempt to prove his abilities, Turvey undertook a series of experiments, many of which are documented in his book, 'The Beginnings of Seership'. He would induce an OBE, fly to nearby séances, and send messages to the bewildered people (called sitters) at the séances.

Early experiments involved simple spirit communications techniques such as table rapping, but became more complex as his skills improved, progressing to automatic writing. Turvey knew his claims would be ridiculed and scrutinised, so he obtained signed testimony from those who observed the phenomena, these appear in his book. In one experiment, he travelled in an OBE to a nearby séance and his non-physical body was seen. The testimony letter reads:

Dear Mr. Turvey,

Last night I was at a séance held at least two miles from your house, and although your body was *not* in the room I saw distinctly what, for want of better words, I must call "you in the spirit body." I felt it was so *real* that I must get up and place a chair for you...

As his experiments progressed, Turvey gave messages in different ways. During one of the seances, he spelled out his full name, Vincent Newton Turvey (his middle name was unknown to the sitters at the time). As he became more adept, he learned to control the medium's physical body. One of the testimonial letters states:

We, the undersigned, testify to the following facts, which occurred at above address on June 19, 1907--

Mr. Blake was apparently "controlled" by an influence purporting to be "V. N. Turvey." He was at first made to write Mr. Turvey's name, and then, assuming Mr. Turvey's mannerism, he shook hands with Mr. Walker, and said, "Well, Walker, I have done it."

So convinced were we that Mr. Blake *was* controlled by Mr. Turvey, that we signed a similar letter to this, and gave it to him; but we therein stated, "Mr. Blake was controlled by Mr. Turvey." And it is at Mr. Turvey's *own* request that we protect ourselves from criticism by adding the words "apparently" and "by an influence purporting to be." Mr. Turvey was not in the room in his body. We believe his statement that he was in his house four miles away.

This was not an isolated incident. The experiment was repeated several times in front of several witnesses, many of whom signed several letters corroborating these occurrences for his book.

Robert Monroe

I have already discussed Charles Tart's experiments with Robert Monroe, but Monroe also conducted experiments outside the laboratory. Monroe (1971) reported these experiments in his first book, 'Journeys Out of the Body'. For example, he reported an OBE that took place

on October 30, 1960 in which he was trying to reach his friend (E. W.) five miles away. In the OBE state, he flew over the streets and sidewalks. Instead of reaching his friend, he landed prematurely at a gas station where he saw a white car with both rear wheels off, in front of the open grease rack doors. When he returned to his body, he got into his car and drove to that location. When he arrived, he saw the same white car sitting in front of the same open doors. Monroe had other reports as well. In one case, he tried to pinch someone he knew from the OBE state. Later, the unfortunate woman showed him a bruise at the exact location (see Chapter 6 which follows with a more in depth documentation of this particular case).

Akhena

Akhena (2013) is a woman who teaches OBE classes in France. The accounts in her book, 'Out of Body Experiences', are some of the most impressive in the entire body of OBE literature. In several of her accounts, she met her students in an OBE and witnessed concurrent events with them. She often described their apartments in detail. In other accounts, her students failed to arrive at the meeting place and she correctly identified the cause from the OBE state.

In one of the most impressive accounts, Akhena described an OBE which took place on December 26, 2004, while she was teaching an OBE workshop. A few days prior, she had received a card from her friend, Jacqueline, who was travelling abroad; everything was fine, and she was heading toward the south of India. That night Akhena had an OBE and thought about her friend. She found herself unexpectedly face-to-face with her friend, who she perceived to be alone and terrified in a dark old-style classroom with writing on a nearby chalkboard. This was quite unexpected, since all indications had been that Jacqueline was fine.

The next morning, Akhena's students told her about the tsunami that killed over 230,000 people in fourteen countries. Many days later, in the first week of January, she learned that Jacqueline was, in fact, trapped for several days in a cold dark school room, buried under rubble from the tsunami. All the dates, times, places and events corresponded to actual events. The school room even contained the chalkboard Akhena had seen in her OBE.

Preston Dennett

In his book 'Out-of-Body Exploring', Preston Dennett (2004) wrote about an experiment he conducted in 2001. In the out-of-body state, he travelled to a nearby bridge over the Los Angeles River which he knew had banks lined with concrete. During the experience, he saw "at least two feet of soil along the edge, and it is thick with grass and small weeds" (p. 75). Surprised at this result, he went to the bridge to see whether there really were dirt banks. To his shock, he found a dirt bank about two feet thick covering the cement river bank under the bridge, exactly where he had seen it in his OBE.

Indirect evidence

In the previous sections, I wrote about direct experiential evidence of OBEs. That is, evidence obtained by the experiencer. Indirect evidence is also important to consider, for example, when a third party obtains evidence of a person's OBE. An earlier case in which the witnesses claimed to see Vincent Turvey's spirit body at a séance exemplifies this well.

My experience

In my first book (1997) I narrated an experience in which my roommate, J. H., saw my 'astral body' during an OBE where I had walked through the bedroom wall into his bedroom.

In a more recent instance from 2013, I was at an astral projection group in Austin, Texas. While I was preparing to induce an OBE, I perceived (through closed eyelids) a black shape moving past me. Instinctively, I visualised a protective silver shield of energy surrounding my body (this is a common technique used for the purposes of psychic self-defence). After the exercise, the participants shared their experiences. One of the participants, Stephanie, said that she had exited her body and walked past me, at which point she saw a silver shield appear around my body. In this case, I perceived her astral body (as a black shape) and she had perceived the energy shield I had visualised.

Akhena

Akhena (2013) provides some good examples of indirect evidence. For instance (p. 169):

There have been occasions where I have myself been seen by other people who were not aware of my astral presence, and their accounts match up completely with my own recollections. One night I leave my body and go straight to the bedroom of a clairvoyant with whom I have an appointment the next afternoon. I must emphasise [sic] that I had never met this person. I stand at the foot of her bed and tell her the reason I want to see her the next day. When she comes to my consulting room, she exclaims, 'Well, you must have something important to ask me, since you came to see me during the night. Your astral being was fully formed and stood at the foot of my bed.'

Evidence against objective OBEs

Despite the mounting evidence to suggest that a non-physical component exists and interacts outside the body, the data is not consistent. The environments witnessed in an OBE don't always correspond to physical reality. Success stories like those cited above are relatively rare and countered by reports of inconsistencies. People often see a door, window, or curtains open (or closed) in an OBE, only to find that the physical door or window is not present in real life. Sometimes deliberate attempts to obtain verifiable evidence fail miserably. This section will explore some of the attempts by OBE adepts to obtain veridical evidence that ended in failure.

Eddie Slasher: time travel OBEs

In his book 'Explorations Out of the Body', Eddie Slasher (1997) conducted some interesting experiments regarding time travel. He attempted to travel into the future to

determine lottery numbers. To keep it simple, he used the 'Georgia Cash 3 Lottery', which consists of three numbers drawn daily. Every day during the experiment, he induced an OBE and tried to travel forward in time to the next day's lottery drawing. He then stood in front of his television and tried to read the numbers. Later that night, he would watch the live lottery drawing on television.

The experiment started on August 24, 1993. He induced an OBE and attempted to travel to the next day's drawing on August 25. The numbers flashed quickly in the OBE state, and he wasn't quite sure if they were 2-8-3 or 2-9-3. He wrote down 2-8-3 and bought a five-dollar ticket for those numbers. When the drawing came, the numbers were 2-9-3.

Undaunted, he tried again. For the next two weeks he induced an OBE almost every night, attempting to travel one day into the future. He never got the numbers right, but he was often very close. Eventually, as the experiment went on, the numbers became more and more inaccurate until the odds of trying seemed no better than chance.

Eventually, he came up with another idea. Instead of watching the televised drawing in his OBE, he tried to travel to the nearest gas station in his OBE and stare at the posted lottery numbers. This also ended in failure and he ended up lost or misdirected. He tried a few more things, but his conclusion was: "To date I have not yet been able to foretell the future for my own financial gain, but I am still trying". That doesn't necessarily mean that such a task is impossible, but it's certainly not a straightforward task. One of Slasher's conclusions is that the future isn't fixed; that there's only a set of probable futures.

Frederick Aardema

In his fascinating book 'Explorations in Consciousness', author Frederick Aardema (2012) describes experiments he conducted in an attempt to obtain physical verification of his OBEs. His honesty and candour are commendable and his theories are among the most insightful in the literature. First, he aimed to implement the suggestion of OBE author Robert Bruce: to look at a random playing card from the OBE state. After several failed attempts (seeing the wrong card or no card at all), he abandoned that test, deciding it relied too much on the sense of sight, which is often distorted.

Undaunted, he devised a new test that relied more on the sense of touch. He organised five wooden blocks, each of which had a different number of nails protruding (from zero to four). His wife would take one of the five blocks at random and place it inside a box on the nightstand next to the bed. During the OBE, he would reach his non-physical hand through the box, feel for the block and try to count its nails. After many failed attempts, he managed to perceive the correct answer once, but his success rate was no better than chance.

Again, he designed a different experiment; one that involved identifying one of six colours. The targets were different in colour and shape, and each had the colour written below. For example, he had an orange square with the word "ORANGE" printed underneath. After three failed attempts, he abandoned that method too.

Aardema returned to the tests with the wooden blocks, this time using a different box that had mirrored glass. He had a much better success rate this time. He estimated the probability was 1 in 150, admittedly not enough to draw any scientific conclusions. He concludes, in part: "OBE adepts have so far failed to convincingly prove the existence of veridical perception in the out-of-body state. While a few successful experiments have been reported in the scientific literature, these results do not seem to replicate very well" (p. 149).

Aardema's book goes on to present a fascinating discussion of perception (both in and out of the body), body image, how sensory information is transmitted from the senses to the brain, and some theories as to how OBE perception might differ from physical perception. Notably, Graham Nicholls also presents an alternative explanation for how perception might function in relation to 'physical' out-of-body environments in Chapter 7.

Afterthoughts and conclusions

How can we account for discrepancies between physical perceptions and those obtained in an OBE? Author William Buhlman (1996) once told me about an experiment he conducted regarding a certain home remodelling project. He had drawn up plans and paid contractors to resurface a fireplace in his family room where he often induced OBEs. For several weeks, he examined the fireplace from the OBE state and found it to be different from the physical fireplace. Weeks before the final resurfacing and brickwork had been done, the fireplace strangely started to take on the appearance of his plans. It was almost as if his plans had solidified some kind of thought-form before the actual work had been done. Was this just a case of Buhlman projecting his wishes onto his experience or was there really a preconceived influence on the physical structure?

Several authors have suggested that the non-physical world perceived in an OBE is merely an 'echo' or a reflection of the physical world, and is somehow more malleable. They suggest that objects in an OBE are often thought-form counterparts of the physical (6). I have a different theory. I believe that the difference between OBEs and other phenomena such as lucid dreams is that in a dream, we become totally absorbed in a dream-hallucination, while in OBEs, we're observing a kind of objective reality (which may or may not have anything to do with the physical world). My theory is that the discrepancies in OBE reports may be due to bleed-through (or unintended intrusions) from these hallucinated dream environments into the OBE.

One thing is certain: ordinary people are having OBEs every day and struggling to understand them. Regardless of what we believe they are, more scientific study is needed. If the validity of the OBE is to be demonstrated, we need to conduct controlled scientific experiments of this phenomenon.

One key step is to engage more active participation from competent scientists. Getting more mainstream scientists involved in OBE research would be ideal, but OBEs, along with other paranormal phenomena, carry a large amount of stigma within the scientific community. Until

that stigma is lifted, research studies along these lines are going to be a hard sell. In the meantime, scientists such as Charles Tart, Rupert Sheldrake, and Dean Radin, whose thirst for knowledge outweighs the stigma, are still making progress in these areas of investigation. Even some sceptical scientists such as Olaf Blanke and Michael Persinger having studied OBEs from a neuroscience point of view, and have progressed interest in the field. Multidisciplinary researchers, such as physicist Thomas Campbell who worked with Robert Monroe, are also publishing theories to explain OBEs (see Campbell, 2007). An open scientific dialogue on the OBE from multiple research perspectives would thus no doubt stimulate further investigation into the nature of this phenomenon.

Despite the lack of scientific study to date, the mountain of evidence for verifiable OBEs continues to grow, and with it, our understanding. The number of OBE books and OBE adepts continue to increase exponentially. As modern medicine saves more lives, the number of NDE-related OBEs grows exponentially as well. All of these OBEs are causing an increasing amount of dialogue between scientists, sceptics, experiencers, and believers. It may take a while to get there, but eventually our knowledge in this area will trump superstition and belief.

Notes

1. There are many good examples in the book 'Entangled Minds' (2006, Paraview Pocket Books) by Dean Radin.
2. Near-death experiences (NDEs) often include an out-of-body experience (OBE) in which one floats out of one's body.
3. This was developed as an open invitation that all OBErs around the world were welcome to attempt and experiment with.
4. Computers are notoriously bad at generating random numbers, especially in the 1970s, so this was not an uncommon practice.
5. See the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, Volume VII.
6. The concept of 'thought-forms' was taught by theosophists A. E. Powell ('The Astral Body', 1927), Charles Leadbeater ('The Astral Plane', 1895, 'Thought-Forms', 1901), and other occultists. This notion suggests that ideas solidify into non-physical objects on the 'astral plane', and can influence the physical world.

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CHAPTER 6: THE CASE FOR ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE, PRESTON DENNETT

The central question pertaining to the phenomenon of out-of-body travel is: is it real? While some ask this question out of scientific curiosity, those who have had out-of-body experiences (OBEs) themselves ask it because of a vital need to find out what is happening to them. Are they going crazy or are they truly travelling out of their body? This need can be so great that it becomes the primary goal of novice explorers. I know this is true because it happened to me.

Following the death of my mother in 1984, I developed an interest in dreams. This led to an interest in lucid dreaming and out-of-body exploring. After discovering Robert Monroe's (1971) book, 'Journeys out of the Body', I began my own extensive forays of the non-physical dimensions. I say this because I am writing about a subject that is not only of great interest to me, it is something I have experienced myself. I went through the period of doubt and fear that nearly every new OBEr must navigate. And I moved beyond it to enjoy many of the benefits of 'astral travel', including meeting deceased loved ones, visiting with spirit guides, learning about past lives, rescuing lost souls, visiting the higher dimensions and more.

The experience so completely transformed my life that I couldn't believe everybody didn't know about this! So I began a quest to educate and inform whoever I could about the OBE and the worlds just waiting to be explored. I quickly found out that many people are frightened of going out of body. Many people don't even believe it's possible. The single most common question I am asked is: how do you know you're not just dreaming? How do you know it's real? And so I discovered that scepticism and fear are perhaps the main reasons why this subject has not been more fully embraced.

In this chapter I shall present some of the best evidence supporting the reality of the OBE. In many ways this chapter can be considered 'part 2' of Robert Peterson's exploration in Chapter 5. However, the focus here will be on corroboration in anecdotal accounts, and an examination of why anecdotal evidence should not be dismissed outright when it comes to OBEs. In this way I hope to reduce the fear and scepticism surrounding this subject and let everyone know that not only is the OBE real and safe, it can also have profoundly beneficial effects in one's physical life.

The obvious question is: how does one prove the reality of an out-of-body event – an experience which seems to be wholly subjective? One cannot exactly bring back an artefact from the 'astral planes' to study in a laboratory setting. While out-of-body, one is in the situation of a ghost, seemingly unable to affect the physical environment in any way.

While this is true for most people, there are exceptions. In rare cases, OBErs have been able to obtain evidence that their experiences are real and/or affect the physical environment.

Without getting too philosophical, it might be useful to define the word 'real', in the context of this subject. Many people might consider anything that's not physical to be not real. For example, how real are our dreams? Can they be defined as not real? And if dreams aren't real, how can one say that OBEs are real? Clearly, we are dealing with a tricky subject here.

I think we can safely say that dreams, while they don't occur in physical reality, are real in the sense that they are actually experienced, as are OBEs. The difference with OBEs, is that – unlike dreams – they can sometimes be validated in a way that affects or overlaps into the physical world. In other words, there is evidence that can be found in the physical world supporting the objective reality of subjective non-physical experiences. The evidence falls into four main types.

The most common is corroboration. In these cases, OBErs visit a location or person and later obtain information that could only have been obtained at the location. Also common are cases involving psychic effects. Numerous OBErs who travel to the so-called astral planes have episodes of precognition, clairvoyance, and other psychic episodes which have a direct bearing on their physical lives. Less common are cases involving physical manifestations. While the secondary (or astral) body experienced in OBEs may seem non-physical, some experiencers have appeared as an apparition in front of independent witnesses, or have manipulated the physical environment in a variety of ways. The fourth type of evidence encompasses physiological effects. In these cases, OBErs note physiological improvements as a result of their journeys, including healings of a wide variety of illnesses.

The first three types of cases will be examined in this chapter; however, physiological effects will be presented in Chapter 11. This chapter will focus on different types of evidence with a primary focus on physical manifestations and corroboration. Further, in this chapter a brief model of physical/astral interactions will be proposed, in which it is suggested that out-of-body states may be able to influence physical reality as an overlay effect. Although this theory is highly speculative, the preliminary evidence gathered here shows a strong likelihood of OBErs being able to interact with and influence the physical environment in a mind-over-matter fashion. If true, this form of evidence could well shape the 'best case' scenarios in future experiments, where OBErs willingly aim to engage with or interact with their physical environments.

Corroboration cases: A compelling glimpse into the OBE?

Corroborative anecdotes abound in OBE literature. It could be argued that virtually every advanced OBEr has experienced going to a location out-of-body and then returning there and confirming his/her observations. In fact, such cases are so common that they could be called a consistent feature of an OBE. Some of the cases are very compelling and most books on the subject present at least a few examples.

Pioneering OBEr, Sylvan Muldoon (1929), has received personal proof on numerous occasions. As he writes, "This is nothing unusual to do, while consciously projected. I have often

gone into houses, and noted the things—later going there in the physical and seeing everything exactly as I saw it in the astral” (p. 39).

Yram (1972), an OBEr from France, writes that he projected to a friend’s house “hundreds of miles away” (pp. 82-83). He carefully noted the details and then returned to his body. Then, says Yram, “I wrote to the individual in question, giving details of what I had seen so many miles away and, two months later, received full confirmation”.

Albert Taylor (1996) was able to obtain proof of projection on his very first attempt. In March of 1993, he went out of his body and started by exploring his neighbourhood. Suddenly he found himself drawn to the home of an acquaintance, Doctor H. Later that week he spoke with Doctor H, who recalled dreaming about Taylor on the night he had visited. Taylor then proceeded to describe her bedroom in detail. The doctor was impressed and told Taylor that everything he said was correct. Amazed, Taylor was inspired to continue his explorations out of body.

As Robert Peterson mentioned in Chapter 5, literally hundreds of other similarly persuasive cases could be listed when it comes to gathering anecdotal evidence for verifiable OBEs. However, the problem with this type of evidence is that it is wholly circumstantial and derives from a single source. What about the possibility of coincidence or outright fabrication? While circumstantial evidence can be convincing, do these types of cases truly constitute proof?

While these types of cases might not convince a sceptic, certainly they constitute a strong degree of proof to the people who experience them. When an OBEr is able to describe a location in accurate detail, the most logical explanation is to conclude that they have been there. And given the enormous number of cases, this alone is perhaps the strongest indicator that the OBE is a real phenomenon and that OBErs physically visit these locations. A small number of cases like this would be enticing, but the fact that there are hundreds leaves little room for the possibility of fabrication or coincidence.

Psi effects

One of the most exciting and baffling effects of the OBE is the activation of a seeming ‘psi faculties’ and non-physical mental potentials. Almost without exception, advanced OBErs in particular find that they have suddenly become endowed with clairvoyance, precognition, telepathy, and numerous other phenomena. These are experiences that occur during waking physical life that, as theorised here, appear to be the result of a direct bleed-through or overlapping of the astral dimensions. Through repeated travel, the OBEr somehow alters (or raises) their awareness to a level that appears to allow for physical-astral interactions (and vice versa).

This occurrence is so common that, like corroboration, it provides an indicator to the reality of the OBE. While these events might be considered a therapeutic benefit of OBEs, they also provide examples in which the OBE (a non-physical experience) affects the OBEr in a physical way, during their waking life. In that respect, such experience provide a type of evidence

that rises beyond subjectivity and affects not only the OBEr and his waking life, but sometimes other people. Hundreds of cases could be listed. The following represent only a small portion of examples.

Telepathy, a psi effect in which a person can communicate with another's mind without verbally speaking, is often reported during an OBE. As with other psychic abilities, telepathic communication can also occur while in the physical realm. A good example of this is Yram's (1972) case. Yram on one occasion experienced telepathy while in the physical world. Yram writes, "I once received thoughts from a distance of ten thousand miles as loudly as if someone had shouted them in my ear. Surprised at such a result, I sprang up to see who was standing beside me" (p. 126).

Perhaps the most common psi effect is precognition. Oliver Fox (1962) reported that he began having precognitive dreams shortly before he began having OBEs. "Now and then it would happen that a dream possessed real prophetic significance, but only in connection with trivial matters" (p. 27). He apparently experienced these precognitive dreams regularly throughout his life. In 1920, Fox wrote an article for the 'Occult Review' detailing several of his precognitive dreams.

Albert Taylor (1996) had two consecutive OBEs in which he saw an image of Stonehenge. One week afterward, he was excited to receive a book he had ordered. "I tore off the paper and was shocked by the cover" (p. 49), writes Taylor. "A picture of Stonehenge covered the book. Remembering my last two OBEs, I began to feel a weird tingling sensation creeping up my spine. What the heck was this about?" (p. 49). Taylor, like many OBErs, was coming to terms with the fact that his OBEs were affecting him in the physical world.

In one of Robert Peterson's (1997) anecdotes, he writes (p. 235):

As I continued to practice out-of-body experiences, I had more and more psychic experiences. And I was trying to deny it all. I didn't consider myself psychic, but psychic experiences kept piling up, one upon another, forcing me to admit that I had psychic abilities.

These psi effects appear to be some type of bleed-through from the astral plane, a 'higher' dimension of consciousness that overlays the 'physical plane' that many OBErs seem to project into. These psychic abilities may appear incredible in the physical dimensions, but in the astral dimension they are normal. Flying, telepathy, and peering into the future or the past are natural occurrences in the astral plane. Somehow, repeated travel opens a doorway between the dimensions, and the abilities one has on the astral planes begin to translate into the physical world. At this stage we can only speculate as to what this bleed-through or overlapping means, or why and how it occurs. What we can surmise, however – based on ever-increasing anecdotes to support the case – is that repeated OBEs appears to strengthen the connection between the physical plane and the so-called astral planes.

Manifestations

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the OBE is that in which people have been able to physically manifest, in some cases being seen by those who they visit, in others actually affecting the physical environment, sometimes in astounding ways. While rare, these types of cases show us that it is possible to build a bridge between the physical and non-physical worlds. They also provide compelling evidence that OBEs are real and contain the potential to affect the physical environment in a wide variety of profound ways. Again, in the below examples we will rely primarily on accounts from OBE adepts who have had extensive experiences, such as Robert Monroe, Sylvan Muldoon, Marilyn Hughes, and others.

Sylvan Muldoon

Muldoon (1903-1969) was born in Wisconsin, and had his first OBE at age thirteen. More experiences followed, leading him eventually to contact psychical researcher Hereward Carrington. Muldoon (1929) was one of the first modern writers to write a book about his own OBE. From the very start of his out-of-body explorations, he experienced a wide variety of physical manifestations. The first were mysterious knocking noises or raps which usually occurred immediately following his OBEs. One evening he woke up following a lucid dream and found himself in a state of sleep paralysis. After three minutes, he was able to move and wake up. Then, as Muldoon writes (p. 40):

About two seconds later a loud rap sounded—as if someone had struck the iron of the bed a blow with a heavy mallet. The noise was so loud that I ducked, as it rather frightened me...These physical manifestations are certainly interesting—to me, at least—as I never before experienced such things. But then, neither have I ever tried; these things came about by themselves.

Later Muldoon was able to produce physical raps at will, while still in a disembodied state. Often, OBErs find themselves totally unable to affect the physical world. Muldoon writes, “I have tried to move things while projected and conscious, but never could” (p. 118).

Then one evening he lay in bed and dreamed that he was in the next room. In his dream, he decided to start a device called a metronome. Suddenly, the dream ended and he woke up. At that exact moment, the metronome, which was in the other room, started by itself. Muldoon writes (p. 146):

There is no possible way that device can start itself; further, it has stood on the table for months without it being used. It seemed that no sooner had I touched it—in the dream—than I awoke and heard it start clicking in the next room.

For some bizarre reason, the metronome didn't start moving until after Muldoon had returned to his body. Muldoon was unable to account for this curious time discrepancy. Time, as cases of precognition have shown, flows differently on the astral plane. Muldoon writes, “I wonder if it is possible to do something of that sort: to try and move something in the astral body, and not have it move until some time after the astral body has left it?” (p. 152).

A few days later, the same experience occurred again. Muldoon dreamed about moving the metronome and woke up seconds later to find the metronome in motion. Muldoon became

convinced that the astral body has the power to move objects, but it appeared to be beyond his ability to consciously control.

Later his most dramatic experience of this type occurred. In February 1928, Muldoon was very sick in bed and was too weak to call for help. He tried to crawl out of bed and fainted, then found himself out-of-body. At this point, he floated upstairs and found his mother and brother lying in bed. He experienced a gap in awareness, then saw that his mother and brother were lying on the floor. He heard them discussing how the mattress had been lifted off the bed and thrown them to the floor. At this point, Muldoon was pulled back into his body.

Muldoon called for his mother who ran into the room and told him excitedly how the mattress had lifted up by what she assumed were spirits. Muldoon writes, "She said that they had lifted it not once but several times, and she confessed that she was terrified for a moment" (p. 256).

On several occasions, Muldoon has physically manifested to outside witnesses while out-of-body. In November 1881, he went out-of-body and visited two friends with the expressed purpose of "making my presence perceptible" (p. 273). Muldoon also writes (p. 299):

On the following Thursday I went to see the ladies in question, and, in the course of my conversation, without any allusion to the subject on my part, the elder one told me that on the previous Sunday night she had been much terrified by perceiving me standing by her bedside, and that she screamed when the apparition advanced toward her, and woke her little sister, who also saw me.

Muldoon was able to repeat this experiment with different witnesses. He also reports that on several occasions, he returned from his OBEs with such a high level of energy that he felt he might physically levitate. Muldoon states, "I always felt invigorated—sometimes even to the extent that, upon awakening, I actually believed I could fly off the ground" (p. 152). Unfortunately, he was never able to do so.

Muldoon's case may sound extreme, but it is far from unique. In fact, many advanced travellers who go out of body often report experiences of a very similar nature.

Yram

Finding one's self in an immaterial body can be a disconcerting experience. Being 'non-physical' can be a difficult concept to grasp. One of the first instincts for many OBEs is to try to move physical objects.

Yram (1972) began his experiments by trying to move a piece of paper while projected. He writes of one incident: "Nothing distracted my attention. Remembering what I had decided to do I went towards the chest of drawers but saw two pieces of paper instead of one. I picked up both of them and put them on the bed" (p. 56).

Yram then flew around and later returned to his body. "I opened my eyes, wrote down the details of the experiment and, looking up, noted that the piece of paper had not moved from the chest of drawers where I had originally put it".

Another experiment produced equally dismal results. In a projected state, Yram blew on the piece of paper and noted its position. However, upon return to the physical body he saw that "the piece of paper had not moved at all".

Yram had already found that the density of his astral body varied with certain projections. As he says, recalling one projection (p. 70):

I was well out of my body and proceeded to carry out, in my room, the experiments I had in mind. As it happened, on that day my astral double was more condensed than usual. In order to change to another dimension I tried to pass through the walls of the room, but found that they resisted my efforts. When I tried harder to only managed to produce a pain in my forehead and had to resort to the astral opening of a window before my first projection could have its way.

Yram believes that the answer to manipulating the physical environment may lie in this direction. "Ever since I began these experiments I have noted the possibility of projecting a double whose density would vary considerably, bringing in its wake all sorts of experimental powers and possibilities".

Yram did experience one remarkable physical effect. On several occasions, he would return from his OBEs with such an increased sensation of energy that, like Muldoon, he felt he should be able to physically fly. On at least one occasion, he apparently nearly did. Yram writes (pp. 110-111):

The following instance is rather unusual. I slept for six hours and awakened in an apparently normal state. As soon as I had risen, I felt extraordinarily light. I felt as if I were walking on air and my legs were moving far too quickly. At first this amused me. I had the impression of being in an intermediary condition between earth and a less material substance, and this form of disequilibrium was new to me. At last, I remembered my social obligations and, walking down on the street, boarded a tram. This semi-exteriorization had not come to an end, though, and it somewhat diminished my nervous sensitivity. It therefore happened that on stepping off the tram, I was nearly run over. No longer having a full control over my body, I still had the feeling of walking on air. On stepping off the tram it seemed as if a chasm were opening at my feet, and I reacted violently in order to keep my balance. All this took scarcely a second. Anyone looking on would only have seen me take a few steps faster than was necessary. I did not fall, but the vividness of the impressions which I experienced in so minute a fraction of time is beyond imagination. At all events, I do not consider that such states of spontaneous levitation are to be encouraged.

Marilynn Hughes

Marilynn Hughes is one of today's leading practitioners of out-of-body travel. She has written a fascinating series of books about her own personal experiences while out of the body, which began shortly following the birth of her first child. She has also experienced numerous highly mystical experiences involving precognition, miraculous healing and other phenomenal events, including at least two recorded dramatic episodes of physical levitation.

One evening in the late 1990s, Marilyn was in bed having just returned from a major OBE journey. Suddenly, she felt strong energetic vibrations pulsing through her body. Hughes (2003, p. 31) writes:

A massive energy surge overtook my body, thousands of times stronger than I'd ever felt before. Scared, I'd never felt anything like this, but suddenly, my whole *body* and *spirit* lifted up out of bed, beginning to fly around the room. 'It is possible!' I screamed out, trying to get Andy's attention, but he was deeply asleep...For the next hour or so, the energy beam came and went, taking me on bodily flights around the room.

A few years later, Hughes experienced a repeat of this. Again, she was lying in her bedroom meditating when she sensed (but could not see) the presence of two spirits. She felt that the spirits were performing some type of "energetic adjustment" (p. 32) on her body. Evidently, the adjustment was effective, because Hughes found herself promptly levitated.

Suddenly, two spirits were lifting my body and soul up off the bed, as I began levitating. What wonder! What malaise! It was so spectacular; I cannot even fathom the words to tell! As my body and soul floated about the room in the hands of my unseen quests, I awaited the end of this levitation to bid them with a question. Lasting for about five minutes, they slowly began lowering my body onto the bed.

At this stage, Hughes asked for the invisible spirits to reveal themselves. She saw two glowing human-looking figures quickly appear and disappear, one male and one female. Although there are other explanations for these experiences, such as having a very vivid OBE that seemed to overlay with the physical experience of levitation, the accounts are compelling in their own right.

Joan Hartmann

In 1999, Joan Hartmann (2001) of Florida spontaneously experienced a typical OBE during which she floated about her room. She found the experience very pleasant and decided to try it again. A few days later, Hartmann attempted to initiate an OBE. She was successful and allegedly her attempts also resulted in a physical levitation episode.

I had an out-of-body experience. I spontaneously popped out of my body and hung out up in a corner of the bedroom but didn't know what to do, so I just looked down at my body and that of my sleeping husband. After about fifteen seconds, I snapped back into my body. I thought this was really cool and tried to repeat it. A few days later, it happened again, only this time, I watched my body actually levitate off the bed before I snapped right back.

Anonymous

The ability of the astral body to manipulate the physical environment is illustrated dramatically in a case presented by dream researcher, David Ryback (1988). While collecting psychic dreams for his book, 'Dreams that Come True', Ryback received a letter from a nurse in Central Islip, New York, who reported a very unusual experience. The nurse worked part-time at a local hospital. One evening she dreamed she was at the hospital walking down the corridor. She saw that the nurses' station was empty, and there was a call-light above the door of room 254.

In the dream, the nurse walked into the patient's room and saw a man who she recognised as the patient in the room. The man told her that he spilled his urinal.

"No problem", she told him. "I'll change your bed".

The nurse explains:

My eyes search the room, and on the shelf is a stack of linens. I am surprised at my lack of strength, for it takes extended effort to bring the sheets down and change the bed, but somehow I manage it. I want to rub his back but find I can't open his bedside cabinet for the lotion.

The patient asked for pain medication. The nurse searched her pockets for the keys to the narcotics cabinet, but finding them empty, decided that another nurse had the keys. Even though the patient was a double-amputee missing both his legs, she told him to go to the nurse station himself. She had just enough energy, in the dream, to gather the soiled linens and carry them to the laundry basket outside the room.

At this point, she woke up in her bedroom. "It was about 4 am", explains the nurse, "and I felt as though I had been worked over with a rubber hose. In the morning, totally exhausted, I told my husband about the dream and remarked how funny the sleeping mind is" (p. 49-50).

When she returned to work, she received an incredible shock. The nurse describes what happened next:

One of the night nurses stopped me to tell me of a complaint from Mr. X, the patient in Room 254. She assured me that, while Mr. X thought me very gentle and kind in general, he was in a rage because I had told him he had to go to the nurses' station for his pain medication after I had changed his bed.

Confused, she told the night nurse that she hadn't worked that night, and quickly left. Ryback writes:

How I wish I could check somehow to see if that bed had really been changed! The fact that the patient saw and heard the nurse make the unreasonable request to go down the hall demonstrates that the dreamer had come psychically from her domain into his.

Robert Monroe

Perhaps the most astounding cases of physical manifestations come from well-known OBEr Robert Monroe. On several occasions, Monroe has been able to affect the physical environment while out-of-body in astounding ways.

On October 10, 1962, Monroe decided to visit R. W., a sceptical friend. He went out-of-body to her home and saw her sitting in a chair, reading. He hovered back and forth before her trying to get her attention. Suddenly she seemed to notice him and become frightened. He tried to talk to her but was pulled back into the physical realm. The next day R. W. asked Monroe where he was the night before and said:

I was sitting in the living room after supper reading the paper. Something made me look up, and there on the other side of the room was something waving in the air...It was like a filmy piece of gray chiffon. I could see the wall and chair behind it, and it started to come toward me. I was frightened and I thought it might be you.

She called out 'Bob's' name, but the apparition responded only by moving back and forth. She became more frightened and told 'it' to leave. Monroe told her that, yes, he had visited her. She told him, "Well, next time, say something so I'll be sure it's you. Then I won't be so scared".

Ten months later, on August 15, 1963, Monroe 'exteriorised' and went again to see if he could locate R. W., Monroe found her seated in a room with two other women. He tried to get her to notice him. When that failed, he tried more extensive measures. Monroe writes:

I reached over and tried to pinch her, gently, I thought. I pinched her on the side, just above the hips and below the ribcage. She let out a good loud 'ow', and I backed up, because I was somewhat surprised. I really hadn't expected to be able to actually pinch her.

Monroe noted the details and left, returning to his body. Later he talked to R. W. and confirmed that the details he had observed were correct. Then he asked her about the pinch.

Monroe: "A look of complete astonishment crossed her face".

"Was that you?" she asked him. Then she took him aside, lifted her sweater and showed him where he had pinched her. Monroe writes, "There were two brown and blue marks at exactly the spot where I pinched her".

R. W.:

I was sitting there, talking to the girls when all of a sudden I felt this terrible pinch. I must have jumped a foot. I thought my brother-in-law had come back and sneaked up behind me. I turned around, but there was no one there...It hurt!

In one early experiment, Monroe allowed himself to be studied while inducing an OBE by psychiatrist Stuart Twemlow and Fowler Jones of the Kansas University Medical Center. Twemlow and Jones were able to observe Monroe while he was hooked up to a brainwave monitor. Twemlow:

We observed him through a one-way mirror over a thirty minute time period. Most striking was his slow rate of breathing ... at about the same time as a technician entered the room to tell us that the brain wave tracings were changing, Dr. Jones and I simultaneously had the impression of a heat-wave-like distortion of Monroe's upper body while the lower part of his body was clearly in focus to us. This distortion lasted until approximately two minutes before the termination of the experiment.

Twemlow also examined Monroe for physiological abnormalities after the experiment. Twemlow recorded a Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) which was highly unusual. Twemlow noted that "Monroe had demonstrated his ability to move needles of sensitive voltmeters by waving his hand over them". Like other advanced OBEs, Monroe has also experienced physical levitation.

In our house at Whistlefield Farm, there was a screened in porch off the living room. To get to the porch, one had to go through two double doors and down a series of flagstone steps that led to the porch at a lower level. These steps were quite steep, the difference in floor height being approximately four feet...One morning, with my arms full of books and papers, I walked out the entrance to the porch and stumbled. My left foot crossed over in front of my right, and I dove headlong in the direction of the flagstone floor of the porch. As I fell I was unable to get my arms out in front of me. I remember thinking, 'Well, this will certainly end up with a fractured skull or a broken neck'.

About six inches from the floor, my fall was suddenly arrested and I landed on my head and shoulders very lightly on the flagstone floor, no heavier than if I had simply put my head down very carefully. The rest of my body then draped down afterward, drifting as gently as a feather. I lay there for a moment wondering what had happened. I felt my head and my shoulders and there was no pain, no mark, no bruise, nothing. I stood up, picked up my books and papers, looked at the place from where I had fallen, and tried to figure some answer. Something had cushioned my fall, but I certainly was not consciously aware of what it was.

Monroe was unable to account for the levitation, but he was absolutely convinced it was unusual. His feelings were confirmed when it happened again.

Some months later in the middle of winter, a similar event took place. I was walking down the front steps, which had been reportedly cleaned after a snow, slipped and started to fall. This time I was not quite so surprised when I again landed very lightly.

Monroe then knew that he hadn't imagined the levitation. Whatever the cause of the experience, he knew it was real. And yet, he was reluctant to experiment. As he says, "There have been only two such events, and I don't think I will deliberately try to fall experimentally. Just another one of those 'as yet' unexplained moments".

This demonstrates once more that perhaps the after-effects of OBEs might contain the hidden clues as to the interaction between physical and non-physical worlds. In particular, those effects appear to relate to certain exceptional mind abilities and psi potentials that seem to carry over, as it were, into physical manifestations.

The Durville Experiments

Early French psychic investigator, Hector Durville (1849-1923) became interested in proving the reality of OBEs after discovering that he was able to hypnotise his patients and verbally guide them into an OBE.

After Durville succeeded in leading his patients out-of-body, he decided to see if the astral body could physically affect the environment. He first instructed his patients to attempt to make a rapping noise in the OBE-state. To his amazement, the experiment succeeded and heard raps immediately after instructing the patient to do so. Furthermore, the patients were able to return to a waking state and report their own perceptions.

He was then able to get his patients to move out of body and try to move the needle of a sthenometer, a device invented by Paul Joire. The needle of the device could be moved by placing one's hands next to it. Durville wondered if an astral body could affect the device. To his delight, his patients successfully moved the needle while out-of-body on multiple occasions. On a few occasions, he claims to have successfully instructed his patients to move out-of-body and manipulate physical objects.

Perhaps Durville's most noteworthy success came from a single remarkable experiment. In that experiment Durville set up screens covered with calcium sulphide. He then hypnotised his patients and guided them out of their bodies, and then instructed them to walk through the calcium sulphide screens. Amazingly, on each occasion that he instructed his patient to go out-of-body and walk through the screens, the screens would glow brilliantly.

Durville concluded: "Projection of the astral body is a certain fact, capable of being demonstrated by means of direct experiment". Durville documented his research in a series of books published in French. Although, as far as we know, limited replication of Durville's experiments has been carried out to date.

The Monroe Institute Experiments

While Robert Monroe had his own experiences with the objective and physical reality of OBEs, he was also inspired to conduct more formal research in this field. At the Monroe Institute, Monroe and his OBE students of the 'Gateway Program' experimented to see if the 'mental energy' of twenty-four participants could be made to physically manifest in a certain predetermined location. The chosen location was above the motel where they were all staying. Monroe (1987):

Four of us went outside and looked up into the darkness. We had plenty of chance to accustom our eyes to the darkness beforehand, so when the signal came at the proper time, we looked very eagerly. None of us saw anything.

Then somebody called out, "Look higher, look higher!"

We did. Most of us had been looking just above the roof of the motel. We now looked far up into the sky in astonishment. Against the starlit night there were soft, red, neon-like waves. They resembled nothing as much as trickling water moving across an arc of the sky directly atop the roof of the motel. At exactly the time the exercise called for the light to shut off, it suddenly disappeared. Three minutes later the exercise was repeated ... and the red waving rivulets appeared again and shut off at the appropriate signal. All four of us observed it and were tremendously excited by the result.

Later Monroe and his team repeated the experiment. Monroe hoped to not only see a physical manifestation, but to photograph it. The experiment was repeated. Six people, including Monroe, stood outside looking for the light. Unfortunately, they saw nothing. They took pictures regardless and were surprised at what they found. The control pictures showed nothing unusual. The others showed something very interesting. Monroe:

The two taken during the exercise itself showed a round ball with a marbled effect much like the earth seen from a distance. Why the Polaroid picked up a picture and we could not has been explained by several physicists and photographers. The film can 'see' light frequencies our eyes cannot.

Monroe (1971) has also written briefly about other profound physical effects. In certain experiments, OBEs at the Monroe Institute were able to effect magnetic instruments. Monroe:

There are indications that a magnetic field is generated of a type with which our science is unfamiliar. One of the results of this is to set up magnetic fields in nearby electrical loops as well as audio cables. Another is to affect nearby magnetic tape to such an extent that a 'print-through' takes place from one layer of tape to another.

Monroe documented further evidence of the ability of OBEs to affect machines. This occurred when Monroe and his team noticed that the cars parked closest to the isolation booths where the OBE experiments took place began to exhibit a curious symptom.

One night, when we got into our cars parked outside some twenty feet from booth 2, we found the batteries were dead in all three cars...Thus we learned we had better not park too close to booth 2 during certain experiments with specific Explorers. Exactly why this took place—and still does so—we don't know.

Other cases

Many other instances of the astral body affecting the physical environment have been recorded. Visual OBE apparition cases number well into the hundreds. Much rarer are apparitions which can be heard and felt. Pioneering OBE researcher Robert Crookall (1890-1981) wrote about several such accounts.

A typical example is Mr Rose, who attempted to project his 'astral double' to visit a distantly lady friend. He saw himself approach the house and ring the doorbell. At the time, his female friend lay in bed with her daughter. They both awoke feeling strangely anxious. The maid then rushed in to say that the door bell had just rung. On another occasion, Mr Rose repeated the experiment. This time the mother saw a "luminous cloud" (Crookall, 1964, p. 24) while the daughter heard footsteps in the corridor.

In the early 1950s, an anonymous gentleman went out-of-body and attempted to visit his friend Stella. To his amazement, he was successful and found himself on her doorstep. Not realising that he could have simply walked through the door, he attempted to knock and announce his presence. The gentleman:

...I knocked. No result. I tried again and this time there was a feeble tapping not likely to be heard within. With a concentrated effort, I knocked once more and this time was rewarded by a very startling crash. Stella's sister opened the door, looked this way and that, evidently saw no one and retired perplexed.

Later the gentleman visited the residence and inquired if they had heard the front door knock at the prescribed time. Stella replied, yes, they had heard first a faint tapping noise, and then "a tremendous bang".

In October of 1960, Mrs Schreiber of London was sitting in her kitchen when she became unaccountably anxious about her daughter who – at the time – was sailing on the Queen Mary to New York. The feeling grew until suddenly Schreiber felt herself being flung out of her body, flying over the ocean and approaching the ship. Mrs Schreiber:

I went down to one of the cabins and I saw my daughter lying in her bunk, looking very sick. I sat on the edge of her bunk, took her hand, and asked what was wrong? She answered that she had been very sea-sick and had been sending her thought out to me asking for help.

Schreiber told her, "Don't worry. You are all right. Just get up, have a wash, get dressed and go up and deck, and you will be quite well!". Schreiber then felt herself leave the cabin and

fly back home to her kitchen. A few days later she received a letter from her daughter describing how Schreiber had appeared to her physically:

She described how I had sat on her bunk, the words I spoke, and also that she had done as I had told her to do and went on deck and felt quite well and enjoyed the rest of the voyage, without further sickness.

A case from the early 1900s involves an Irish clergyman who found himself lost at night in an area riddled with abandoned mine-shafts. He moved slowly trying to avoid the dangerous terrain. He was about to step over a short wall when suddenly a small stone struck him on the centre of his back. He turned around and was shocked to see a young girl holding a lantern and beckoning him to follow.

Surprised to see a young girl out at night in such a dangerous area, the clergyman was also relieved to be rescued and he followed the girl to a small cottage, at which point she promptly disappeared. Shocked, the clergyman entered the cottage and inside found the young girl lying in bed, deathly ill. The girl told the clergyman, "I dreamed I fetched you here. You are just like the gentleman I saw in my sleep. You were about to step in Pember's Shaft when I threw a stone to stop you".

Conclusions and afterthoughts

While many other cases of physical manifestations could be presented, as the reader can probably gather, the accounts would become quite repetitive over time. Important here is that in case after case, people who find themselves out-of-body have been able to successfully manipulate the environment in a wide variety of ways. People in their astral bodies have been able to make themselves seen, heard, and felt.

The implications of these types of cases are profound. The first obvious conclusion is that the astral body is not as non-physical as perhaps commonly believed. These cases show that in rare instances, the astral body has apparently all the abilities of the physical body, and maybe even more. If the OBEr can throw physical stones, or pinch somebody, or knock on a door, or change hospital bed sheets, or throw a heavy mattress and two occupants to the floor, then the possibilities to perform other kinds of physical activity are endless.

The real question is: how can such cases occur? These cases boldly defy the common conception that OBErs are wispy ghosts, unable to affect the physical environment, not to mention the basic tenets of Newtonian physics.

The answer appears to lie with the density of the astral body. The above cases show us that when the astral body reaches a certain density, then moving physical objects is possible. In some cases, it appears to be related to the willpower and state of mind of the OBEr.

In cases of levitation, it appears that the astral body's natural ability to fly is somehow carried over or translated into the physical state. Somehow the high energies of the astral body coincide with the physical body and cause a levitation event. Masaharu Naruse, a spiritually advance yogi in Japan, is one of the few acclaimed modern living levitators. When people have asked him how he claims to levitate, he states:

It is to use instantaneously prana, or vital energy permeating the universe. Place one's consciousness on the destination point for floating. According as the amount of consciousness increases, existential reversal takes place and the physical self becomes evacuated. Then, the physical body gets attracted towards the consciousness which has been already shifted to the destination. One can thus levitate.

In not so many words, Naruse seems to suggest that levitation occurs as a result of an OBE; the astral body leaves the physical body, which can be drawn upwards with it.

The experiments of Hector Durville and of the Monroe Institute have provided compelling evidence for the existence of an astral body. They have shown that the astral body can move physical objects, effect electromagnetic instruments and can visibly manifest as an apparition.

Ultimately, the accounts in this chapter show that the dividing line between physical and non-physical is not easy to define, and that there appears a seeming bleed-through or overlap from the astral dimensions into the physical dimensions. This explanation fits nicely with the theory held by many OBErs, that the physical world is, in fact, a reflection of the astral world, identical in most respects except that the energy or vibrational level has been condensed or reified in some fashion. Again we are entering the realm of speculation here, but if the physical world is, in fact, a replica of the astral world, it would make sense that the two worlds are integrally and vitally connected in ways that we are only beginning to understand.

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CHAPTER 7: OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES AND NON-LOCAL PERCEPTION, GRAHAM NICHOLLS

The conventionally educated and sceptically-minded reading this book might not have much time for stories of near death journeys and the idea that out-of-body experiences (OBE) could be an objectively real phenomenon. Even fewer would entertain the possibility that consciousness could survive the death of the body. Yet many must wonder why it is that there are researchers, scientists in the field, and seemingly intelligent and informed people, who will conclude otherwise.

What if the mistake that cultures down through the ages have made was to ascribe a supernatural explanation to such experiences? And what if the scientifically-minded in general have dismissed them on this very same basis by connecting them to religion, or superstition, simply because religion has attempted to explain them in much the same way it has attempted to explain the origin of our species?

My perspective is that near-death experiences (NDEs) and OBEs could hold the key to consciousness, and self-awareness could be more than a localised brain function; but these experiences need not have anything to do with religion and belief. In this chapter I will explore these issues, and endeavour to step outside of the emotionally charged and ideologically driven divide on the subject. First of all, I will offer a definition of the OBE, followed with a discussion of verifiable experiences. Then, later in the chapter, I shall delve into the premise of non-local perception related to OBEs and how this can be considered with regard to psychic phenomena and extra-sensory perception (ESP). Finally, a new model of perception during the OBE is proposed which does not depend on physical sight.

Defining the OBE

It is clear from even a cursory look at the literature that definitions of an OBE vary greatly. For the purposes of this chapter I will use a definition that focuses on the type of OBE commonly described in near-death accounts, and also the form that I commonly experience:

An OBE involves an experience of consciousness, or self-awareness floating out of (or sometimes simply being independent of) the physical body. Usually the individual's experience will be totally autonomous from the physical body, as there will be no pain, sensory information, or any spatial relationship to the physical body. Once an initial experience of separation from the physical body has taken place (often accompanied by 'vibration' sensations), travel locally via floating/flying, as well as over distances are commonly reported. Some kind of energised form, a subtle body, sphere, or point of awareness, is often described. OBEs usually entail visual perceptions from the out-of-body vantage point, often of objects, or activities happening at a perceived location (quality and colouration of vision can vary). Less commonly, other sensations

will be experienced, including touch, and hearing (smell and taste are very rarely reported). The duration of the experience varies greatly from a matter of seconds, through to several hours. OBEs often end with the sensation of re-entry to the physical-body, or self-awareness becoming realigned with the sensations of the physical-body again.

I have chosen to go beyond the overly simplified definitions often used, because they can be limiting and even misleading. If I were to only define an OBE as a feeling of being out of the body, this would leave many unrelated types of experience within the definition (e.g., drug experiences, dissociative conditions, etc.). This would be unhelpful as these other types of experience do not include factors like travel over distances, or non-local perception.

Verifiable OBEs

In November 2013 I took part in a debate in central London focused on the idea of whether or not consciousness is purely an epiphenomenon of the brain's neuronal activity, something extended, or even entirely separate. Many questions and points arose from both the neuroscientist Jane Aspell, and the philosopher Stephen Law, as the debate progressed. But what I felt throughout was that we were debating ideological positions, rather than what we know about the nature of mind. OBEs were dismissed by the sceptical panellists as either some form of mental dysfunction, bodily illusion, or sleep paralysis from the outset.

Since childhood I have heard similar claims that OBEs/NDEs must be little more than dreams, hallucinations, or the brain malfunctioning. Little reason for this belief is generally given, other than the fact that our current assumptions about physics and neurological activity do not support any other possibilities or conclusions.

As I have had OBEs from a normal state of health most of my life, the illusion hypothesis has seemed at best incomplete to me. I have been on a journey to explore what OBEs are in as rational a way as possible. During that journey I have not rejected science. Despite my experiences, I have remained devoted to an empirical approach. I have spent years studying sceptical interpretations, but like researchers in the field of NDEs, the veridical factors (objective observations that suggest some form of psi ability), shared experiences, and the sheer complexity present in out-of-body perceptions have left me unconvinced they can be explained so easily. At the very least a purely neurological interpretation is not currently complete enough to account for the full range of what I, and others, have experienced.

My earlier experiences

From very early on, apparently veridical, independently supported OBEs have been a part of my personal experience. My first few objective OBEs occurred in the 1990s, and are outlined in my first book, 'Avenues of the Human Spirit' (2011). One of which I describe like this:

I focused in on a window up ahead; I don't really recall deciding to enter the building, but I turned to the window and effortlessly passed through its reflective surface and found myself standing in a kind of office. Just in front of me stood a desk laid out with papers and what seemed like the paraphernalia of a work place. As I looked at the desk the real potential of my vision became apparent; I could read the details on the page and I could see the grain of the paper. It was more than just seeing; I felt like my vision was connecting directly to my self-awareness, wherever that was now located, not filtered through the lenses of my eyes or interpreted by my brain in the normal process that vision is. ... I focused on remembering the details so that I could verify what I had experienced later ... When I returned to my body, I grabbed for my diary so I could write down the details of the journey and the name and address at the location. It wasn't long before I was able to verify what I had seen, the area code and the name at the address as well as the layout. I was literally able to retrace on foot the path I had travelled in the out-of-body state.

As I had never been to that road before, it seemed extremely unlikely that I could have known the details of the person living at that address, let alone the position of the house on the street. Of course this one case would not have been enough to convince me of the objective nature of OBEs. Extraordinary coincidences can happen, although I could find no way to make that view work, as the details were highly specific and recorded prior to my investigation.

Soho bombing

From that point on I had many more veridical OBEs, including one of a bombing in Soho in 1999. I was in a room with four others as part of a practical workshop when the OBE happened. One man present, Cristovão Neto, was sceptical, but nevertheless confirmed the details I saw in my OBE. He stated: "I remember thinking it was quite far-fetched, but yes, the "vision" involved an explosion in Soho".

Lawrence Brightman, another man present while my OBE was taking place went into more detail and stated that I described "a bombing at a bar in Soho". All the details were recorded at the time (within two hours) in my journal before the actual event occurred.

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral

I have explored my Soho experience many times elsewhere, but it was another verified OBE in 2012 that inspired me to write this chapter. It was the night of the full moon, November, 29th, 2012. I laid down on my bed and started to feel a sense of heightened awareness, as if there was a large area of space beyond my closed eyelids. I concentrated and clearly felt the sensations of separation from my physical body, I was even aware of floating up and out of the building. The next thing I saw was the cobbles on the street below that run the length of my street and are a feature of the historical area of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, where I now spend much of my time.

Moments later I was aware of the sensation of drifting towards the dome of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. It stands on a hill in the west of the city. It was very beautiful taking in the image of Tallinn at night and the main dome surrounded by smaller domes. Yet nothing seemed different from my last visit months before. That is, at least until I drifted to the entrance side of the building and saw repair work to the right of the main door, including what looked like yellow plastic tape over tarpaulin. I realised in that moment that this OBE was exceptionally clear, and that I should make every effort to document all the details I could.

When I returned to normal physical-body awareness I made detailed notes and described to my partner all of the details of what I'd seen before I made any attempt to visit the cathedral to verify my perceptions. I knew gaining such veridical information is not as easy as many sceptics assume it 'should' be. There is often very limited control and clarity of vision, but highly vivid perception does occur in peak, or exceptional, experiences.

I then got my camera and headed for the west of the city. As I came up the hill, the side of the building I had seen in the OBE was not visible (it can only be seen from the street in front of the entrance). Moments later I turned the corner to see the tarpaulin and repairs to the two windows on the correct side of the building – nowhere else. The right-hand side even had yellow plastic tape, making every element I had described to my partner before I left totally correct. I then took the photograph shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The damage and repairs outside the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral taken shortly after the OBE.

My partner, Triin Tõniste, commented: "the yellow tape looks the same as I'd pictured it from your description". I made a side note of this and then began to look for anything in my description that didn't fit, to make sure I wasn't falling victim to any cognitive bias. It was clear that I wasn't and the details including the location on the building, materials, colour, and size, were all consistent, and no elements were left out.

This simpler example of a confirmed OBE is described to offer a clearer perspective on the types of OBE that can occur. Within the NDE there are many similar accounts that also offer insight into the nature of the out-of-body state.

An example of a veridical NDE

As is the case with my own OBEs, there are many cases of veridical perception within the NDE literature. A quite compelling case recently caught my attention. It is rare, because it includes the perception of a twelve digit number while the individual was undergoing an NDE.

Perceiving letters and numbers is highly uncommon in my experiences (and in the research), thus cases such as this stand out. The case was investigated by Norma Bowe, a

professor at Kean University in Union, New Jersey. Bowe was not a believer in the objectivity of NDEs and had generally considered them the result of a drug reaction or brain malfunction. Yet on this occasion a woman regaining consciousness claimed she could prove she had been out of her body.

The woman had been in a car accident and been pronounced dead on arrival when she was brought into the emergency room. Medical students and interns had begun working on her and managed to get her heartbeat going, but then she had coded again. They'd kept on trying, jump-starting her heart again, this time stabilising it. She'd remained in a coma for months, unresponsive (see Hayasaki, 2014).

When the woman regained consciousness, she explained that she suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and had a habit of remembering numbers. She claimed that while floating out of her body she had memorised the serial number on top of the respirator machine. The nurse made a note of the 12-digit number the woman described so they could check if it was in fact the same as the one on the machine.

A few days later, the nurses called for maintenance to take the ventilator machine out of the room. The woman had recovered so well, she no longer needed it. When the worker arrived, the nurses asked if he wouldn't mind climbing to the top to see if there was a serial number up there. He gave them a puzzled look and grabbed his ladder. When he made it up there, he told them that indeed there was a serial number. The number matched with the number the woman claimed she had seen during her NDE.

This case changed Bowe's view of consciousness and what is possible in OBEs. But, sceptics will generally dismiss these kinds of occurrences as anecdotal and thus not worthy of consideration. While I know that memory and eyewitness accounts are fallible and these kinds of cases cannot stand alone, I find it unreasonable to dismiss such cases without engagement.

On anecdotes and case studies

Cases of accurate perception within OBE/NDEs are often dismissed as anecdotes by critics, simply because they did not take place within a laboratory setting. In my understanding of the word 'anecdote' and the limits of research, it seems the issue over anecdotes is often quite a disingenuous one. The real meaning of the word is something more akin to gossip, a far cry from the type of recorded case study generally referred to in the NDE literature. It is clear that witnessed and confirmed cases that have often been published, or recorded, contemporaneously do not in fact fall within the realm of anecdotes. This is especially the case when they form part of a prospective study. In such situations the argument that 'selective positive reporting' is the reason these cases seem supportive of non-local perceptions would seem less convincing, as comprehensive reporting takes place. Negative cases would also be included, and the intention from the outset would be to explore all cases, not to report only if something extraordinary were to take place.

When used as a criticism, the word 'anecdote' is often applied to anything that is described by witnesses outside of controlled conditions. In my view it is not so much an issue of the context of how the experience might happen, working with the nature of the phenomenon is unavoidable. While I agree that case studies are not enough alone to establish the reality of non-local perception, it seems to me that they do offer support for OBEs as objective experiences when recorded properly. In the case of NDE research there is simply no other source of evidence other than the descriptions that are recorded in intensive care units. To dismiss them would be to simply close the door on any possibility of study. I think most, short of pathological sceptics, would not consider this kind of dismissive thinking to be scientific, nor reasonable.

Cases from prospective studies are even more compelling, as they are all recorded with great detail, as in the case of Pim van Lommel and Penny Sartori's research for example. Again in these studies, with clear protocols and detailed transcripts, we find cases of what Janice Holden, a professor at the University of North Texas, calls: 'apparently non-physical veridical perception' (AVP). In the book 'The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences', Holden (2009) writes: "Of the 111 cases of apparently nonphysical perception, I found that 92% contained absolutely no errors, 6% contained minor errors, and 2% were completely erroneous [not matching actual events]. Thus, the vast majority of these apparently nonphysical perceptions were veridical".

Cases from prospective studies, and laboratory research into abilities like remote viewing, create a converging body of support for the idea that perception without the use of the five regular senses is possible, and happens frequently. In Sartori's (2003) prospective research, the case of Patient #10 is one of particular interest, not only for its verified factors, but also as it involved the spontaneous healing of a 'claw hand' and hemiplegic gait that the patient had suffered with since birth. Sartori applied many possible models, including the mental reconstruction theory or some form of confirmation bias put forward by sceptics, but in fact found they cannot explain all the details of cases such as this one. She writes, "The veridical details of this case are corroborated by the medical notes and the testimonies of the patient, his nurse, and physiotherapist, who were present at the time the experience occurred", and concludes "[t]here are many aspects of this case for which our current brain/mind models cannot provide an adequate explanation".

Does neuroscience show that OBEs are hallucinations or bodily illusions?

In my second book, 'Navigating the Out-of-Body Experience' (2012) I detail the problems with the hypothesis that neuroscience purports suggesting OBEs are hallucinations or perceptual illusions. I'd like to overview some of these issues again here, starting with experimental research studies, some of which were undertaken by Jane Aspell, a neuroscientist with whom I have debated on two occasions. After our last radio debate in November 2014 I listened to a lecture Aspell gave at the 'Cambridge Science Festival' in which she detailed her perspective and a possible explanation for OBEs. Aspell gave a brief explanation of brain stimulation to elicit different responses within a patient with the aim of locating the source of

epileptic seizures. She describes what happens as the electrical stimulation begins. "They'll switch the current on, and they'll say "what do you feel now?" and they'll say "Oh I just thought of my grandmother", "Oh I just felt a tingle in my foot", or whatever it is" (see Aspell, 2014).

Aspell then goes on to state that when the temporo-parietal junction is stimulated in the same way the patient will have an OBE (this is consistent with Olaf Blanke's experiments). The problem with this form of reasoning is that concluding that a phenomenon is not 'real' because it is possible to stimulate the brain in order to trigger a certain experience, is not correct. If we take Aspell's own example of the patient thinking of her grandmother, and apply the same logic, we would have to conclude that her grandmother does not exist, or that the experience of a grandmother was illusory in general. When one breaks the argument down in this manner I'm certain it is clear why it is insufficient to conclude anything substantive about the objectivity of OBEs, using this reasoning.

However, the memory of the grandmother, and the OBE are not equally likely to be objective. As the OBE is outside of our current scientific understanding, this is where some of the issues of scientific explanation arise. So it is not so much that the neuroscience has disproved OBEs to have an objective component: it hasn't. But what it has done is offer a framework within which an OBE could be viewed as a bodily illusion.

So, do Aspell's conclusions match up with the forms of OBE commonly described, and can this model account for the objective perceptions that researchers find? In order to answer this question, firstly, we need to look at the definition and example given by Aspell in her lecture. Interestingly the reference used was the case of Sylvan Muldoon, famous in the 1920s and 30s for his OBEs and work with the psychical researcher Hereward Carrington (refer to Muldoon & Carrington, 1929).

The type of experience mentioned involves a feeling of floating directly above the body and looking down, and little else. It is clear to me that such a basic experience could of course be illusory, but it is also clear that this very rudimentary type of experience is far from the complex multi-sensory experiences that I have already described in this chapter. Muldoon's more complex and far reaching OBEs are not discussed at all. This simple example is probably referenced as it is similar to the experience induced via neurostimulation by Aspell's colleague Olaf Blanke (2002).

As is it clear from earlier chapters, I am not the first to point out that drawing conclusions about the OBE from neurostimulation experiences is at best limited. Researchers Janice Holden, Jeffrey Long, and Jason MacLurg (n.d.) wrote a reply to Blanke's study explaining why the types of experiences that magnetic stimulation elicit do not in-fact resemble most forms of OBEs. In the reply they compare two example cases: an English patient who had a spontaneous OBE, and the Swiss patient who was the key subject in Blanke's study.

A thorough review by one of us (Holden) of three classic books reporting extensive OBE research [Green (1968), Gabbard & Twemlow (1984), and Irwin (1985)] and one very recent review of the entire OBE research literature (Alvarado, 2000) reveals that the English patient's OBE is quite characteristic of OBEs in general, while the Swiss patient's is highly uncharacteristic.

This reveals that not only is it incorrect to claim a bodily illusion disproves OBEs, but it may even be inaccurate to describe the type of experiences induced with magnetic stimulation as OBEs at all. So far from explaining OBEs, the often quoted studies in-fact offer little explanation, and raise many questions. Even if the study had produced a convincing OBE, it would still not show that OBEs are not objective more than inducing an experience of an illusory grandmother would prove grandmothers don't exist. In my opinion, it is important to untangle these ideas of what an OBE is. This will allow researchers to explore these experiences with a greater spirit of fairness.

AWARE

Those sceptical of the veridical elements within NDEs will sometimes champion the AWARE study, which was conducted by a team headed by Sam Parnia (2014), and produced somewhat disappointing results in some areas. The methodology relevant to our discussion used signs placed over the beds in intensive care units, so that they could, in theory, be seen from an out-of-body vantage point. Yet many within the NDE community felt this method was, and is, unlikely to result in a positive outcome for three key reasons.

Firstly, it fails to take into account the kind of details reported in NDE cases. Very few NDEs include descriptions of paintings, decorations or other such two-dimensional information. Most out-of-body objective observations focus on the operating apparatus, and/or fragments of information in the environment, usually small three-dimensional objects. The signs themselves used within the AWARE study were in my opinion of poor quality for reasons I will outline, and were unlikely to result in a positive outcome (see Figure 2 for an example). I will explore the visual components in the last section of this chapter, and examine characteristics of vision within OBEs/NDEs, as well as how awareness of these factors might be useful in future research.



Figure 2. According to Sam Parnia, this is the only remaining example of a 'sign' from the AWARE study (source: 'The Times').

Secondly, the participants had no knowledge of the signs, and so they were not looking for them, and in all probability were not even aware that the study was taking place. This is, of course, important for the validity and ethics of the study, but at the same time, this makes the signs being observed even less likely, and remembering them, very unlikely.

I am not the only researcher to have expressed doubts about the design of the AWARE study prior to the release of the results. Pim van Lommel, who conducted the largest study on NDEs, stated that he feels 'inattentional blindness' could be the cause of not seeing the targets in studies like AWARE. He stated (see van Lommel, 2013):

...until now there has been no published case where patients during CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] has perceived this hidden sign despite perceiving veridical details of their resuscitation previous unknown to them. Could there be a plausible explanation for this impossibility to 'proof' the reported perception during OBE by a hidden sign? This lack of 'objective proof' could be caused by so-called 'inattentional blindness', also known as 'perceptual blindness'. This is the phenomenon of not being able to perceive things that are in plain sight. It can be a result of having no internal frame of reference to perceive the unseen object, or it can be caused by the lack of mental focus or attention caused by mental distractions.

Van Lommel argued that:

Based on the many corroborated cases of veridical perception from a position out and above the body during NDE it seems obvious that perception really can occur during OBE, and that missing a hidden target during OBE must be the result of a lack of intention and attention for this unexpected hidden object because patients are too surprised to be able to 'see' the resuscitation of their own lifeless body from above during their cardiac arrest or surgery.

Thirdly, this kind of experiment has been attempted before and failed (see Alvarado's, 1982 research for an overview of veridical OBE studies, for example). Sceptics of course will use the perceived 'failure' of studies such as AWARE in supporting their hallucination hypothesis, and simply dismiss the hundreds of veridical perceptions, or AVPs, in the literature. I personally feel this is a premature conclusion, as what is needed is greater attention to the specifics of how vision and wider forms of perception might work within an OBE/NDE. It is also essential that if a similar protocol is explored again, that any hidden element be far more thought through than

a random image, or newspaper cutting (I will explore new approaches for research in the final subchapter).

It was however fascinating to see a case of objective perception within the AWARE study despite the limited amount of cases they were able to observe (of course not a fault of the study's design). The verified case was timed very precisely due to a sound in the operating theatre that the subject heard after cardiac arrest, supporting the idea that awareness can continue in some form at a time when the brain is thought to be inactive.

Other objective forms of OBE/NDE

As is common in the literature of NDE/OBEs, I have mainly been focusing here on visual perceptions while in the out-of-body state, but it should also be noted that information about deceased individuals is another common form of objective information present within NDEs. 'Peak in Darien' refers to a category within the field of survival or NDE research in which an encounter with a deceased person is described by an individual with no prior knowledge that the person they witness has died, providing a different type of veridical evidence. The name was inspired by a book of the same name published by Frances Power Cobbe.

British researcher Penny Sartori (2005) described the case of one of her patients from her prospective study who reported a visitation from his dead sister while he himself lay dying. The part that confounds explanation is that he did not know that his sister had died at the time of the visitation. It was only when his relatives visited him later that it was confirmed that she had passed away before his vision of her. Again this case was reported and detailed at the time it occurred as part of Sartori's study, so it cannot be fairly rejected as simply a story.

Controlled research

At this point I would like to turn my attention to controlled laboratory research into non-local perceptions and psi, which focuses on the collection of objective data from anomalous experiences. While some may feel that remote viewing and telepathy for example, are totally distinct areas to the study of OBEs, I feel this is a misconception, and that these abilities are on a continuum and probably only separate within our conceptual frameworks. Indeed, parapsychologists have long studied OBEs within the same category as other psi/anomalous phenomena. As part of my own journey and understanding of this area of investigation, I began by looking into research by scientists in the field (such as Charles Tart), which I found pioneering and fascinating, but largely inconclusive, through to a sceptical interpretation of parapsychology by Susan Blackmore. I explored topics related to non-local consciousness including remote viewing, telepathy, and micro-psychokinesis (e.g., Dean Radin's work at the Institute of Noetic Sciences [IONS]), areas with a larger body of experimental data.

My conclusion was in-line with others who have assessed the research, including statistician Jessica Utts and sceptic Ray Hyman. While reviewing the Stanford Research Institute remote viewing studies Utts conducted, I discovered that there is as much evidence for 'psi' as

any effect in other areas of science. While Hyman (1995) admitted he had no ready explanation, and that he did not believe there was an issue with the methodological protocols, he stated:

The case for psychic functioning seems better than it ever has been. The contemporary findings along with the output of the SRI/SAIC program do seem to indicate that something beyond odd statistical hiccups is taking place. I also have to admit that I do not have a ready explanation for these observed effects.

One objection was that the researcher could be at fault, or an artefact was the reason that positive results were produced. I decided to explore the way parapsychology is conducted for myself by assisting Rupert Sheldrake, a well-known psi researcher. The science became more convincing to me the more I engaged with it, organised experiments, and took part in trials.

The data across hundreds of institutions seems to confirm what I have personally found via my own work. For example, Dr Dean Radin, Senior Scientist at The Institute of Noetic Sciences has pointed out that in some replicated studies, such as in telepathy and precognition research, the level of evidence in favour of psi abilities exceeds discoveries in mainstream physics (Bem, Tressoldi, Rabeyron, & Duggan, 2014). Put simply this means that by accepted standards within science, psi or some form of non-local perception is a genuine effect. In Radin's book 'Entangled Minds' (2006), he explores other meta-analyses into telepathic communication with strong effects.

Furthermore, unlike the discipline of theoretical physics, in which many phenomena are postulated but not empirically observable, throughout this book we have noted reasonably good results with observing psi effects, such as verifiable OBEs and remote viewing phenomena in controlled conditions. And, these results will likely only improve as more specific techniques for OBE induction and measurement are refined.

A common objection to these kinds of meta-analyses is that the quality of the research is not good enough. This is largely rejected, even by sceptical researchers within the field. Parapsychology has in general very high standards of research, despite stereotypes. For example Caroline Watt, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Edinburgh University, has stated, "the quality of [parapsychological] research is very good, probably better than mainstream psychology" (The Scotsman, 2008). This echoes the opinion of the 2013 study by Marie-Catherine Mousseau, entitled, 'Parapsychology: Science or Pseudo-Science?' which found a higher level of rigour in parapsychology than studies reported in mainstream journals.

The above opinion has been echoed by informed sceptics and proponents alike. So it would seem that quality, repeatability and other common objections are not based upon fact. For example, most parapsychologists are educated first in traditional psychology (normally a 4-6 year undergraduate and postgraduate sequence) and then specialise at doctoral-level in parapsychology. Psi researchers are also well-known for publishing null results in the spirit of transparency.

In conclusion, from various lines of inquiry outlined in this chapter, I feel that it is: 1) reasonable to conclude there is evidence for some form of perceptual functioning either extended from, or beyond, the brain. It is of course possible to surmise the evidence does not

fully support this conclusion, but not that it is unreasonable, and therefore 2) that the scientific investigation of non-local perceptions is both important and cannot be fairly dismissed.

New ways to understand the OBE

It is my current opinion that there are several states that are considered OBEs, from hallucinations related to sleep paralysis with few objective characteristics, through to veridical experiences of an autonomous self-awareness observing the world from a non-ordinary position. The idea of 'out-of-body' suggests several characteristics that may not be helpful, including the idea that something leaves the body, like a spirit. In addition to this, we should consider the lucid dream model that closely connects OBEs and lucid dreaming experiences, which are also often more subjective.

I feel that most of my OBEs, as well as those of whom I work closely with, do not fit within the above definitions. My experiences are more akin to an 'independent consciousness experience' (ICE), which is one of the terms I use to describe them. But even that term does not go far enough, as what I experience is not related to my body at all. I am experiencing a mobile autonomous sensing self. I am still refining these terms and ideas, but I think they come closer to what is taking place than the standard OBE.

The next stage in refining definitions would be to bring together the idea of what the experience feels like to the individual, and the exploration of what might actually be taking place. For example, the mental/sensory model extended beyond the brain would feel like being out-of-body [if our hearing, seeing, and feeling were coming from a remote source] but would in fact be more of an internal reception of information about the world. It would feel something like being in a virtual reality system. In fact this idea first occurred to me in 2003 when I was researching virtual reality technology for an installation at London's Science Museum. As part of the research my colleagues and I explored many forms of virtual environment, including the system that is used for research at University College London.

At this point I have not seen a reason to attribute anything beyond the realm of the sciences, and specifically physics, psychology, and biology, to the OBE. Hard line sceptics often seem to fall into the trap of naïve realism, and make assumptions in quite Newtonian terms, something that seems limited given our most recent discoveries in physics and other areas. I prefer to say I am agnostically physicalist, meaning I feel that psi, OBEs, and other phenomena, will most likely be shown to function within a form of quantum biology, or similar natural process. However, I am agnostic in the sense that there may be something that we simply cannot predict at this point in our scientific understanding.

The important factor is that the brain, consciousness, non-locality, and psi all seem to be linked, and I reject the need for supernatural explanations. We simply have a repeatable and observable phenomenon [i.e., non-local perception], and much like dark matter or energy, at this point we can only know them via their effects, rather than the mechanisms behind them.

During a recent visit to the IONS in Petaluma, California, I took part in Dean Radin's experiment which examined the links between quantum physics and psi abilities. The experiment at the time of writing has produced positive results in the predicted direction, showing a correlation suggestive of psi linked with the collapse of the wave function, a complex area of modern physics. If the experiments at IONS continue to provide positive results, the test I took part in could lead to a quantum solution to the mechanism through which psi, and more specifically non-local consciousness, might function.

Visual perception in OBEs

Earlier in this chapter I described two OBEs I had in London, in which I visited a room set up like an office on Lancaster Road, and also an experience of a bombing in Soho. One of the most interesting elements of both of those experiences was the monochromatic blue/green tint to my vision whilst in the out-of-body state.

It was as if I were viewing the scenes through some kind of tinted lens. In the years since those experiences I have often wondered what was taking place to cause such an effect. Very little is said in the OBE literature on the subject of how we see during such experiences, or even how we can experience sensory information in general without access to our physical senses. It would seem highly unlikely that vision works via light hitting a mass of light-sensitive neurons, or photoreceptors, as vision is generally understood.

So what then could be happening to give rise to highly complex and vivid visual imagery reported in OBEs (at times more vivid than normal vision)? It occurred to me that one possibility is that monochromatic and dichromatic perception could be related to the brain translating information coming via some other access route. In order to explore the idea that OBE vision is either a translation, or a more direct experience of reality, I started to research forms of physical vision that resemble non-local perception. One of the most interesting and closest to the cerulean experiences (Soho/Lancaster) is 'scotopic' vision, or low-light vision.

Scotopic vision

Human vision involves three primary forms: photopic, mesopic, and scotopic. Photopic vision would be ordinary vision in fully lit conditions, such as daylight or bright electric light. It is dominated by the use of the cone cells. Mesopic vision would be active under medium light sources, like the moon for example. Scotopic vision is characterised by monochromatic perception, much like that experienced in some forms of OBE.

I then realised that all of the forms of vision I have experienced over the years within my OBEs resembles dichromatic (two tone) areas of the visible light spectrum. To illustrate this I have examined the different forms of OBE visual filtering with an explanation below.

Visual filters in my OBEs

- 1) The first visual filter would include the dark blue and black very low light stage of the OBE. It is often difficult to make out detail of any kind, and a sense of the environment is built up from simple forms, blurry colours, and some sense of movement, or sensation around the subject. This is a commonly reported type of perception and is often present in the early stages of an OBE, or if the person is experiencing an OBE for the first to third time.
- 2) The second is the rarest in my experience, and also the most fascinating. My most vivid and poignant OBEs have been characterised by this form of perception, which is accompanied by a 'cerulean blue' tint to the visual field. My OBEs with this 'filter' of perception have also been highly objectively accurate.
- 3) The third visual filter also often includes veridical perceptions, and is characterised by a crystalline, or yellow to golden light. This stage is reminiscent of descriptions within the NDE literature and research.
- 4) The fourth filter shares some qualities with infrared imagery, and is characterised by oranges and reds within the visual field.

The final form of perception would be without a filter, essentially a state in which we perceive in much the same manner as we would physically with the full range of colours present. See Figure 3 for a graphical representation of the above.

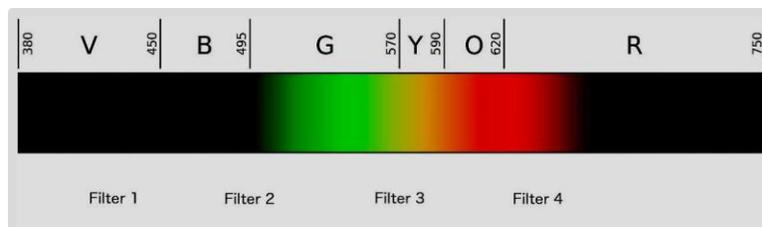


Figure 3. The visible light spectrum violet through to red with the filters marked below in-line with the band of colour they represent.

At this point I do not have a clear theory to explain these seeming differences in OBE perception, but as with the other factors I have mentioned and explored in this chapter, these descriptions are a first step towards a better understanding of how OBE vision might work.

Focused field of vision

Another characteristic I have observed in my OBEs is a focused field of vision, that I would estimate, based upon my observations, would usually be approximately 25cm-30cm in area. For example, during the Lancaster Road OBE, described earlier, there were two key veridical elements.

Firstly, as I approached the street I glanced to a street sign, but was able to see only the '11' clearly. It felt as if my vision had moved very close up to the surface and thus limited my peripheral perceptions. Secondly, I was able to see the upper portion of the letterhead, very

close up, as if I was seeing right into the grain of the paper, but nothing around it. Seeing text is extremely rare in itself, having happened to me only a few times among hundreds of OBEs.

More common are small three-dimensional objects, again within the 25cm-30cm size range. What is even more fascinating is that this is also the case in many of the most famous NDE reports. Consider for example the Pam Reynolds case, in which she saw the small medical drill being used on her skull during her operation, or Kimberly Clark Sharp's famous case of Maria, who was able to see a blue tennis shoe on a ledge outside the hospital during her OBE. I could go on listing cases that include small three-dimensional objects; there are many in the literature, but I think what is needed is actual research into this perceptual aspect of the OBE/NDE.

Towards the future

Once we have a greater understanding of the nature of visual perception within NDE/OBEs, we will be able to formulate better research into veridical perception, which is obviously highly dependent upon some form of visual ability during the OBE. So far the assumption has been that vision is simply identical to physical vision, but I consider that logically it makes little sense to make that supposition. While some experiences certainly do seem to match quite closely with how we normally see the world, others clearly do not. I hope that my observations in the last section will help to open up this important area of study.

From a range of data, from veridical NDE/OBEs, laboratory experiments into non-local perception, and psi, as well as unusual characteristics of OBEs themselves, it seems to me there are myriad aspects to the case for OBEs and non-local perception that need more research and exploration. By bringing together the experiencers and researchers, I envision the emergence of better protocols and more refined experiments, based on the actual OBE. Then, maybe, we will move one step closer to understanding these enigmatic experiences, and possibly, in time, even consciousness itself.

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CHAPTER 8: CHALLENGES IN OBTAINING VERIFIABLE DATA DURING OUT-OF-BODY-EXPERIENCES, JURGEN ZIEWE

As a number of previous chapters have argued, most scientists who have never had an out-of-body experience (OBE) are likely to dismiss the experience as a hallucinatory fantasy, perceptual distortion, or describe it as due to a temporary disruption in multi-sensory integration. These assumptions or beliefs are mainly due to the lack of scientific proof that a separation from the body did, or could, actually occur.

In contrast, for the person experiencing such an event the perspective is dramatically different, when they can clearly observe their physical body from an outside location. From this viewpoint the only way to make sense of OBEs is by regarding our body-mind as a temporary receiver and transmitter of consciousness. The fact that consciousness can exist away and separated from the physical body and focus independently of anything determined by intent must mean that consciousness is infinite and able to temporarily focus as a pocket of attention away from the physical vehicle. Frequently the physical body is no longer even regarded as the only possible seat of consciousness. With repeated experiences, many build up a completely new understanding of reality, which makes their experience an integral part of it. This chapter shall thus explore the concept of an infinite mind embodied in a finite corporeal self, and the implications this has for OBE research and investigation.

Ever since the first OBE reports reached the public domain, people were determined to find hard scientific proof of an objective reality for the phenomenon. The reason why consistent repeatable proof has mostly evaded us becomes clear when we look at the fluid nature of consciousness, which embraces multiple levels of reality and cannot be defined by our conservative scientific models, limited to our physical plane, and our physical body, only.

Therefore, in this chapter, I shall explore OBE evidence in relation to how we might gather 'proof' of verifiable perception, as well as new potential models for considering the OBE as a post-physical experience. As researchers into the numinous, we are used to reaching towards a high burden of scientific proof, a burden consistent with the adage of 'extraordinary claims call for extraordinary evidence'. Indeed, the OBE is an exceptional human experience, but how come we cannot capture its validity in scientific conditions? Perhaps the OBE requires a different type or interpretation of evidence altogether. This shall be the focus herein: how can we come to understand and validate the OBE as a legitimate experience?

OBEs are experienced in waking awareness, equalling or even exceeding our physical waking awareness. Not surprisingly, those who have OBEs rarely question their validity or that they have actually left their body and been translocated to another place away from their physical self. To the OBEr, the fact that they are fully aware and conscious and can validate their experience in the same way they can validate physical awareness is proof sufficient.

My experiment on OBE perception

In the seventies, when I started having regular OBEs, it became of some importance for me to prove to myself that this was not just a result of an over active-imagination or some twisted neurological condition. So, I was keen to find proof. Initially I started to observe my out-of-body environments for signs which I could later verify in waking reality. For example, on one occasion, when I spotted a calendar in the local library when out of body, I looked up a date in the future and memorised the day of the week of that date, which I later discovered was correct, but it was also a one in seven chance of having guessed correctly. To lead on from this, I thought of an experiment which would be more accurate and conclusive.

I asked my brother in Germany to pin a word on his wall, which I would read when projecting to his house next time and then confirm it via phone the following day. A few nights went by and then I succeeded in leaving my body. As I projected into his room I was confused by the large number of notices stuck to his wall. I couldn't focus clearly on many of them, but one stood out and it read: "4 o'clock, Thursday, take car to MOT".

I telephoned my brother the following day and he told me that he had only pinned one word to the wall and it read simply "love". However, he told me that he had a note in his diary to have his car checked in for a MOT that following Thursday, at 4.00pm. This event and others that followed provided new insights for me into how non-physical awareness operates.

To take the example of my brother pinning the word "love" to his bedroom wall, but me instead reading his diary entry, which I saw projected to his wall, should tell us a lot about the nature of consciousness and what actually takes place during projection. How does consciousness, as such, gather information? What does our consciousness focus on? Where is our awareness located? Obviously, it is no longer in the physical dimension. Why did I see a note about my brother's MOT appointment, but not the most relevant word in the experiment?

It seems, regardless of our intent, consciousness itself (as a self-governing non-physical quality) sets other priorities and agendas. In this case it could be argued that at the unconscious level, my brother considered not missing his MOT to be more important than providing a crazy request by me for a test he simply could not relate to. Although he pinned his word dutifully to the wall, his heart had not been in it. Other issues that mattered to him more were clearly projected into his canvas of consciousness, which I discovered on his wall where I expected the test word to be.

Why did I not see his actual diary entry in the bound copy of his notebook and instead saw it projected to the wall? Perhaps this occurred because my request stated specifically that I should find the information on his wall and not in his diaries. So at the target point our consciousness collaborated. My brother pinned the word "love" to the wall, to which he had no emotional connection, whilst his number one concern remained in his diary. In doing so he created a link between what he dutifully performed and what was of priority importance to him.

But why did I see so many notes pinned to his wall, when in reality there had been only one stick-it note? Obviously there were other things on my brother's mind which found their

way to the wall, which were not necessarily part of the content of his physical diary. The outcome was a collaboration of our expectation, intent, and emotional attachment. Could this in fact have been evidence that consciousness operates as a holistic mechanism, not easily boxed into individual frames and limited by singular minds?

A home ground of consciousness

After many more OBEs I found out that, for myself at least, it was unnatural, if at all possible, to project into a physical real time zone or space, but instead into a copy of the physical world, which never quite matches our physical reality (1). The natural environment of our projected consciousness can almost match the actual physical environment to such an extent that we are fooled into accepting it as physical reality. Sometimes it is almost identical or it may have changed in degrees from subtle unnoticeable differences to a complete transformation, with furniture and windows having moved, carpets added, wallpaper changed or even the room transported to a different place. Even people, complete strangers, could be found squatting uninvited in our familiar places. The time of year could alter as well as the weather and curiously; despite all this, in the face of all rational consideration, we still would clearly identify it as our 'own' space.

I noticed that the identification process is determined by a much more subtle component of consciousness than external appearance: a subliminal feeling of a space's aura or atmosphere, an inner identity of the space which would supersede external appearance and creates some kind of identifiable marker. It seems that we take ownership of our physical and psychic space on multiple reality levels; spaces connected right up to a core identity of which we have taken ownership by our own awareness. There is something more primary than physicality in that sense, an essential consciousness that pre-defines physical impressions.

In this non-physical space, other content may enter into or overlap this sublime territory, intermingle with its substance. It could consist of other objects or feelings on similar wavelengths such as objects we may have thought of, strong memories of seasons or holidays, or even strange content we simply cannot recognise – these impressions are placed into the space by unknown affinities. At other times there could even be strange individuals, 'squatters' feeling somehow at home in our place or being attracted by its atmosphere. There are reports of people leaving their bodies only to find strangers waiting for them, even pursuing sexually or intimate contact (2). There are some reports of intruders who the OBE subject was desperate to evict. Some report strange energies or objects in their familiar environment they could not even relate to or recognise as belonging to them.

It is quite impossible, based on these individual accounts, to decide whether all these are projections of the mind, lucid dream content, or manifestations of independent agencies which form part of our collective and greater environment of consciousness. All we can agree on is all such occurrences happen when waking awareness is no longer focused on our consensual physical time-space. Our psychic spaces may be action fields of much greater energy currents,

serving as active mediums for consciousness synchronisation, sometimes attracting sympathetic energies that we cannot even directly relate to.

As psychology in the Freud and Jung era pointed out, these normally subconscious energies may serve as subtle undercurrents that affect our behaviour, or perhaps even actual occurrences in our physical waking life. They may be the mechanical levers and switches, which make our unconscious fears and desires become waking reality. Whatever they are, within the waking state of their normally hidden world they have become tangible objects we can face, see, touch, manipulate and relate to, in the same way as we can interact with our world in waking life.

With regard to object or space identity, I observed that these sublime auras or markers of a space are not restricted to single human habitations but to other spaces, to whole cities, countries and even planets. Every space in consciousness carries a marker of identity which builds a chain right to the very core of its originating source. Localities appear to be linked through a chain of dimensional levels, which externally may have very little in common with their original physical appearance, but these can still be identified by their aura or marker even though they share very little in terms of external features.

The moment consciousness operates independently of the physical body it simply no longer operates in a physical environment, but is irresistibly drawn towards its more subliminal aspect, away from and beyond the coarse atomic manifestation; most likely to a quantum world, which operates on its own laws of attraction and interaction of which we know very little about as yet. The identification with physicality is broken the moment consciousness becomes aware of its own independent nature. Consciousness becomes self-sustaining, not sustained by physicality. This paradigm drastically shifts how we ought to consider OBEs, and whether we can even regard them as physical experiences in the first place.

There are frequent observations where a projector, after experiencing all signs of leaving the body, can no longer see their physical body where they expected it to be as in the bed or sitting in a chair. The bed is empty and OBEs frequently report their doubt towards having had the experience at all; they might instead have gone about waking and getting up out of bed and wandering around as per usual. It is only when they observe the inconsistency between their remembered room and the room they actually experience that they accept their altered state of consciousness, or alternatively via other means of testing reality such as floating or hovering, or by witnessing strange unphysical phenomena, such as lights, strange noise sensations or alien entities being in the room, only to find these inconsistent with their waking reality.

Such accounts offer confirmation that consciousness has left the physical world and found its native environment – its home ground. Like an air bubble released from the deep sea diver's mask, consciousness has found the quickest way to the surface to reunite with its natural element, the air above the surface of the water. Refer to Figure 4 for a graphical representation.

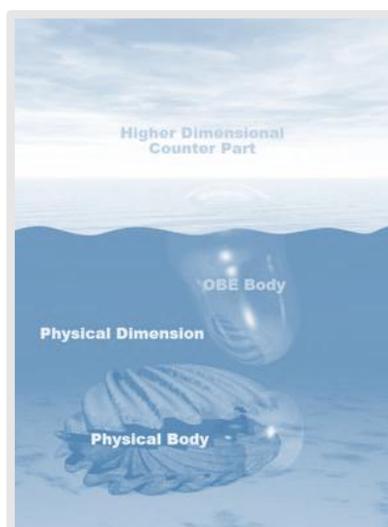


Figure 4. The shell represents the physical body and the seabed the physical world. The air bubble represents the projected subtle energy body and the area above the sea the higher dimensional counter part. As the OBE body is composed of the energy of the higher dimension its natural attraction is towards it and it passes very quickly from one dimension to the next, like an air bubble would find the quickest way to the surface and into the air. My theory is that only in exceptional circumstances is it possible for the air bubble (the finer energy double) to remain suspended in the water (the physical dimension). It will nearly always zoom towards its natural energetic condition, except where attention still employs the sensory organs of the near physical energy body, as during anaesthetics or immediately after a drowning or accident. Most people confuse the next dimensional counter part with the physical because at first sight it appears identical until we begin to notice subtle differences.

And this is precisely the reason that most OBE verification experiments seem to fail. Consciousness transits almost instantly into its natural habitat, a copy of the physical reality, a reflection of how our minds perceive it or wish it to be. But, in every case these manifestations are no longer physical, even though they are perceived as real as their physical counterpart. Thus, how do we go about gathering physically verifiable evidence of the OBE from this model in which we regard consciousness as a non-physical entity? This leads us to the following question.

What is reality?

For the most part, of the hundreds of OBE reports, it can be noted that most people who have OBEs project into non-physical reality or places and discover that these worlds are either similar, different, or completely alien to our physical world. In such experiences one's state of consciousness is experienced in complete wakefulness, lucidity, and clarity, sometimes even reported as a super-waking state, a state of awareness and wakefulness which makes physical awareness appear more like a mere dream.

It appears that when consciousness is released from the tether to its exclusive physical focus it enters its home territory of non-physicality where it may broaden and accentuate its self-awareness into new frontiers. That which consciousness then experiences in its home world are the infinite and myriad things that can be perceived, encountered, processed, imagined, fantasised about, projected into and reinterpreted in waking life, in addition to all the former

unseen subconscious elements which are no longer subconscious, but rather an open book for the experiencer not just to see, but wander through and experience.

We can experience these new uncharted realities on multiple levels, in very dark regions which may serve our deepest fears and negative expectations right up to the luminous source of its own origin, the inspiration, the creativity, the imagination, where dreams and wishes are manifested reality, as real as anything we have experienced during physical waking life. Consciousness can even go as far as to trace its own point of origin, which mystics refer to as a state of Enlightenment. Before us new realities unfold with infinite layers, larger than what our known physical universe can possibly offer.

All of this is now experienced on a level of higher authenticity, as own home ground and tangible reality, no any less real than what has been experienced when awareness was tethered to the physical body. The houses we see are made of real bricks. The people we encounter are real people, permanently or temporarily rereleased from their ad-hoc identification with a physical body. Many people having experienced these finer subliminal levels of reality, such as near-death experiencers (NDErs), as their true home, the place where they belong.

Home ground and physical ground

From a home ground perspective, seeing the diary entry for an MOT projected on my brother's wall is just as much veridical proof for an independent functioning of consciousness from the physical body as would have been seeing the word 'love' pinned to the wall. From a home ground perspective, this validation is articulate, cogent, and valid. From a physical perspective, the evidence is meaningless and, of course, not satisfactory at a scientific standard.

In physical waking reality, our senses function like a torch, illuminating the atomic parts we focus our attention on, whilst all the other intangible parts the light of our torch does not reach are mere memories, assumption, fantasies, and conjecture; but the moment our waking torchlight is directed to these intangible images they spring to life and become solid reality. Perhaps, as Preston Dennett suggested in Chapter 6, physical reality is reified or translated from an 'astral' abstraction of sort – a 'home-ground → physical ground' interaction. We know for certain of reality simply because we are just as awake and self-aware, aware of our identity, our social selves and find that our torchlight shines just as brightly in the non-physical realm as in our physical one.

Our waking attention and focus not only makes this environment tangible and discernible in every way, but we often also acquire new powers of cognition upon entering the higher non-physical states of awareness. We can speak to people not only with our words but with our thoughts. Thoughts too now can turn instantly into tangible reality. We frequently sense more colours and richer frequencies of sounds. We can clairvoyantly look into the histories of other non-physical beings. We can perform tasks which we could never perform before. We can travel through the air and breathe under water. This is the unimaginable potential of the infinite mind which reigns free from the restrictions of a finite body.

We are only limited by the power of our focus and imagination, which are qualities of consciousness in its home ground. In the physical realm, we are of course limited by consciousness-in-a-body. In OBEs, we interact whilst being fully aware of our waking life social identity, certain that another part of us is lying in bed asleep and we are in no conflict with this whatsoever. Above all, we are fully awake, fully aware and recognising this as a fact with the same confidence as we do in physical wakefulness, because instinctively we know that this is where we truly belong, our home ground and playing field. Perhaps at one point, we may even begin to suspect that our awareness, which was so stoically focused on our physical atoms, was little more than a temporary dream in a broader non-physical spectrum – a deeply immersive exterior impression of consciousness.

The 'physicality' or solidity with which OBE waking awareness perceives its natural habitat should perhaps alert us to the possibility that physical perception is simply just one of many reality states consciousness, which our torchlight temporally illuminates. If we have no other means of defining what is real than by what our torch of awareness focuses its light on, then we will have to accept that what consciousness perceives is as real as anything else. Concepts such as evidence, meaning, truth, and knowledge thus take on a much different meaning from this home ground / physical ground comparison. Our discussion thus leads us to reconsider the very concept of a positivist naturalistic physical world as one that is perhaps a mere consensual reality which is intrinsically driven by a projected conscious experience.

Subjective vs consensual awareness

Many explorers seem to have established an agreed consensus that there is a qualitative difference between subjective (or projected) and consensus reality in OBEs. How do we differentiate our subjective individual projection from the consensus content of our non-physical environment? An example of consensus reality can be considered where a group of non-physical individuals have come to an agreed perception of their environment, in the same way as we agree that the Eiffel Tower 'is' the Eiffel Tower in our physical environment, while individual projections are mostly temporary and dependent on the strength of focus of the individual. Just as in a dream, we carry these personal projections with us during our dream state and when we become aware of them we recognise these as fleeting lucid dreams.

In order to dispel lucid dreams or projections and acquire awareness of consensus reality, the subjective narrative and the projection have to be disrupted by an act of deliberate focus. For example, if we are in a lucid dream or inside a projected fantasy, we can escape it by focusing on our hands or on an object on the ground which is not experienced as part of our dream narrative.

The notion of a consensus reality does not necessarily mean that this is just a projection by the power of the many. It can also be a projection of a much greater core consciousness in the same way as our physical sun and earth are a projection of the core event of the Big Bang.

When people report zooming into space, it is unlikely that they are visiting physical space. I have discovered this myself when zooming through our solar system and landing on a planet, which I identified as Venus; I found that it was inhabited by non-physical individuals, and had its own culture and social structures. It is here that many sceptics may seek to depart from our argument, but if we stick to our detached observation, we must consider this too as a possible variant of reality.

Based on these types of observations, we may have to reconsider our assumption that the non-physical reality only exists as a projection of individual human minds. Based on personal OBEs, I found that underpinning our physical universe are multiple dimensional layers each feeding the layer below. The same can be observed when looking at the physical world from a heightened state of consciousness, which has also been observed by people under the influence of mind-expanding drugs, during which time they observed an energy level of light flowing through the material world around them (3).

Non-physical reality carries multiple layers of conscious projection from an infinite number of sources and minds, human and non-human. This level of awareness is obtained by breaking through projected consensus realities in the way we break through the projection of lucid dreams. Such a disruption of focus is often accomplished by an additional level of self-awareness which becomes cognisant of the super structure of reality, or a super-consciousness, which in esoteric traditions has been referred to as a cosmic consciousness or cosmic mind (4). For the achievement of this 'breaking through' there are many techniques of meditation to acquire the new levels of conscious focus. In the next section, I will discuss how this expanded platform of observation will be one of two ways which will allow us access to accurately observe our physical environment from a non-physical viewpoint. This may shed light on the reason that evidence in non-physical realms is not easily attainable or translatable to the physical ground of experience.

Authentic and accurate means of non-physical projections into physical space

If non-physical awareness is drawn or attracted to its non-physical home ground, which represents the physical strata as a reflection (at best), how do we explain accurate descriptions of physical environments via out of body observation?

During their OBEs, many, myself included, have actually observed their physical body lying in bed or sitting in meditation, with the physical environment observed exactly as in physical waking reality. People suffering trauma, following an accident, under anaesthetics in the operating room, and being resuscitated after a drowning, frequently report seeing their body whilst hovering a few feet above it or standing beside it. By all accounts, their body and its physical environment are accurately observed from outside their body and it is this kind of reporting which compels investigators to set up controlled experiments for traditional scientific verification.

From the projector's viewpoint in these OBEs, the physical body is perceived as a separate thing, an object of little importance, like an item of clothing or part of the furniture no longer

essential for life or survival. It has no longer any power of perception and to the doctor and anaesthetists attending to these patients, these bodies are bereft of all consciousness and awareness, but in some cases this awareness has been transferred to a non-physical bystander which carries the true identity of the unconscious body. All aspects of the former person are firmly transferred to this new point of awareness, together with the identity, memories, and self-awareness.

We still need to consider how it is possible for non-physical awareness to focus on physical atoms without the use of physical senses. I myself had firsthand experiences in which I accurately observed my body in OBE, including its actual physical environment made out of physical atoms. In the early days I would experience physical vibration at the onset of separation, which is also one of the most frequently reported symptoms of OBE. There were noises, such as clicking sounds and on occasion I would literally experience discomfort in my jaw, heard loud bangs or a torrent of energy pulling on me.

After separation, I would roll out of my body and out of bed, hover above the ground to the far end of the room from where I could see my lifeless body lying in bed, comatose or as if in deep sleep. There seemed to be nothing that linked me to my body, yet at the same time I perceived the bedroom with my non-physical eyes exactly as I did via my physical senses except from a different perspective.

I experienced these kind of separations, where my attention was fastened on the physical level mostly in the early months, when I was still becoming accustomed to the phenomena of out of body states. It could simply be habit and attachment to my strong physical identification that my awareness was still so strongly fastened to the physical level. I have observed that this attachment or identification is eventually weakened by the more powerful attraction of the home ground for consciousness.

Though there is another possibility found in esoteric literature where it is postulated that penetrating the physical body is a much finer etheric body, a layer between the gross physical and finer non-physical body, which retains the faculties of physical perceptions. This too could account for the fact that we are able to observe purely physical phenomena whilst at the same time still operating in a non-physical energy body, able to act independently from the physical to a certain degree.

Eastern medicine and some of the martial arts frequently refer to this energy layer in order to affect healing and strength, such as 'Qi Gong' and acupuncture. This may be the energy body entered into at the early stages of OBEs and near-death experiences (NDEs). Such an explanation would account for the reason OBEs rarely see their physical environment; their attention is accustomed to the finer more natural seat of awareness. It would certainly require concentration and effort to return into the much coarser layers of energy we are attracted away from, if at all possible.

Below is one of my early reports, which, in the same experiment resulted in both; first awareness of physical reality, and then non-physical shortly after. It looks as if the focus on the

physical level or etheric energy body had by then given way to the more natural attraction of the much finer non-physical level.

With my body still rigid if not paralysed, I closed my eyes and allowed myself to drift into a kind of dream state without losing control of my consciousness. I knew that I could leave my body with an effort of will, and the way I accomplished this, which came instinctively, was by rolling myself out of my body and out of bed. Floating a foot above the floor, I moved to the opposite corner of the room and from there saw my body lying peacefully on its side in bed, and completely unaware of me looking at it. (As well as my body I could observe every detail of my bedroom, the old curtains, the cracks on the floor, the paint of the wall cabinet and the poster on the wall).

Then I glided back towards the bed in order to re-enter my body from the back, a bit like slipping into an item of clothing; but before I did so I stopped and observed with fascination the texture of the hair at the back of my head - a truly novel experience, I thought. I slipped back into my body via my head, but had some difficulty aligning myself. Finally I succeeded.

(Shortly later) As before, I rolled out of my body, but this time I stood up with the intention that before doing anything else I should attain full waking consciousness and a clear mind in the alternate state. This was not so easy, as my mind oscillated between two states of awareness: one the dream-state which tempted me to let go and drift into a common dream-world, the other the waking state with the body asleep, which was determined to resist the lure of dreams. Finally I triumphed over sleep and was fully awake in my sleeping body, with my non-physical eyes wide open and my vision cleared. I observed with curiosity that some of the sitting room carpet had found its way into the bed room, creating a strange new setting.

This time I decided to visit our neighbours via the staircase through the hall. As I walked up the stairs my consciousness was of such clarity that I feared I might actually have taken my body with me and was physically marching up the stairs. In order to dispel my doubts I decided to test my state by sticking my hand through the wooden stairs. To my horror I found resistance, where I expected to pass through; to my relief, as I looked up the stairs, I saw strange furniture on the landing and a new red carpet, which I knew did not exist on the physical level. Yet I was still so confused, so I decided to return to my body.

The second time I had actually visited the non-physical copy of the physical location, most likely because I was more attuned to my new body. Later I discovered there were two powerful attractions. The first attraction was towards my vacated body, which instantly terminated the experience, the other one away from it, which felt like a release into a more natural and more pleasurable non-physical condition.

The first attraction inevitably led to a premature ending of the experience, but there was also a chance of getting stuck in the etheric body, which meant although separation from the body it still maintained, the ability to use physical senses or at least the finer energetic counterpart of the physical senses to observe physical matter remained in-tact. I had noticed that after repeated projection, this ability was lost, as though the etheric membrane was cleared and consciousness was naturally pulled clear from physical reality towards the direction of its natural habitat. The etheric membrane seems to be little more than a barrier which has to be broken. Once the breakage had occurred, the etheric energy membrane can no longer be used as a vehicle for projection. It could be compared to the amniotic sack which breaks when the baby is borne.

This transference into a less tangible secondary OBE-body would also explain that after the first year, nearly all my projections took place in non-physical reality. This would further account for the reason it is so difficult for seasoned out of body travellers, even adepts such as Robert Monroe, to succeed at validation tasks in experiments. It seems more difficult for

experienced people to deliver proof than for people who have never deliberately projected in their entire life until an accident or a NDE, which provided their first OBE.

The high energy way of out-of-body projection

Much later on, after years of regular meditation, I had other OBEs, which were quite different to the etheric and usual non-physical experience. These were triggered through meditation and had the hallmark of exceptional clarity, detachment from my normal personal identification, hyper awareness, 360° vision and an ability of enhanced knowingness and perception. Curiously, I could easily choose where to focus my attention. These experiences would often arise from meditation and lead into completely new and enhanced states of consciousness, hyper awareness, or even 'Samadhi' (5).

This newfound experience of consciousness allowed me the freedom to choose my focus of attention as never before. In one of those states I simply stepped out of my body without feeling any pull in either direction, towards or away from my body. I was simply standing in front of myself observing with utmost clarity my body and my room in every physical detail. There were no unexpected changes in the room. I looked out of the window and observed my garden in exactly the way it was, except now it had an additional dimension of beauty, a serene glow, as if everything was lit from the inside. Focusing my attention back on my body I moved closely all around, observing my thinning hair and studying myself for the first time without the use of a mirror.

Every time I experienced this state it was clearly a state of detachment from my normal social and ego identifications, with a greatly enhanced clarity of consciousness. It also allowed me to observe reality as it was and at any level. Sometimes my attention was attracted to non-physical teaching entities, other times I would simply follow a pull from a much higher and extremely compelling source of pure energy and love which would make it quite impossible to resist. This was accompanied by an intense feeling of being blessed, and frequently resulted in ecstasy. It would draw me into completely new and much higher dimensions of reality, with their own unique features and even landscapes which had no equivalent in any other reality I had experienced before, into a vastly expanded state of awareness, liberated from all human attachments.

So, it would appear that there are only two state of awareness which will allow us to accurately observe physical reality as-is. One is via the energy body which is closely linked to the physical body, and the other is via a much higher energy state which is marked by non-attachment to personal identification and much more powerful and cognisant. I also believe that this is a state reported by some NDErs, who overshoot the normal most common non-physical state, perhaps as a result of their trauma, the release of certain chemical within their brains, which compels them or pulls them towards a much stronger force. Inevitably, this leads to the ecstatic celestial experiences we so often read about.

However, the latter high energy state will give us very little veridical proof of the reality of the OBE unless we are able to fully control it and fasten our attention to the physical world.

This can only happen as a result of meditation, and even then I find consciousness has moved so far away from the concerns of our physical identification that there is literally no motivation or interest in proving the relative triviality of OBE, for the simple reason that more compelling realisations are laid out in front of us, a vast pool of cognition and understanding which makes everything else we have experienced before appear utterly insignificant. To forgo this experience in favour of delivering proof of such trivial nature would be a tremendous sacrifice and almost inconceivable to such an enhanced experience of super reality.

So now it may become clear that actual projections into the physical real time zone are very rare and almost impossible to achieve. Perhaps we have to start with the novice mind, the beginner OBEr, relying on perception delivered by an unsteady energy body between, which has temporarily been forced into separation. Or, we commence at a much higher energy body level, which is so far removed from the trivial concerns of mundane life. The first option is limited to those who have had very few OBEs and maintain an 'in-between' connection via the ethereal body, while the second is also a difficult proposition, as the question of survival seems trivial from the perspective of consciousness in its native environment.

A third option of obtaining veridical evidence is also the most unreliable one: the immersion into non-physical reality where we simply take into account the fallibilities and unreliability of the normal non-physical state. We acknowledge that the things we observe may be similar, very similar or not very similar at all to the physical original. If we pursue this option to find verifiable proof, we will have to start considering new kinds of tests which are in line with the test described at the start of this chapter. This would mean introducing a powerful emotional component into the experiment which would address and appeal to the emotional aspect of non-physical awareness, such a component grazes on psychic content in favour of our physical agreed reality. This brings us to the open-ended question: what sort of evidence of the OBE would we be willing to accept?

Conclusion

Maybe the time has now come to shake off the illusion that we live predominantly in a physical world, where only physical tests, based on our traditional physical sciences, can give us conclusive proof of the reality of OBEs. After all, what we are dealing with from the moment we wake up and open our eyes in the morning are images entering our inner world where they are manipulated and assembled by the brain into something that forms a cohesive reality. No-one has ever put their finger on where these images are held. Our sciences fail to convince us that somehow immaterial images and memories suddenly and by magic become part of our material organism.

As we walk to work, pick up a coffee from the coffee shop and settle down at our desks for a day's work, talking to our colleagues...we are creating and recreating our world on the hoof every moment of our day. When travelling out of the body we enter a new space and discover that it is as real and as solid as the one we have just left behind, but now we discover that our world has become infinitely more complex, with all the elements assuming tangible

reality which before only lived as possibilities in our minds. In conclusion, in this chapter a number of challenges to obtaining verifiable evidence in OBEs were canvassed. To sum up, we must commence considering the OBE as a non-physical experience, by which we can gain access to unique and meaningful emotional and spiritual insights. Such insights may be immensely satisfying on a consciousness-level in its native environment, but not necessarily meaningful or derivative on the physical, tangible ground.

Notes

1. The 'Real Time Zone' (RTZ) is a term which was popularised by Australian mystic Robert Bruce. The RTZ refers to an OBE environment that very closely resembles physical reality, as contrast with more fluid and unstable OBE environments.
2. I noted these accounts and others like them from several anecdotes I recently came across via social media responses on the topic.
3. Refer to my book, 'Multidimensional Man' (Lulu, 2008).
4. Cosmic consciousness states have been well documented in literature, see for instance Ken Wilber's work.
5. 'Samadhi' in Hindu traditions refers to the ultimate or final stage of meditation, in which a person attains Self-realisation or Enlightenment.

SECTION III: PERSONAL BENEFITS OF OUT-OF-BODY EXPLORATION

OBEs are highly arousing; they can be either deeply disturbing or profoundly moving. Understanding the nature of this widespread and potent experience would no doubt help us better understand the experience of being alive and human. – Lynn Levitan and Stephen LaBerge at the Lucidity Institute

CHAPTER 9: SURFING THE RAINBOW: FEARLESS AND CREATIVE OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES, CLARE R JOHNSON

I hover up, vibrating, and fly again. I'm in whitish space, endless neutral light. I try flying as fast as I can and it's so quick it's impossible to describe – I could go around the circumference of the world in a second at this speed.

There's enough room in this white space for absolutely anything and I'm alight with exhilaration. It strikes me that in experiences like this there can be no doubt that we are more than just a physical body. We are physics itself; gravitational pull and light particles and the energy-force that pulls everything together ... There's something so harmonious and natural about flying so fast, as if I become the energy of the air itself. There's no resistance and with wonder I think to myself: "This is soul-flying". – My personal account

Imagine consciousness as a rainbow-coloured expanse of silk. Why take up scissors and slice the different colours into separate ribbons? "This deep red is a dream. Snip, snip. This orange is a waking vision. Snip. This sunny yellow is an out-of-body experience (OBE)". The stuff of consciousness is woven together from the same fabric: if we get too fixated on separating it, we risk no longer seeing the big picture.

States of consciousness bleed into each other like coloured dye: a non-lucid dream becomes a lucid dream, which can transmute into an OBE, which in turn might transition into a state of sleep paralysis and then waking consciousness. Within a single lucid dream (in which the dreamer is aware that he or she is dreaming), lucidity fluctuates from effortless clarity to confusion as we get sucked into the dream scene and begin to forget we're dreaming. Similarly, in the waking state we drift from daydreaming to sharp mental alertness and back again. We drive to our child's school rather than to the doctor because we go into the curious state of alert non-attention known as 'automatic pilot mode'; we have a beer in the evening and get a buzz off that; later in bed we lapse into sleepiness and might spontaneously find ourselves having an OBE.

Consciousness occurs on a continuum, and when we turn our attention to conscious experience, we quickly notice the experiential overlap between different states and are able to recognise moments of transition as they arise. Of course, definitions of different states are extremely useful for clarity, and I'm as keen as the next researcher to tease the strands apart and name them so that we can discover more about consciousness. However, it's important to remember that at the end of the day we're all talking about the same intrinsically connected phenomenon: the rainbow of conscious experience.

With that in mind, for the purposes of this chapter I propose the following definition of an OBE:

The OBE is a state in which self-perception (perceived sensory input, self-location and self-identification) seems external to and independent from the physical body; a state which may be entered spontaneously, involuntarily and abruptly from diverse waking and sleeping states of consciousness. In terms of onset, the OBE differs from lucid dreams in that an OBE

might arise from the waking state, trauma, meditation, fainting, or in the midst of great physical danger. However, the OBE can also arise from sleep states such as hypnagogia, sleep paralysis, non-lucid dreaming, and lucid dreaming.

The numerous entries into the OBE state seem non-exclusive in terms of reported onset phenomena: a lucid dreamer may either experience earthquake-like shaking at the onset of a lucid dream-induced OBE, or a gentle transition. A meditator may suddenly find herself floating above her body, or she may experience diverse kinaesthetic and auditory sensations such as vibrations and buzzing before the experience of being 'out of body' seems complete.

Apart from trauma and physical danger-induced OBEs, I have personally experienced each of the above OBE entry points many times, and can testify that the defining features of OBE entries seem closely linked to the attitude and adeptness of the experiencer. In particular, a sleep paralysis-induced OBE entry is likely to involve an unpleasant struggle for someone resisting it, while an experienced practitioner can relax and enjoy the transition. The following are examples of just a few of the ways in which a typical OBE may start.

A sleepy trance while lying in bed (Nicholls, 2012, p. 14):

A jolt of energy shot through my body, something akin to a large electrical shock. It wasn't painful, but it was very close to that level of intensity. As I regained awareness of my surroundings, I realised I was hovering or floating around a meter above my physical body.

Dream-induced: "Suddenly, with no observable transition, I'm floating cross-legged about a foot above the ground, next to my bed" (my personal account).

Lucid dream-induced (Buhlman, 1996, p. 183):

I said aloud, "I must be dreaming." Immediately I felt a strange tingling sensation in my body and realised that I'd entered the vibrational state while dreaming... I focused my complete attention on the idea of floating up and out of my physical body. Within seconds I could feel myself lift from my physical body and move toward the living room.

Faint-induced (my personal account):

As the nurse injects me I see black spots in my vision and there's a roaring in my ears.

I know I'm about to faint. For a moment it feels horrible, then I'm drawn up into the corner of the room where I float calmly and observe the scene. From what seems a great distance I hear the nurse shouting my name....

Wake-induced: "As I walk across the university library, a buzzing grows in my head and I feel myself involuntarily beginning to rise up out of my body" (my personal account).

This chapter examines the way that the OBE can dissolve fear and release deep creativity. The standard definition of creativity is 'novelty': the act of bringing new ideas, art and discoveries into existence through the expression of original thoughts, images and insights (Shavinina, 2003). But creativity is more than this. In my essay, 'Magic, Meditation and the Void: Creative Dimensions of Lucid Dreaming' (2014, p. 46), I note:

Creativity is also imaginative freedom, a stretching of the psychological, philosophical, and cultural boundaries to which our minds usually adhere. People talk of “thinking outside the box” and “leaps of creative genius”. Creativity in its purest sense means going beyond what has come before, shrugging off preconceptions and leaping bravely into the unknown.

To this definition I add the element of ‘reality creation’: lucid states of consciousness such as the OBE often trigger an understanding that we can shape our waking reality creatively just as in a guided OBE or in lucid dreams (Johnson, 2006). I further add the element of healing as a fundamentally creative act. This completes my definition of creativity as novelty, imagination, manifestation, and healing. Fearless OBEs can enrich these four branches of creativity.

How can a sensation of being out of body lead to or encourage creativity? Before this question can be properly addressed, it’s important to consider what hinders creativity. Fear is a major hindrance, as can be seen when the roots of artistic blocks are dug up, when a trapeze artist seizes up and falls, or when businesses fail due to fear-provoked decision making. When we have a tool for dissolving fear, creativity is not far away. If the OBE is embraced and befriended, it can be a powerful tool for dissolving fear; yet, paradoxically fear can stop people wanting to have an OBE at all. Let’s look at three different types of fear and how having an OBE can help to dissolve them: 1) fear of the OBE itself, 2) fear of a waking life situation, and 3) fear of death and dying.

Fear of the OBE

An OBE can be terrifying for someone who has never heard of the experience and is unprepared. Many people believe they are dying, or that they will get lost and never be able to return to their bodies. These people spend their time out of body feeling distressed and alarmed, fighting to regain a physical connection with their body. OBEs can involve powerful physical sensations such as being swept up by a giant wind, being shaken by earthquake-like vibrations and hearing a roar so loud it’s as if an aeroplane is taking off right by your head. In the midst of such phenomena, the uninformed OBEr naturally feels overwhelmed and helpless. When in addition to these phenomena the OBEr also experiences unsettling visions, such as unidentified shapes or presences, he is prone to panic. This is due to a lack of knowledge about what is happening, coupled with a lack of understanding about thought-responsive environments.

Thought-responsive environments

Thought-responsive environments react to our thoughts, emotions, and intentions. Sometimes this reaction seems instantaneous, as is the case in dreams. Other times it seems much, much slower, as in waking reality. It seems likely that all environments are thought-responsive on some level. As William Buhlman (1996), advanced OBE explorer, remarks: “all environments are a form of energy, and all energy is thought-responsive to some degree” (p. 95). Lucid dreaming is usually highly thought-responsive and it can feel as though we are co-creating a complex multi-sensory movie simply by engaging emotionally and intentionally with

the dream environment. There are different types of OBE and these reflect different intensities of thought-responsiveness. For simplicity I define here only three:

- Form-based OBEs: in some OBEs, we find ourselves in a replica of our bedroom or flying through a kind of energetic replica of the waking world. Reports from OBEs suggest that these seem the least thought-responsive type of OBE.
- Psychological projection OBEs: in these OBEs, psychological elements and projections are strongly present, and thought-responsiveness seems higher than in form-based OBEs.
- Bodiless lucid experiences: This is my term for OBEs where we go beyond form and experience ourselves in white space or another formless environment – these seem highly thought-responsive.

Buhlman (1996, p. 95) remarks on formless OBE spaces:

These areas are often observed as misty voids, empty space, or featureless, open areas consisting of white, silver or golden clouds of energy. Natural energy environments are extremely sensitive to thought. Any focused thought will instantly mold the immediate energy environment.

I will explore formless OBEs further on in this chapter. Most beginner OBEs will tend to experience the form-based OBE or the psychological projection OBE. The form-based OBE environment, although less malleable and thought-responsive than most lucid dreams, is still far more responsive than waking physical reality.

In terms of having enjoyable, creative OBEs, this is great news, as it means we can generally guide and shape our experience. If we encounter something that frightens us, we can often change the encounter by changing our attitude from one of fear to curiosity. It's helpful to remember that although the walls of the house may look very solid in an OBE, they are not. Some novice OBEs report feeling scared when the walls of their home dissolve in the OBE state, yet this is simply a sign that the OBE is moving beyond a form-based environment. The house will still be there when the OBE ends!

When we feel fear during an OBE, whether it is form-based or involves psychological projections, there are basic steps we can take to calm down and focus, such as taking a deep breath and relaxing; reminding ourselves we will return safely from this experience; summoning feelings of love and acceptance; and keeping our thoughts positive. If we learn about and keep in mind these simple techniques, we can begin to work with the OBE rather than fighting it.

How thought-responsive environments function

A typical train of panicky thought and its impact upon the thought-responsive OBE environment runs as follows:

Unfamiliar vibrations are experienced and the person projects out-of-body for the first time. He feels terrified and out of control. 'Oh no', he thinks, 'there's a shape in the corner, what if it's something scary?' [In response, the shape becomes noticeably scarier]. 'What if it comes up to me?' [Shape responsively moves towards OBEr], 'Whoa, it's going to attack me!' [Shape

approaches faster and at the moment it's about to touch the OBEr, he wakes up bathed in sweat, convinced he has escaped something evil in the nick of time].

Let's rewind that script.

In this new version the OBEr has a spontaneous OBE but because he has read this chapter, he now knows he should relax and breathe. It works a bit, but he's still uneasy because this is the first time and it's all rather strange.

He notices a shape in the corner and feels a little nervous but remembers that this is a thought-responsive environment and consciously guides his thoughts towards a positive outcome: 'OK, a shape in the corner; that's fine, there's plenty of room for shapes. I'm safe here and later I will return safely to my body' [He breathes, relaxes]. 'Uh-oh, the shape's moving towards me... think positive...' [He does his best to muster a feeling of love and acceptance]. 'Maybe it wants to help me?' [The shape grows bright and he sees it is a beautiful ball of light. He's so astonished that the experience ends].

This is a simplification of the thought-responsive process, but it illustrates how the attitude and expectations of the OBEr can impact upon the OBE environment. The greater the fear and resistance the OBEr feels towards phenomena he encounters, the more likely it is that the experience will only become more terrifying.

When I turned twenty, I had a great number of partial OBEs arising from sleep paralysis, where I would feel stuck half in, half out of my body. Struggling and fighting never helped a bit! It didn't matter to me whether I got back in my body or left it completely; I just wanted the stuck feeling to go away. Over time, by experimenting with breathing techniques while 'stuck' and mixing deep calmness with focused intent and visualisation, I taught myself how to transition effortlessly from this irritating state into full, enjoyable OBEs where I could soar into the stratosphere or explore locally. This self-learned breath-work and mind training was my initiation into yoga, although I didn't know it at the time and had never done yoga before.

How to release fear: practical tips

Panicking is possibly the worst thing a person can do during an OBE. I cannot overstress the importance of relaxing the belly and breathing calmly when the freight-train version of an OBE entry runs you over. It's remarkable how simply accepting the experience can transform it fairly quickly into a calm, beautiful event.

Practising yoga and meditation is an excellent way of learning to connect with the peaceful centre we all have somewhere within us. The way to this centre is through the breath. Since we all breathe all the time, whether awake or asleep, the breath is an excellent tool for the nervous OBEr. Once the 'Breathe – Grow calm – Relax' structure has been practiced (and it takes only minutes to learn), it becomes second nature to turn to the breath in any state of consciousness as a way to calm emotions and release fear (see Sevilla, 2004).

Another useful practice is that of visualisation. If we visualise ourselves moving easily away from our physical body towards a beautiful landscape or safe place, the thought-

responsive environment generally tends to react by materialising that place. Feeling and projecting love is also a very good way of dissolving fear and fearful visions or sensations: when we explore lucid states with love in our hearts, the lucid environment responds warmly. Summoning a feeling of love can be done by imagining warmth or colour emanating from the chest, breathing freely, and smiling.

Adopting an attitude of curiosity when observing strange visions or scenes which arise during an OBE is an effective way of gaining perspective and clarity. If you're in search of creative inspiration for a painting or a story, these visions are imbued with creative potential, so try to notice everything about them: watch them like a film. Remind yourself that after all this, you will find yourself safely in your bed. Don't forget your ability to fly in the OBE state; kick out a little or wriggle upwards like a mermaid.

If you are truly desperate to escape the OBE experience and return to your body, try wiggling your toes, which brings your attention to your physical body, or hold your breath for as long as you can – this second technique can shock the body into returning to regular waking consciousness.

From fear to creativity

Having a creative attitude towards the OBE instead of a fearful one makes a big difference. Instead of wishing it would never happen to you again, it's far less psychologically stressful to think of something fun to try out in case it does happen again. Imagine how your ideal OBE might unfold – would you fly over mountains, experiment with putting your hand through a wall, or enjoy the sensory explosion of doing floating somersaults? Once we open ourselves to the creative possibilities of OBEs, we soon find ourselves hankering after more experiences and working on inducing them.

Personally I've found that curiosity burns stronger than fear. If we get curious about OBEs, any fear rapidly diminishes. Reading widely on the subject and talking to experienced practitioners is also helpful, as the experience will seem less foreign.

The golden rule of fearlessness in OBEs can be visualised as a see-saw, because it's all about balance and reciprocity: if you tip too far down into fear, the fear-factor of the experience rises in response. If you are relaxed and calm out of body, and feel balanced within yourself, your OBE is far more likely to be a relaxed and calm one.

Anja, a German novelist, has had a vast number of OBEs. Over time she has taught herself to be completely free from fear in this state. In a personal interview with me, she remarked:

Having no fear is an inner attitude. People fear they won't be able to return to their bodies but that's nonsense, you always come back. Nothing can happen to you, you won't get lost! You don't need to be scared and it's important to release all fear. Instead of feeling afraid, why not explore this state: try things out, travel to the US or wherever you want to go.

As a final note, this subchapter comes with a caveat: those who have suffered sexual or mental abuse or are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety-related disorders are unlikely to find it as easy to 'relax and go with the OBE flow' as the majority of people will.

In these cases, it would be wise to consult a psychotherapist or hypnotherapist to help with the underlying issues first.

Fear of a waking life situation

Job interviews, air travel, and moving house are just a small sample of common life experiences which can be very stressful. When we become aware in a thought-responsive environment, we have the opportunity of engaging with and releasing deep-rooted fears. In OBEs with psychological elements and projections, we can ask for help purposefully, by posing a question directed to the environment when we are in a stable state of awareness:

“How can I overcome my fear of flying in aeroplanes?”, “What do I need to learn to land this job?”. Alternatively, we can indirectly trigger a response from the environment simply by thinking certain thoughts and feeling certain emotions.

Caz Coronel reports how an OBE helped her to overcome her fear of public speaking. When she was asked to speak at the 2014 ‘Gateways of the Mind’ conference in London, Caz initially felt “consumed with fear” (see Coronel, 2014). She decided to incubate a dream to help her choose a subject she felt so passionate about that she would have the courage to get up on stage. Shortly after falling asleep she had an OBE where she was whisked away to a forest and deposited before a cliff-face covered in ancient carvings of owls. These made her recall her sister’s remark that Caz gave out advice ‘like a wise old owl’ and should really try taking her own advice more often. Caz thought back to some recent advice she’d given to someone: “face your fear”. Apparently in direct response to Caz’s train of thought, a dark, frightening presence materialised behind her. In a private interview with me, Caz reports:

I very rarely feel fear in an OBE after so many years’ experience but this presence was not nice and the whole experience was hyper realistic... The presence descended upon me and pinched my non-physical skin on my shoulders to the point that it really hurt. My mum used to always pinch me when she was mad at me (which was a lot of the time!). Suffice to say I am not a fan of being pinched. Suddenly I felt, in the pit of my stomach, my fear turning to rage. ‘How dare this thing make me feel afraid!’ I thought. I knew that the one thing I could control was my attitude towards it. ‘Damn it,’ I announced. ‘You can do what you want to me but I will *not* be bullied by you!’

I puffed out my energy chest as much as I could, defiant in my stance. It then lifted me up in the sky and whisked me away from the forest in a furious rush, returning to the version of my bedroom and delicately plopping me back in my body. I awoke instantly realising that I had literally been in the grip of fear but that I had not let it get the better of me! The answer came to me immediately that I would do my speech on fear.

This may seem a paradoxical example as it shows how fear of a waking life experience was dissolved through overcoming a fearful OBE experience. Yet this is often how the unconscious mind works in relation to thought-responsive environments. It can seem as if we are being tested, or presented with a challenge we must rise to. In the above example, Caz faced her fear and gained not only an element of psychological integration (liberation from fear of the pinching mother), but also a creative answer to her dilemma.

This example also illustrates how OBEs can lead to reality creation: an attitude practiced in the OBE state can be implemented with greater ease in waking life. In this OBE, Caz created

a powerful psychological model for herself by standing up to something frightening. In waking life, she mirrored this experience by drawing on its lesson. Despite her phobia of public speaking, Caz didn't let her fear get the better of her. She was able to control her attitude towards the feared situation and manifest the bravery she found in her OBE. She stood up in front of a large audience and successfully delivered her talk on overcoming fear: 'Tales from the frontier: using OBEs to overcome fear in the waking state'.

Fear of death and dying

Recent studies such as the AWARE study led by Sam Parnia (2014), along with the work of researchers such as P. Fenwick and E. Fenwick (2012) and Penny Sartori (2014), have put the spotlight on the possibility that consciousness continues after death. Their research has shown that people who have near-death experiences (NDEs) often report subsequent acceptance of and fearlessness of death.

In NDEs, as in OBEs, self-perception seems external to and independent from the body. The sense that the physical body is not required and that one can be conscious beyond the body can invoke feelings of peace and the conviction that death is merely a transition, rather than the end of conscious experience. Since OBEs can occur spontaneously at moments where we feel ourselves to be in extreme physical danger, they can release us completely from the terror of impending doom, and simultaneously resolve a generalised fear of death and dying.

British lucid dreamer Natalie O'Neill has only had three OBEs in her life, and all three occurred from the waking state, seemingly as dissociative reactions provoked by traumatic experiences. In each of these situations a spontaneous OBE enabled her to remain calm and feel safe while harrowing or dangerous events unfolded.

In one incident in Greece, she was involved in a motorbike crash where she was riding pillion. As the motorbike skidded and crashed, Natalie found herself floating above and behind the bike, watching as everything happened in slow motion. In a personal interview with me, she reports the incredible feeling of peace that came over her; there was no sense of concern, no pain:

I remember the bike going from side to side in slow motion and then I was outside of myself. I couldn't have been any calmer. Totally at peace, content, just watching it like you'd watch a movie. I remember thinking: *This is probably what happens to everyone when they die.* It made me feel much better about everything; it made me think that whatever happens when we die, it's going to be fantastic! I totally believe something continues after death. It's just one little journey, this one on Earth. I know 100% that your energy continues after your physical body dies.

Living through a traumatic event which triggers a spontaneous OBE is far from the only way of overcoming the fear of death. All OBEs and lucid experiences such as floating in the void, or becoming lucid in a dream, teach us that we can be conscious without a physical body. We don't even need a dream body in our lucid dreams – experienced lucid dreamers often report becoming "a dot of consciousness" (Johnson, 2014, p. 63) or pure awareness, with no sense of limbs or movements (such as walking or sitting, which imply the presence of a body).

A growing ease accompanies the OBE as we explore and learn. This ease, coupled with the refreshing awareness that the body is unnecessary in such states, tends to lead to a more relaxed attitude to the inevitable separation of consciousness from the physical body at the moment of death. After spending time in OBE states, there is often a stronger sense that consciousness could well continue after death, and this is understandably a more comforting prospect than believing that we simply cease to exist at the moment of death (Sartori, 2014).

OBEs can free people from fear, whether the fear is specific or generic, life-centred or death-centred. Once we are free from fear, we are open to creativity: the mind is released from its shackles and can begin to dance. What kind of creativity can we access in the OBE state and how can we manifest this in our waking lives?

The four branches of creativity

Once fear is out of the picture, the OBE becomes something rather beautiful. Deep space experiences such as floating out of body in what I have termed a state of 'lucid suspension', or speeding effortlessly to the stars, take us to the source of creativity (see Johnson, 2014). The body is forgotten and the mind experiences total freedom. Artists and writers can inspire their creative work by cultivating such experiences, but even 'non-artists' can benefit in terms of creative thinking, healing potential, and a broader perspective on life and death.

Novelty and imagination

Almost 40 years ago, in 1976, artist Jurgen Ziewe had the following lucid-dream induced OBE which he describes in his book, 'Multidimensional Man' (2008). A 'tremendous force' carried him away. At first he resisted it, but at the moment he decided to relax and go with it, he was deposited in an environment so alien that the experience has stayed with him all his life, and informs his virtual reality creations, animations, and artwork.

I saw what resembled a body of water, but it wasn't water, it was a crystalline liquid mass, shimmering and shining... plant-like entities grew around the pond and seemed to be on fire. Flames were coming out of their roots, but it was not fire. It was iridescent light rising from the ground and up through the stems.

The thing that was the most striking of all was the indescribable beauty, the harmony that the objects created among themselves and with their environment, and the sounds that rained down on the scene, together with the cascading lights emanating from the crystalline pond... The borders between what was sight and sound became blurred and what a moment ago was a liquid object moving in harmony with its surrounding turned out to be a sound with a shape, and so I was never quite certain whether it was a sound I saw or a colour with a shape I heard...

Through the indigo depth of the liquid I saw large silver bubbles rising to the surface, up to two feet in diameter... The bubbles burst with a musical 'pop' when they reached the surface, releasing sounds dressed in misty puffs of colour, which rained back down onto the liquid surface... I noticed a soft, almost wet feeling on my feet. I looked down and realised I was standing on grass, which formed a soft furry skin over the landscape. Even this, when I moved through it, emitted a shimmer of musical notes.

Such an abundantly creative OBE barely requires commentary to point out the elements of novelty and imagination. The synaesthesia, or mingled senses; the surreal and alien quality of the landscape, are grist to an artist's mill. Ziewe has drawn on this OBE time and again over

the years in an effort to recreate it, which can be seen in the surrealistic depictions of his virtual reality films. Anyone who has this kind of super-creative OBE can draw on the experience for inspiration, whether they are artists in the physical realm or not: such an OBE can imprint the memory with great beauty, and beauty is itself a creative force. My own lucid dreams and creative OBEs informed the writing of my two novels, 'Breathing in Colour' and 'Dreamrunner', giving me insights into synaesthesia, bodiless environments and sleep disorders (see Jay, 2009, 2010).

Creative OBEs can be purposefully induced when the OBEr directs her intent towards having one. Calling out, "Show me the most beautiful landscape!", or "take me to the heart of creativity!" may trigger a sudden sense of being borne aloft and blown through space until one comes to rest in a new scene, or it could be an altogether gentler experience, with the new environment forming around the OBEr like mist.

My doctoral research shows how this project-specific creative inspiration functions within lucid dreams (Johnson, 2006). The research I conducted highlights the experiential and creative overlap between some OBEs and lucid dreams; although as I noted earlier, form-based OBEs seem less malleable than lucid dreams. A specific request and subsequent guiding actions can work together with the thought-responsive environment and the inherently creative nature of the OBE to trigger new ideas, methods, and perspectives.

Manifestation and healing

We have seen how an attitude practiced in the OBE state, or a fear overcome, can carry over into waking life and help us in the area of reality creation or manifestation. Just as we can learn from waking life lessons, so we can learn from experiences we have across the entire spectrum of consciousness. Daydreams allow us to re-run situations or fantasise about possible outcomes. Dreams and nightmares can help us with waking life dilemmas by flagging problems or suggesting solutions (Barrett, 2001). Similarly, we can benefit from lucid dreams and OBEs where events are guided either involuntarily, through unvoiced expectations and emotions, or overtly through specific requests, intentions, or actions.

One of the many wonderful things about being conscious within a noticeably thought-responsive environment is that the more we experiment with observing the impact of our thoughts and intentions, the more clearly we understand the impact our thoughts and intentions also have on our waking life. Even the waking state is thought-responsive, and I like to describe waking physical reality as a kind of slow dream because it usually responds a lot more slowly to our thoughts and intent than other states of consciousness. But sooner or later, even physical reality responds to our intent.

In some OBEs we can experience instant manifestation: we decide to visit the sun and BAM! We're floating right in front of this giant fireball. Or, we meet a frightening entity and instead of fleeing we do our best to send it love and ask calmly what it wants from us. Our inner calmness infects the environment and the entity is no longer so scary, or it transforms into something else. This latter example can help in waking life situations when we encounter

aggressive people: being able to give a calm, compassionate response generally reduces the explosive potential of the situation.

Another aspect of both creativity and manifestation is healing. OBEs have potential for both psychological and physical healing. Graham Nicholls (2012), author of 'Navigating the Out-of-Body Experience', remarks: "after several hundred OBEs, I have found nothing but healing and transformation within my own experiences" (p. 13).

After William Buhlman had cancer surgery, he had experiences of floating in a cube of white light (see Buhlman, 2013). He had the strong sense that these experiences were fundamental to his physical healing. Luigi Sciambarella points out that in the OBE, "You can connect with a state of pure, unconditional love" (personal correspondence, 2013), and this, too, is an optimal state for healing as it provides us with respite from the hurt, dissatisfaction or negative emotions we usually identify with. In particular I have noticed that states of consciousness in which I find myself floating bodiless in white space have a healing quality.

Surfing the rainbow: from out-of-body to bodiless

"I've had white light out-of-body experiences where just for a moment I understand the nature of reality, the universe, everything" (Anja, personal correspondence, 2015).

What happens when we find ourselves in a state the only distinguishing feature of which can be described as 'infinite space'? We have no sensory input from our physical body, so we could say we are out of body, but we are not really out of the body, and nor are we embodied. In states of deep awareness where we do not identify with a body image of any sort (whether we label this the dream body, astral body, or energy body), we simply experience ourselves as bodiless.

In such states, all we experience in terms of graspable stimuli that we can report upon waking up is endless white (or grey, or black) space, or millions of dots of light. As mentioned earlier, I call these states Bodiless Lucid Experiences (BLEs). Signposting states of consciousness isn't always straightforward, but I have previously termed the most common entry point for BLE as the "gap between dreams" (Johnson, 2014, p. 60), as such states usually occur following a shift in the dream-state where all representational imagery falls away, or in transitional stages of sleep. In BLE we have no sense of location beyond the perceived self-location as a dot of awareness in space. There may be a sensation of movement. There may be a sense of wonder, oneness, or belonging; maybe a sense of understanding the nature of the universe.

Perhaps at first we continue to identify with ourselves as 'I', but after a time in the white space, there's not much for the ego to bounce off. When everything dissolves, what remains? When we spin a rainbow spinning-top, the colours merge into whiteness. When the rainbow of conscious experience merges into white light, self-perception and ego dissolve. What remains is lucid awareness.

There's something immensely reassuring about being stripped of a body and all sensory perceptions but all the while remaining lucidly aware. There's a freedom to the experience; a sense of boundlessness. When I return from a BLE, for a time the pressures of my daily life are less powerful and I feel at peace with the idea of my own death.

It's like being protected by a shield of knowledge – the knowledge that waking life is transitory and the body is only a carapace. None of this means I feel less love for life: compassion flows more easily when we sense that we all came from oneness and will return to oneness.

In terms of creativity, white light OBEs and BLEs provide a space of great nourishment because we can be completely at rest within the white light, whether we have the sensation of movement or not. Creativity needs restorative moments, points of reconnection with something deeper than surface, everyday reality. Doing what I have called 'soul flying' in white light has a similar effect to spending an hour or two in a floatation tank: upon emerging the body feels looser, the mind is broad and spacious, and thoughts are slower and deeper. When we take this state of consciousness to the writing desk, the canvas, the musical instrument, or any waking life situation, we're ready to create.

On its most basic level, creativity involves being willing to release preconceptions and open up to new experiences. I've had hundreds of classic lift-off OBEs and many thousands of bodiless experiences in the void and in lucid dreams, but I'm still learning. If we release preconceived fears and expectations and actively cultivate a spirit of adventure, we can become intrepid explorers of our own conscious experience. Through exploring OBEs and related states such as lucid dreams and waking visions, we allow the unknown into our lives, and with the unknown arrives all the beauty of a profound mystery waiting to be discovered. Instead of panicking and resisting, the secret to creative OBE is to take courage and find our balance, so that we can surf the rainbow of conscious experience.

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CHAPTER 10: A PRACTICAL PROGRESSION FROM LUCID DREAM TO OUT-OF-BODY STATES, ROBERT WAGGONER

In the spring of 1975, I taught myself how to induce a lucid dream, sparked by an idea in the book, 'Journey to Ixtlan' by Carlos Castaneda (1974). There, his shamanic teacher, don Juan, suggests to Carlos that he find his hands in the dream state and become consciously aware of dreaming to produce a lucid state. Don Juan commented, "You don't have to look at your hands. Like I've said, pick anything at all. But pick one thing in advance and find it in your dreams. I said your hands because they will always be there" (p. 100).

Intrigued by this concept, I devised an easy technique to 'find my hands'. Simply put, I visually focused on the palm of my hands for about five minutes before sleep, while repeatedly suggesting, "Tonight in my dreams, I will see my hands and realise I am dreaming". Within three nights practice, it happened. Walking through my high school hallway, my hands suddenly popped in front of my face, which prompted me to realise, I am dreaming! The resulting lucid dream completely amazed me (Waggoner, 2009).

By associating the sight of my hands with the thought, 'I am dreaming' or 'this is a dream', I conditioned myself to respond to the visual cue of my hands. With nightly practice and strong dream recall, I found this lucid dream induction technique resulted in two to six lucid dreams each month.

However at that time, the scientific evidence in support of lucid dreaming had yet to appear, and would not become widely known until 1980-81, when researchers like Stephen LaBerge (1980) at Stanford and separately, Keith Hearne (1978) in England, popularised their research. Both scientists hypothesised that a lucid dreamer may be able to signal their conscious awareness in a dream by moving their eyes in a pre-determined pattern (such as left to right eight times) while in the dream state. After the repeated success in the sleep laboratory with this technique, called 'eye signal verification', the irrefutable scientific evidence established lucid dreaming (or 'conscious dreaming') as a bona fide experience, and led to further scientific research and personal exploration.

For the five years before the evidence emerged, however, I continued to lucid dream and conduct my own personal investigations. This taught me much about maintaining lucid dreams, the principled nature of the dream realm, and manipulating within it. I share many of my lucid dream insights in my first book, 'Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self' (2009).

During this early period, however, I began to notice another strange night time phenomena – the out-of-body experience (OBE). While falling asleep as a teenager, I sometimes began to hear strange humming or vibrations around my head or body, and felt strange energy moving around me. Sometimes, I noted seeing my dark bedroom from a vantage point of about five feet above my bed. Thankfully after talking to an older brother about my experiences, he

assured me that I was having OBEs, and gave me Robert Monroe's book ('Journeys Out of the Body') to read. While grateful for my brother's reassurance, I found that I preferred the relative joyful realisation of lucid dreaming to the buzzing intense energy of the OBE in a half-awake state. Since that time, I have had a number of OBEs and more than a thousand lucid dreams.

Yet even back then, I noticed that some night time experiences defied simple classification. For example, in those early years I found myself consciously aware, zooming around the sycamore trees in the front yard, enjoying the early morning dawn and my mastery of flight (often in my early lucid dreams, flying required strong focus, effort and intent, but in this experience, I flew without that burden). Suddenly, I saw someone coming down the street on a bicycle. I felt the need to hide, so I flew behind the peak of our roof to watch. Within a few moments, the young man on the bike threw something at our house! This surprised me and I woke. Rushing outside in my shorts, I saw something had been thrown at our house and right where I expected. It was the morning newspaper.

So what did I just experience? A lucid dream or an OBE? I do not recall 'how' I became aware, but I felt consciously aware and directed the experience, much like a lucid dream. I noted in that experience how I flew with graceful abandon (unlike the large majority of my lucid dreams at that time). And then, there was the issue of the newspaper. Had I, in some other state, perhaps an OBE, seen the newspaper boy actually throw the newspaper, and had a veridical experience? Or was it a strange lucid dream?

Lucid dream or OBE?

In the early 1980s, most commentators and researchers appeared to accept a clear-cut distinction between OBEs and lucid dreams. A July 1983 survey conducted by Susan Blackmore (1983) at the University of Bristol found that of 593 randomly selected individuals, 47% reported at least one lucid dream, and "The most striking finding was the strong association between lucid dreams and others experiences" (p. 61). She notes, "Lucid dreamers also tended to note more frequent dream recall, vivid dreams, flying dreams, hallucinations, body image distortions and OBEs" (p. 61). Clearly, at that time, OBEs and lucid dreams appeared as different experiences to the public, if not the researchers themselves.

A later survey reported in the Spring Issue of 'Nightlight' by Lynne Levitan and Stephen LaBerge (1991) echoed Blackmore's findings. The analysis noted (p. 9):

People who reported more dream-related experiences also reported more OBEs. For example, of the 452 people claiming to have had lucid dreams, 39 percent also reported OBEs, whereas only 15 percent of those who did not claim lucid dreams said they had had OBEs. The group with the most people reporting OBEs (51%) were those who said they had experienced all the dream events we were studying, that is, lucid dreams, dream return, and sleep paralysis.

From such surveys, it appears lucid dreamers encounter a variety of unusual experiences, including a large proportion who note the occasional OBE. By their survey markers, it seems apparent that the lucid dreamers felt that an OBE seemed uniquely different than a lucid dream.

Yet by the mid to late 1980s, Stephen LaBerge (1985) had already begun to propose a different view, doubting the existence of OBEs and suggesting "...OBEs are actually variant interpretations of lucid dreams" (p. 206). Briefly making the case in his first book ('Lucid Dreaming') he wrote, "In my opinion, lucid dreams and OBE's are necessarily distinguished by only one essential feature: how the person interprets the experience at the time" (p. 211).

Nonetheless, LaBerge fails to address the OBEs which seem to occur as a result of medical trauma, sudden accidents and other waking state events, and how they might reconcile with his assertion that OBEs are subjective interpretations of lucid dreams. In any case, a number of experienced lucid dreamers who have also had OBEs disagree with his broad assessment, and find the distinctive characteristics of the two experiences indicative of unique states.

Similarly, when you read a self-report on a lucid dreaming forum of someone falling asleep, who begins to feel humming or buzzing and energy around the body, possibly sees wispy arms composed of silver looking light, and then floats above the bed consciously aware, then please ask yourself, "does this meet the definition of a lucid dream? Did this person realise within a dream that he or she was dreaming?". If not, the experience simply fails to meet the definition of a lucid dream, just as having a heart attack on the operating table and floating up to the ceiling fails to meet the definition of a lucid dream.

Shifting States Hypothesis

In Chapter 3, Ed Kellogg identified the phenomenological differences between a lucid dream and an OBE. While the vast majority will easily and clearly fall into one camp or the other (lucid dream or OBE), a small percentage will appear to show elements of both states, and therefore seem indeterminate.

Here, I wish to propose a unique proposition to explain some of the indeterminate experiences: the Shifting States Hypothesis (SSH). The hypothesis posits that a person may consciously (or unconsciously) transition from the lucid dream state to other states, including that of the OBE. Similarly, a person may transition from the OBE state to a lucid dream. These hybrid experiences can result in reports with elements of both lucid dreaming and OBEs.

Before getting into some of the personal experiences, I ask the reader to think about moving from one state of consciousness to another in general. When moving from waking to sleeping, do you shift states of consciousness? When moving from a lucid dream to the waking state, do you shift states of consciousness? When awake and undergoing deep hypnosis, do you shift states of consciousness? When awake and daydreaming as a friend drones on about their recent holiday, do you shift states of consciousness?

Obviously the physical, mental, and phenomenological evidence supports an affirmative response to many of these questions. Throughout the day, consciously and unconsciously, we shift states of awareness. In fact, this process often seems so commonplace that it appears unremarkable. Though physical and mental markers exist which confirm that shift, we normally know a shift has occurred because of the change in inner experience.

Aside from the commonality of shifting states, the relative depth of that new state has significance. For example, many lucid dreamers have independently noted 'levels' of lucidity, and outlined criteria for sub-lucid, semi-lucid, lucid, fully-lucid and super-lucid lucid dreams (Kellogg, 1989). A sub-lucid dream example involves realising that you dream because you see Uncle Fred, who passed away ten years ago, yet you still go along with the dream activity, and serve him some pie and coffee (and fail to influence the dream in any way). Similarly, a person may achieve lucid awareness for a few minutes, only to lose it later and return to regular dreaming. Changes in the level of focused awareness within a state can fluctuate.

While awake, we also see the existence of 'levels' in various states of awareness. In hypnosis, scientifically studied scales of hypnotic depth exist to note the various levels achievable (such as in the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scales). While a small percent of the population can reach a 'somnambulistic' state, the majority of people appear susceptible to various levels of hypnotic depth. The important point remains: not only do we naturally shift states of awareness consciously and unconsciously, but these states of awareness often have levels of depth, which may lead to transitions when shallow or unfocused.

So, can an experienced person shift states in a lucid dream? More specifically, can an experienced person move from a lucid dream to an OBE? Or from an OBE or other state into a lucid dream?

In the remainder of this chapter, a number of practical examples will be illustrated, which demonstrate how you can consciously (or subconsciously) move from one state to the other. The examples all come from experienced authors, including myself, Clare Johnson, Robert Peterson, and Ryan Hurd, and illustrate how to make the shift, whether using conscious intent, visualisation or other practice.

Decades ago, I decided to experiment with shifting states and consciously intend to transition from the lucid dream to another state of consciousness (other than waking). Naturally, I felt uncertain and wondered, what would that experience entail? Would the SSH stand?

Example: my experiences

I became lucid and recalled my interest in the idea of shifting levels or forms, while lucid. I announced, "Take me to the next form!".

Suddenly a remarkable shift occurred. I now found myself in our kitchen (or an amazing replica) with the early dawn light coming through the windows. I could even see the wind moving the branches softly outside. Every detail of the kitchen looked in order and stationary. This felt very much like an OBE state, since everything seemed stable (and not amorphous or dream changeable) and profoundly realistic. The transition from the lucid dream to this new state seemed incredible and the stability indicated an OBE state.

If it was an OBE, then I knew I could also go flying easily. I willed myself out the window and through the side yard with ease. I flew across the street, as light as a feather, and with no sense of difficulty or concerns.

This additional detail of flying with extreme ease (and not the need to focus and manipulate, as in lucid dreams) served to support my belief that I had willingly transitioned from lucid dreaming to the OBE state. Through the power of focused intent, I had shifted my awareness from lucid dreaming to "the next form", or the OBE state in this case.

Aware in the apparent OBE in my home locale, I decided to investigate and began to fly through the houses on the west side of the street. I felt a bit surprised to experience flying through my neighbour's homes, bedrooms and all (or again, amazing replicas). After a few houses, I stopped and hovered above the street.

Then I began to fly back down the street. As I came to one of my neighbour's houses, I decided to fly into the house, through a second story window (note: in waking physical reality, no window exists there, only a sharply pitched roof). Entering, I first noted the cramped storage area full of boxes with the slanting roof angled above. Then I found myself in an empty bedroom. I moved into the hall; to my left was a simple bathroom, and to my right, the stairs.

I realised the other bedroom sat on the other side of the hallway and looked through the doorway. I felt a bit shocked to see the elderly Mrs. H. suddenly move her blankets over her face, as if she had 'seen' me (perhaps in some ghostly form) in her doorway. I announced, "Don't be afraid". Recalling that her husband had passed away earlier in the year, I then said something like, "Your husband is fine. We all survive death in a form like this".

Shortly thereafter, the experience ended and I woke in bed.

By all appearances, I had done it. I had intentionally shifted my awareness from a lucid dream to another state, apparently an OBE state, by simply announcing my intent within the lucid dream, "Take me to the next form!". The phenomenological shift from lucid dream to the OBE-type experience seemed utterly remarkable.

The idea for this personal experiment came from reading a book by Jane Roberts, 'Seth, Dreams and Projections of Consciousness'. In this book, Seth (see Roberts, 1986) states that awake-seeming dreams (i.e., lucid dreams) and OBEs exist as various forms of projections of consciousness and that a person may shift freely amongst forms:

Projection from a dream is something else again, and when executed successfully, you have a fine example of the self as it changes the focus of awareness. Here the critical consciousness can be fully alert when the body sleeps. Spontaneous, unrecalled projections of this kind happen often. It is beneficial that they be carried out by the conscious wish of the projector. You learn, therefore, to manipulate your own consciousness and to experience its mobility. Quite simply, such projections allow you practice in dealing with realities that you will meet when you no longer operate in the physical system.

Examining this experience in the morning, I walked past our neighbour's house to see if I had seen things according to physical reality. I then noticed that I had not, because in my experience, I flew through a window, where no window exists in waking life. Because of the

mentally dynamic nature of altered states (where belief, expectation, focus, and intent play a role), my mind placed a window where none existed, so I could easily enter the house. From this (and other experiences), I consider OBEs a 'reality plus-one' experience in which the environment and situation can be overlain by intent or other mental needs.

In any case, such an experience seems to add evidence to the SSH, namely that a lucid dreamer can intentionally shift from a lucid dream to the OBE state. While looking through my dream journals, I came across a likely example of an unintentional shift from a lucid dream to an OBE state, as in this experience from March 19, 2000:

I am driving in a strange town. As I travel down the road, it begins to get narrower and narrower. I end up popping over the curb and down the embankment, doing my best to control the car. At some point, I realize this is a dream and decide to look at my hands [to stabilize the experience].

Suddenly, I begin to hear the energy humming associated with an out of body experience, and then feel energy around me. Then, I feel as if I'm back in bed. I look towards my wife and see her sleeping head on the pillow along with three cats laying nearby. [Note: in waking physical reality, we only had two cats at the time] I wake.

In this example, I became lucid, and then without intending it, began to feel the precursors of humming and energy, which often accompany an OBE. Suddenly, the experience shifted to my home locale and seeing my wife in bed, along with three cats. Here I note that many OBEs report seeing themselves or their partner in bed, while this seems much less likely to be reported in lucid dream self-reports.

This type of example suggests that a lucid dreamer may unintentionally shift from the lucid dream state to an OBE. Such accounts may explain some of the hybrid experiences, which resist easy classification as one or the other, and move us to considering that such a 'hybrid experience' contains elements of both.

In Carlos Castaneda's (1993) book, 'The Art of Dreaming', don Juan suggested a series of lucid dream challenges. One of these, he called "the second gate of dreaming" (p. 112). He explains, "...the second gate is reached and crossed when a dreamer learns to wake up in another dream, or when a dreamer learns to change dreams without waking up in the world of daily life" (p. 112). In the below experience from October 1993, I sought to accomplish this task.

I've become lucid and find myself flying around my bed. I casually notice the bodies under the covers, but have a curious disinterest in them. The room looks exactly like it does in waking life. I remember Castaneda's comment about 'when a dreamer learns to wake up in another dream,' so I align myself with my sleeping body (about 4 feet above it), close my eyes and say, 'I want to waken in the next dreaming world.' I wonder if there truly could be various levels or realms of dreaming.

Suddenly I feel energized and I fly straight up out of the house. The night sky is brilliant with 10,000 stars. I move effortlessly through the night [and actually a period of complete darkness] as I fly onward. Eventually, I descend and find myself in an arid region. I noticed what looks like some kind of fruit tree and touch its waxy leaves. A cat walks by.

Lucid and energetic, I think how great life is and I marvel at the stars above. I recall that others have flown to the stars and decide, 'That's what I'll do.' As I fly upward in the standing position, the stars glow bright and brilliant. Suddenly, the stars do something fantastic – they begin to rush together into patterns and symbols, forming interlocking circles, then pyramidal shapes, and something like the Star of David. Other interlocking geometric figures begin to form, all composed of the golden stars....

I descend back to the ground only to find an attractive woman waiting for me. She comes up to me and insists I follow. Curious about such a talkative dream figure, I follow her, and she leads me to an older, dark haired woman seated on a chair. This woman begins asking me a series of question, the gist of which is that she wants to know if I'm worthy of advancing deeper into dreaming – she wants proof that I'm ready! I respond, but wonder why a dream figure would want to question me.

Here, I felt that I had accomplished the task, and changed dreams without waking. This may have begun in the midst of an OBE, since I found myself aware and flying above my bed. The experience then ended as a lucid dream. Thinking back, I do not recall how I became self-aware, which seems one of the common aspects of misidentified lucid dreams which are in fact likely OBEs.

As soon as I made the request to waken in the next dreaming world, this resulted in an interesting series of events. Unique amongst them were the sensations of flying or moving through utter darkness, and then descending into a fully formed dream, lucidly aware. In my first book (Waggoner, 2009), I note that this experience appeared as my first encounter with a 'review committee' or group of dream figures who sought to question me about my awareness, as if gauging my progress and potential.

By virtue of having these experiences, it seemed much easier to accept the hypothesis of shifting states, and conclude that some lucid dreamers may intentionally or unintentionally transition from the lucid dream state into an OBE state, and vice versa. By doing so, they create hybrid experiences.

As I prepared writing for this chapter, I reached out to see if others had noticed similar experiences, which might support the SSH.

Examples: Clare Johnson's experiences

Clare Johnson has studied lucid dreaming personally and professionally for decades. In that time, she has noted various occasions in which she feels that a shift in states may have taken place, which support the SSH outlined here. For example:

As for moving from LD [lucid dream] to OBE, sometimes in lucid dreams I get vibrations in my dream body and if I follow these by allowing them to intensify, the dream imagery falls away and goes dark and as I move to explore, a more physically realistic scene like my bedroom builds around me, fuzzy and undefined at first, then gaining clarity. This is the point where (if pressed) I would say the LD has turned into an OBE.

Conversely, Johnson also notes the movement from OBE to a more lucid dream-like experience on some occasions:

Many times in my life I've 'left my body' in the typical way (vibrations, noises, sensation of shooting up and out) and after a while of exploring, e.g. by flying through the roof and into the sky, I've focused on something visual like a ball of light or something else that appears; could be the face of a stag close-up, or a kind of firework display, and I've been sucked into the imagery so much that it becomes 3D and I feel I'm in a lucid dream.

In these switches, the phenomenological differences seem to alert us that some kind of shifting in states has occurred. When we unintentionally experience the shift, we may not immediately notice those differences as much as when we consciously or experimentally seek to shift our state of awareness.

Examples: Robert Peterson and lucid/OBE overlap

Some overlap may exist between states, where elements of both exist simultaneously as we transition. Robert Peterson (1997) discovered that a wandering focus within an OBE may lead to the 'Fantasy Trap', or basically a shift to a dream-like or lucid dream-like experience, which seems far different than the typical OBE.

...I quickly discovered that I was now stuck to the physical body, and I struggled to get free of it. I struggled for what seemed to be 10 or 15 minutes, using only my mind to try to free myself. After that I started thinking of other things and, because I was very tired, I eventually lapsed into a daydream, which led me into a state of hypnogogic imagery again. I was now semiconscious. At some level of consciousness, I was still aware of my OBE condition. It was only a minute or two before I "caught myself" and reestablished full consciousness.

So after a difficult OBE transition from the physical body, Peterson's mind begins to wander which allows the Fantasy Trap to start, as daydreams and dream-like imagery occur. If not focused and mindful, the OBE practitioner can begin to shift and get lost in the dream-like state.

Peterson also notes how the Fantasy Trap taught him to take care when using visualisation in the OBE state:

Most of the OBE books say that you can travel in the blink of an eye, just by thinking about the person or place you want to visit. Therefore, I would think about a place I wanted to visit, and I would visualize that place, and imagine I was there.

I learned this form of idle imagination can easily turn into an unproductive OBE-daydream. Instead of being transported, the visualization takes on a life of its own and my consciousness slips into a dream-fantasy state. The fantasy is entirely subjective, as far as I can tell, and can be as wild as any ordinary dream. But once the fantasy is over and my consciousness returns to normal, I know I've been dreaming.

When I return to full consciousness, I may still be out of my body. Waking up out-of-body (and comparing the former dream to the now-OBE state) convinces me that the OBE was real (objective) and that the fantasy was not real (subjective).

If you fall prey to the fantasy trap, there are certain clues that you are no longer in the proper state: Fantasy-objects (such as doors and windows) might seem solid, fantasy-people might see you, and your fantasy-body might not be able to fly.

If you wake up in-the-body from a dream-fantasy, you might be left with a sense of "Was that just a dream?" I usually say something like, "This is real!" during OBEs so that I'll have a conscious point of reference. Of course, I only say that after I examine my state of consciousness and detect that I am fully aware during the experience. That way, I leave no doubts that I was conscious at the time, and not involved in a dream-fantasy.

It seems Peterson has observed some of the possible forces that unintentionally shift a person from an OBE to a dream or lucid dream state. Trying to visualise while in the OBE state may act to shift the focus to more dream-like situations, which can then evolve into an entire dream scenario.

As lucid dreamers have also observed, failing to focus properly in the lucid dream state and maintaining one's awareness 'of being aware' can result in returning to regular dreaming. Whether an OBE or a lucid dream, minor changes in focus can sometimes result in major shifts in states of awareness. We could argue that, essentially, a steady state requires a steady focus of awareness.

Sleep paralysis and SSH

For some OBE and lucid dream explorers, another special state of awareness appears on rare occasion, called sleep paralysis (SP). The experience often has this primary characteristic: Feeling consciously aware (normally in bed) while unable to move. The person may sometimes experience sensations like a weight on the chest, hear voices, sense others in the room, or find their breathing impaired – all while consciously aware and unable to move.

To break this state, SP sufferers have learned techniques, such as focusing on moving a finger or toe, which usually results in waking. Also, attending to breathing and relaxing, while in SP, can often lead to waking, according to author of 'Sleep Paralysis', Ryan Hurd (2011).

Hurd notes that even though the SP sufferer may feel he is looking around the room, "...most of the time, the eyes are closed despite the seeming 'reality' of seeing and hearing the outside environment" (p. 12). Moreover, dream-like imagery can occur during this state, and this imagery is often blended into the sensed experience. If the person feels fear, then fearful images of attackers, aliens and worse may appear.

However, Hurd learned through his repeated experiences with sleep paralysis that a person could also use the experience as a platform from which to move to a lucid dream or OBE. To access an OBE, he suggests that the SP sufferer focus on the area between the eyes, and then forcefully try to sit up. By having that intent, the person may find that they 'pop out' into an OBE situation.

For those who prefer to move from SP to a lucid dream, Hurd suggests a different technique (somewhat akin to Robert Peterson's 'Fantasy Trap'). He suggests, while in the SP, begin to relax and go with the flow (note: you may feel that you float along), then announce an intention such as, "I want to go flying over the ocean" while cultivating this imagery in your mind's eye. Within seconds, the dream imagery may appear around you, and you might well find yourself consciously aware in a lucid dream, flying over the ocean and free from the SP.

These examples serve to further support SSH, and demonstrate how the intentional use of techniques can shift awareness from SP to either the lucid dreaming state or the OBE (or perhaps waking, if the SP sufferer prefers).

Naturalistic observation and inner field work

Many explorers in lucid dreams and OBEs eventually realise that awareness seems extraordinarily malleable across states, and depth of engagement. Shifting states consciously or unconsciously must therefore receive attention by observers who wish to create a clear taxonomy of experiences or states of being, much like the biological scientists who study wild animals in the field.

Dennis Schmidt (1999, p. 43) noted:

Naturalistic observation has a lesser status than experiment in most sciences. In the field of dream study, practitioners of naturalistic and experimental disciplines coexist, with limited mutual respect. Long-term naturalistic observation, though, has unique sensitivities that make it the most effective or the only possible method for many important studies. While there are challenges to integrating naturalistic and experimental disciplines, there are possibilities, and there is a scientific imperative.

Researchers would do well to listen to experienced naturalistic observers of lucid dreams and OBEs who may find overlapping and hybrid states. Through experimentation and exploration, the careful observer can experience this personally. However it may require knowledge of favourable techniques, including an openness to the existence of alternate states. Similarly, the careful observer has to remain cognisant of confirmation bias, in which only experiential evidence in agreement with the prevailing belief or theory gets noted, and non-confirming evidence gets discarded, ignored or explained away as unimportant.

Centuries ago, the Swedish natural scientist, Carl Linnaeus, created a system of classifying and naming species, using a ranked hierarchy of domains or kingdoms (for example, kingdom, phylum, classes, orders, families, genus and species). In this way, a classification system of living things resulted and led to exploring flora and fauna with a more observant and informed eye. As William James seems to have hinted in his earlier work, psychology would do well to create a taxonomy of consciousness, in order to grasp its complexity, depth and breadth.

Hopefully this chapter assists the careful reader with accepting the possibility of a certain percentage of indeterminate, overlapping and hybrid states of experience. By understanding this key point, it allows for mixed states of consciousness, and lessens the confusion that results from indiscriminately intermixing distinct states into the same broad classification (as LaBerge seemed to do by saying that OBEs appear indistinct from lucid dreams). Aware within a dream or aware with an OBE, each of us has an extraordinary platform from which to explore the near infinite shifts of conscious focus, particularly, if we have effective techniques and the ability to let go of fears or concerns. Shifting the focus of our awareness can be as simple and profound as waking up!

Future taxonomists of conscious states will need keen observational skills and experience in order to follow the shifting nature of awareness. Nonetheless, conscious states have certain characteristics that identify them as stable and unique. Thoughtfully investigated with understanding and a phenomenological touch, these future taxonomists will begin to map out the last great frontier: *The Inner Universe*.

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CHAPTER 11: HEALING IN THE ASTRAL WORLDS, PRESTON DENNETT

Perhaps the most exciting and useful side effects of the out-of-body experience (OBE) are those cases in which people have been cured of illness or injury as a result of their OBE. Advanced OBErs report a wide variety of healings, some of chronic or allegedly incurable conditions. There are a surprisingly large number of cases of out-of-body healings on record. This chapter will explore the personal accounts of some of the fascinating healings encountered in the esoteric realms of the 'astral worlds' that many OBErs claim to travel to.

As Clare Johnson mentioned in Chapter 9, it appears that the reservoir of peace and healing of the OBE-state can allow us to cultivate a greater potential for inner well-being and balance – with even profound physical health results. While the OBE may not be regarded a panacea, we can already note the profound psychological and physical effects of OBEs in the literature – see for instance the work of Meyerson and Gelkopf (2004) who empowered their patients to heal from psychological issues as the result of a hypnotically-induced OBE. In this chapter, I shall focus mainly on physical benefits of OBEs, as these capture some of the most profound cases. Later in the chapter I will propose possible explanations for the reason that healing seems so accessible in OBE-states, and what this might mean for out-of-body explorers.

Note, in this chapter, I shall use the word 'astral plane' in reference to the OBE-world or realm that advanced OBErs often come into contact with, which is often regarded as a separate dimension of human experience that exists outside of the physical dimension. Clearly, although evidence of the objective existence of such a plane is limited (as pointed out in Chapter 5-8), the fact that so many OBErs have reported coming into contact with a distinctly unique and seemingly 'solid' environment in their accounts, helps contextualise our discussion here.

Cases

Albert Taylor

Albert Taylor (1996), an engineer by profession, became interested in OBEs after reading Shirley MacLaine's book, 'Out on a Limb'. After attempting the OBE exercises in the book, Taylor found that he was pretty good at inducing OBEs. Seemingly, this was especially fortunate when he was diagnosed with a major illness. Taylor writes (pp. 99-100):

In early 1992, I was diagnosed with the debilitating disease of multiple sclerosis, better known as MS. After suffering two devastating attacks, I was hospitalized with severe vision and equilibrium problems. My diagnosis was not good. My doctor explained that my physical health would probably degrade over the next few years. Shortly after receiving this less than welcome news, I began to have consciously controlled OBEs. I knew at that time that I had very little to lose by trying this method of healing. Well to make a long story short, be it coincidence or not, I can gratefully state that I have absolutely *no* outward symptoms or physical manifestations of this otherwise crippling disease.

Terrill Wilson

Some OBEs have been cured of relatively minor conditions. Terrill Wilson (1987) was employed as a construction worker and a Mississippi riverboat crewman. In his mid-thirties, he began meditating and having OBEs. About one year after his first OBE, he became ill with the flu. As he says, "I woke up in the middle of the night with a fever and a very sore throat" (p. 103).

As he lay there, Wilson recalled that other astral projectors had been able to heal themselves of illness by simply going out-of-body, knowledge that he had acquired from reading the OBE and 'astral projection' literature. Little did he know, he was about to experience the healing power of OBEs firsthand.

Curiously wondering if something like this could happen to me, I mustered all the will power within me to try to leave me body. I began thinking of myself as a bodiless unit of awareness moving further and further out the top of my head into blackness, trying to let go all mental ties to the physical body and physical world. Being sick made it especially difficult to hold this thought pattern, and to keep from forgetting, I had to mentally remind myself over and over what I was trying to do. Finally, maybe forty-five minutes or an hour later, I drifted into sleep.

I was able to leave my body three times that night, for short intervals that I spent in an earthlike world with several other people present. I made the acquaintance and talked for a while on two occasions with a fellow who was about my age, but twice I lost control and returned to my body instantly. Each time I returned, unable to tell how sick my physical body was or whether any miraculous healing had taken place, I exited again to the inner world. One time a very noticeable tingling sensation at a spot about two inches from the center of my head caught my attention, and I contemplated on it for a while.

Wilson continued to go out of his body a third time. When he returned to his body, he discovered that he had been healed.

Lo and behold, my fever, nausea, sore throat and head congestion, even my tiredness, were completely gone. Upon waking the next morning, the only trace of sickness in me was a slight snuffle ... Similar Soul Travel healings have happened to me a number of times since then, but at the time I looked upon this unexplained healing as something of a miracle.

Another time, Wilson was healed of an eye infection.

A contact lens problem had caused a slight infection in one of my eyes, and it was sore that night at bedtime. I fell asleep and became conscious of being out of my body in an inner lifelike world. I consciously moved out of my body a second time later that night, and upon awaking to go to work I noticed that my sore eye was completely healed. Such infections usually required at least a couple of days to heal, but this one was cleared up overnight.

Out-of-body healings seem to be affected by powerful currents of 'astral energies', or some kind of metaphysical force that interplays with our physical experience in-a-body. This observation is demonstrated in the case below.

One night I was feeling somewhat sick, I woke to find a current of energy flowing through my physical body, funneling into the top of my head and exiting out my feet. It felt something like electricity and the increasing intensity of this current woke me up mentally, although my physical body remained asleep. It rushed through me like a powerful flood of water, seemingly cleansing my physical body. As this was happening, I knew instinctively that this current flowing through me had a potential strength far beyond what I was now receiving, far beyond anything I could even imagine. As the seconds passed, this energy current flowing through me slowly began to subside, and within five seconds or so had faded away altogether. I went back to sleep feeling much better physically, and upon awaking an hour or so later for work, my earlier signs of sickness were completely gone.

Paul Twitchell

Paul Twitchell (see Steiger, 1968) is probably best known for heading the school of 'Eckankar', a spiritually-based philosophy which promotes out-of-body travel. Twitchell learned how to travel out-of-body from his father and sister. "It was these elementary lessons that saved my life when I was five years old" (p. 35).

At age five, Twitchell had a cold which developed into a severe case of pleurisy. When Twitchell's condition steadily worsened, his sister, Kay-Dee, recalled that their father said that healings could be performed from the 'astral' out-of-body state.

Kay-Dee assumed a lotus position and after meditating deeply was able to leave her body. She then went over to her sick brother, Paul, and pulled his astral body out of his physical body. At first, Twitchell thought he had died. His sister, however, explained that he was having an OBE and to "think of good health, of recovery, of goodness and strength" (p. 36).

Twitchell: "The next thing I remember is that I was awakening to find the family and our doctor standing by my bedside. The doc was saying something about a miraculous recovery" (p. 38).

Robert Bruce

Robert Bruce began projecting out of body at around age four and is today a leading author in the field and out-of-body explorer. In the late 1990s, Bruce noticed an unexplained pain in his hip which he believed was linked to a 'psychic attack'. When his condition worsened, Bruce sought assistance out-of-body.

He travelled into the astral realms where he contacted an 'advanced spirit guide'. Bruce (1999): "Twenty or so feet in front of me sat a being, in appearance a small, thin old priest well into his eighties. He was wearing a full-length white cotton robe with a plain rope belt tied at the waist" (p. 487). Bruce approached the man and they began to discuss Bruce's problems.

At one point, as the priest began talking about my right hip, he moved his hands and beckoned me toward him. I felt myself gripped in a powerful force. I was rolled onto my side and drawn to lie horizontally in front of the priest, facing him, floating just off the floor, suddenly finding myself naked. The priest moved his small hands over my body and finally laid them on my hip. My hip joint moved and felt like it was being turned inside out. This did not hurt but felt rather uncomfortable.

The priest moved his hands slowly back and forth and a murky-dark roughly shoebox-shaped object, shot through with dull-reddish and orange lumps and grisly black lines floated out of my hip. He pulled this away from my skin slightly and showed me angry red and black cords extending sticky strings into my hip, groin and upper thigh.

The priest explained that the cause of the condition was actually a 'curse'. He laid his hands over the area.

...a brilliant-white light then spouted from his hands and bored deep inside me, all around and through the strange thing on my hip. I felt nerves twanging and pricking and then a tickling, almost erotic feeling flooded through my groin as the thing brightened suddenly and then faded. It changed visibly, filling with sparkling-white motes of light, then dissolved back in my body.

Bruce reports that the procedure greatly improved his health.

It felt like a great weight had been lifted off me and my hip felt tender and a little numb...I awoke the next morning greatly refreshed, with no cramps or pain at all and my hip felt a whole lot better.

Marilyn Hughes

Marilyn Hughes began having OBEs following the birth of her first child. She soon discovered that she had very strong natural abilities to induce OBEs and spontaneous healings.

After being diagnosed with an ovarian cyst, Hughes (1991) turned to OBE techniques to remedy the situation. After exiting her body, she found herself taken to a 'healing dimension'.

My being lay in mid-air as six entities, some of whom were my guides, stood around me, three on each side. Observing the colors and vibrational patterns of my being, they determined what medical problems I was experiencing and the reasons for the manifestation of an ovarian cyst. My husband wanted another child and we were trying to have one, but deep down inside, I was not ready for another child. Perhaps I would never be ready for another one...The entities raised their hands as beams of white light shone down from them, healing my auric disturbance causing the cyst. Immense warmth was felt, as the healing ensued.

When they were finished, one of my guides explained that my other problem, which was later diagnosed as asthma, could not be healed yet, as I did not understand the reason for the manifestation. Some soul-searching would be in order. I returned to my body, and as expected, my cyst had disappeared.

On a later occasion, Hughes was able to take steps to cure her asthma condition.

Entering into the vibratory state, I left my body. Suddenly seeing from another vantage point, my etheric body was displayed before my eyes. An obvious energy disturbance could be seen in my chest area, a discoloration. Resembling thermal photography, my consciousness was displayed as a white light with a red color emanating from the area of disease. Realizing the need to deal with my lung condition more thoroughly, I worked on refining the energy. As I brought my energy pattern back to balance, I knew I would need to work on understanding my disease, and the creation of it.

Probably the most amazing of Hughes' (1993) healing experiences occurred after she broke her finger in a car door.

When I opened the door, my finger came out bent to the right and then to the left, obviously broken in two places. It was numb and I could not move it...Calming myself, I put my hand over the finger and I began to ask the spiritual guides to help me. For five minutes I sat, and I felt a warmth going over my hand. When I looked again, the finger was completely straight. I could move it, but the pain was minimal. All that remained was a little bit of swelling.

That evening, Hughes had an OBE during which further healing occurred.

I was taken to a healing zone. In a blue-green room resembling a doctor's office, I lay down waiting for assistance. A spirit came in and without a word laid two bluish-green glimmering stones on my finger and left the room...When I returned to my body, the swelling was completely gone, and all that remained was a tiny scab where the skin had broken. Miracles *can* happen!

Rosalind McKnight

Rosalind McKnight is the mother of eight children, a teacher, a social worker and a prominent paranormal researcher. She was one of the original out-of-body explorers working closely with Robert Monroe, a leader of the out-of-body movement. While working at the Monroe Institute (TMI) she reportedly recorded 1,000s of OBEs.

One day in the early 1980s, McKnight (1999) suffered a severe attack of bleeding haemorrhoids. When she arrived at TMI to perform OBE research, she was given an OBE healing. McKnight narrates what happened during her session.

They are trying to help me. I feel there is someone there, but all I see are two discs and a light. I was put on one of the discs and I began spinning around. I'm still lying on the disc. The light is shining over my body, and is getting brighter. I think the light is coming from the other disc, which is up over me. It's as if I am between two energy discs.

McKnight was astonished by the 'astral technology' used to heal her.

The Invisibles then started to work with heat and color. They sent colors through me from my head to my toes, as if I were a tube. Then they concentrated on the dark areas of my body, where the pain was, beaming in purple energy. The purple changed to blue, with an occasional flash of red. Finally they put me back into the purple light and spun me on the disk again.

Afterwards, McKnight was instructed to return for a further healing. On the next occasion, she was again placed on the spinning disk.

A light beam centered down on the dark area of my body that needed the healing. Some sort of energy rods were then inserted across my abdomen one by one. After that they worked with the violet and blue energies again. Another beam came from the back of me, through my spine and up through the rods.

The 'invisible helpers' told McKnight that they would continue to send her healing energies throughout the next week to clean out the dark areas of her physical and emotional bodies. McKnight reports that the healing was highly effective. "After this second session, I felt wonderful. And the next day the hemorrhoids were completely gone". On several occasions, McKnight was given lessons on energy and breathing to help remove blockages that cause disease. She was also given information to help others.

They also focused on Bob's [Robert Monroe's] health problems and questions on a number of occasions. Bob would think a question, and my helpers would often answer it without knowing he had a question, or what it was. And they offered Bob much health advice when he openly asked for it. On one occasion they did a diagnosis and a healing for my mother living in Dayton, Ohio.

McKnight describes the above healing:

My invisible Friends are checking on my mother now and doing a diagnosis. They say there is something wrong with the gall bladder, and there is also some kind of poison in her kidneys. They are beaming energy rays into her. Now I'm going to try to do some healing on her myself. I am stepping into her energy body. I want to feel and experience the problem. I can feel the energy beams that are being directed into her body.

Bruce Moen: past life regressions

Bruce Moen is probably one of the most advanced OBEs still living. His half-dozen books detail his many highly advanced travels to distant areas of the astral planes. Moen, an engineer by profession, began having OBEs as a young man. In 1991, he attended TMI 'Lifeline Program' and became a highly proficient projector.

In the mid-1980s, Moen began to feel pain in his abdominal area. It steadily worsened until he was forced to seek medical attention. He was given a long series of medical tests, and numerous doctors were unable to diagnose his condition. Finally, he was given exploratory abdominal surgery to locate the problem.

Then came the grim diagnosis: sarcoidosis of the liver, gallbladder, and lymph system. Affecting only one person out of 900,000, sarcoidosis has no known cause and no known cure. It manifests as an uncontrolled inflammation. It is known in medical literature that 80% of patients recover in two years. The remaining twenty percent are chronic or degenerative. Most in this category die from the disease. Unfortunately, Moen found himself in this latter category, and after five years of suffering, his condition was becoming steadily worse. In 1991, he attended TMI and began having regular controlled OBEs. Many of his forays involved exploring his past-lives.

Like other projectors, Moen (1997) found that his current illness was actually connected to a past life. While out-of-body, Moen discovered a past life involving a young soldier named Joshua. During a battle, Joshua was pierced in the abdomen by a large spear. He died slowly and in intense pain. When Moen encountered him while out-of-body, Joshua was still under the impression that he was alive, and had been writhing in pain ever since he died several hundred years ago.

Moen took Joshua off the 'lower astral plane' and transported him to a higher level where he could be treated and healed by spirit guides. This simple act of uncovering the trauma of his past-life apparently caused a rapid healing of his sarcoidosis.

The memory of that wound and infection were expressing through my physical body. I had carried into this lifetime the memory of that infection from a part of myself left dying long ago. I had carried that memory into my present physical body....By retrieving parts of myself, bringing them back into memory and expressing them, I had the opportunity to heal myself. This healing could be physical, mental or spiritual depending on what each part of myself that I retrieved needed....I had absolutely no doubt my sarcoidosis was already beginning to heal. I could feel the swirling movement of energy throughout my liver and the right side of my chest.

Moen's recovery was not instantaneous. He began to feel increasingly better, but still had problems with his lungs. He then uncovered another past life memory in which he and his family were killed in a house-fire. The guilt of being unable to rescue his family combined with the memory of the pain of breathing in smoke and hot air had also been apparently 'carried' into this lifetime as ongoing trauma. By exploring the experience and releasing the guilt, his recovery became complete. Today Moen is apparently free of his sarcoidosis.

Personal experiences

While the above cases may seem incredible, the truth is that these abilities are available to anyone. I personally began researching OBEs and attempting to go out-of-body back in 1986. After several weeks of practice, I had my first OBE.

In awe of the experience, I sought to repeat it. After many years of practice, I learned to have OBEs on a regular basis. Although it took a while, I was able to visit other dimensions, meet deceased loved ones, learn about my past lives and have many other incredible experiences, including some amazing healing events.

In 2001 I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. My hands, wrists and elbows ached suddenly and intensely. Knowing of the incredible healing power of the OBE, I knew what I had to do.

The next time I was able to make it out-of-body, I grabbed my aching arm and shouted out, "Heal! Heal!" and commanded the astral energies to permeate my arm. When I woke up, I felt better, but still had pain.

My next opportunity came a few weeks later. I found myself out-of-body, when suddenly both my arms were drawn over my head by a terrific force. I could feel my sore hands and lower arms become permeated by an intense vibrating energy, much like electricity. It was a very powerful and soothing sensation.

Since I was still experiencing pain at the time, I sought another approach. I moved out of body and searched for a higher evolved being to give me healing advice (a common technique employed by advanced OBEs). I came upon a lady 'guide' and asked her, "What can I do to heal myself?" and she gave the enigmatic response, "You must climb into your crown".

Many of the higher evolved beings teach by giving little riddles, as they appear to prefer that you find the answers yourself. By "climbing into your crown", I believe the lady meant that I should work with my 'chakras'. The 'crown chakra' is a well-known metaphor for spiritual attainment in Hindu and other mystical traditions.

More recently, in December 2014, I went out of body and was able to visit a healing temple in the astral worlds. It consisted of a vast dome with beautifully carved walls formed of slender panels, and a floor composed of interlaced or thatched metallic-looking panels which moved back and forth, emitting a healing vibration.

I was placed on my back in the centre while the energies pulsed through my 'astral body'. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the structure and the sacredness of the entire experience and lost consciousness, waking up later that morning feeling incredibly refreshed and full of energy.

How to heal yourself and others

As the above cases evidence, it is indeed possible to enact a miraculous healing in an OBE. Paul Twitchell showed investigator Brad Steiger several thousand letters from people who were healed in the out-of-body state. Some of the conditions/illnesses allegedly cured with assistance from Twitchell in the OBE-state include: alcoholism, muscular dystrophy, abdominal adhesions, depression, and others. He has also appeared to numerous people following accidents and surgeries.

Steiger: "When one reads the stacks of testimonials it soon becomes apparent that thousands of people are willing to give Paulji credit for their healings". Most of the above OBEs have advice on how anybody can use the power from these higher dimensions of consciousness to heal themselves or others.

Albert Taylor (1996):

I've also been told that spiritual healing of loved ones or your own body is possible...The power of thought is a tool during the out-of-body experience that must be handled carefully and clearly. Remember, anything you can imagine you will see or experience. This alone may indicate the awesome capabilities of your soul. I have come to believe that thought is just as powerful in the physical as in the astral or beyond.

Vee Van Dam (1989):

To heal is to balance a condition which is out-of-balance – wherever there is negativity there is a need for positive input; this cancels the effects of the negativity. All dis-eases, whether physical, etheric, astral or mental, are the results of imbalances, especially towards the negative...therefore the point is to reach a balance of forces, where the negative is no longer negative, and the positive is absorbed into the structural system without adverse effect. To do this you need to heal yourself first, and as you heal yourself you will be healing the whole. Conversely, by healing any part of the whole you are also healing yourself, and yet you may not be able to heal others effectively until you have *cleared away* blockages and debris within yourself. In other words, this is a two-way system; true healing is necessarily internal and external simultaneously.

William Buhlman (1996):

Can physical diseases or illnesses be healed or improved by making energy adjustments to the nonphysical substructure of an individual? ... [These are] questions that I believe serious out-of-body explorers can answer if they are willing to devote the necessary time and energy.

There are numerous reports of people healing themselves and others when out-of-body. Often this healing is initiated by a focused thought directed to a specific area of the body....Science has proven that many of the medical problems in our society are the direct result of our emotions and thoughts. We influence our physical bodies by the way we use, move, and hold energy within us. For example, stomach ulcers, skin ailments, physical addictions and depression are often caused by our thoughts and emotional patterns.

Controlled out-of-body exploration gives us the opportunity to consciously experience the unseen energy frequencies and patterns that affect our physical body. When out-of-body we are directly experiencing our personal energy substructure, our subtle nonphysical energy system. This gives us a tremendous opportunity to make energy adjustments at the very core of our being. Energy restructuring accomplished within the nonphysical energy body must eventually manifest changes within the outer physical body.

Buhlman offers a method that anyone can use to call on these 'astral healing energies'. As he says, "Using this technique, it is possible to influence and balance the unseen energies flowing within yourself or another person". Buhlman advises that once you find yourself out-of-body:

...begin to mentally and verbally request the healing light and energy of God (the universe) to enter you. Ask for and clearly feel the positive healing energies of the universe flowing within you. Sincerely request the healing light of the universe to permeate every level of your energy body. Allow yourself to be completely immersed within the intense healing light. If you desire, verbally request the healing energy to be directed to a specific person, or within a specific part of your own physical body.

After returning to the physical body, Buhlman recommends to continue to feel the healing energy move through your physical body, and to be open to a healing taking place.

Don't underestimate the power of this technique. This form of nonphysical energy adjustment is the true cause of all physical miracles throughout recorded history. The person doing this technique is acting as an open channel for the power of God; within this state of consciousness, all things are possible.

Rosalind McKnight (1999) has been able to obtain a great deal of information from her guides about healing.

I am being told by my friends that one very important aspect of healing is for humans to become aware of all the other dimensions within and around themselves. An awareness and belief in other dimensions opens up tremendous possibilities for help and revitalization...they are saying to me that healing is the process of balance in nature; there are many in their dimensions who are either to work with the earth level to help bring this balance. It is important not only to believe in the healing process, but also to ask for it. 'Ask for it and receive.' When they are called, teams of workers come into the earth level to help in the revitalization and healing process. So remember, belief and desire are equally important. These two, together, make up faith.

McKnight was told that healings take place under many different conditions. One person can make contact with the Higher Self of another person and activate the healing process. "A group of believers asking for healing for others help to create a very special environment for healing. The group can visualize a person in the healing light. This sets the environment for even instantaneous healing at a distance".

There is a special time on the earth level when emotional and mental healing is more effective, when the 'defenses' of the person are down. This is when a person is in the sleep state. Here, the best times for healing are shortly after the person has gone to sleep, and also when he or she has been through several dream stages, a few hours into the sleep. If a group will concentrate when the soul in need is in the sleep state, the healing energies can more easily penetrate the energy levels of the individual.

McKnight was told that even aging can be reversed by mastering the inner astral levels to control the physical. McKnight's guides emphasised that "prayer and thanksgiving are the basic keys to the process of healing in all human energy systems". McKnight's guides assert:

We have said before that at the base of every human system is the principle of universal energy and knowledge. Every cell in the body is a pattern of the whole and is a universe in and of itself. All knowledge exists therein. Therefore, your bodies have a built-in healing capacity – the inner healer. But your cells must have full communication with each other in order to keep the human body functioning as it should, just as you must have full communication with each other in order to keep your planet functioning as it should. Because of the limitations in your individuals – thus on your planet – created by pollution and stress, your inner cells can have disease, with full communication blocked. Each cell in the plant life of the earth is alive with healing energy, so ingesting the earth's pure healing plants, as well as using prayer to ask for help, can stimulate your living cells to communicate with each other. When they become harmonious in purpose, healing can be instantaneous. This is all the pure God-energy that is the energy of love and the basis of all healing. Remember, the secret of life is life itself! Have reverence.

Today, TMI provides numerous tapes that patients can use to recover from injury, surgery, strokes, depression and other illnesses. Out-of-body healings may seem miraculous, but with so many cases, the patterns are clear. The healings occur in three main ways:

- 1) the patient is healed through their own efforts by direct exposure to astral healing energies which re-align the energy bodies or clear-out flow blockages causing a corresponding effect in the physical body
- 2) the patient is healed through the efforts of deceased people or living OBEs who manipulate astral energies and affect a healing
- 3) the patient is given information and advice from the astral realms to affect a healing from the physical world

Again, as out-of-body experts argue that anybody can have learn how to have an OBE, the ability to use OBEs for healing is well within the grasp of anyone willing to make the effort. It is also important to note that many of the people who have experienced an out-of-body healing have also had experiences with healing others. Clearly the force that is responsible for miraculous healings can be activated in OBEs. The reader is encouraged to apply these techniques in their own experiences to come to their own conclusions about the healing benefits of OBEs.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from these cases is recognition of the undeniable power of the mind to influence the physical body. As the cases examined show, this power extends far enough to overcome even so-called 'incurable' conditions.

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CHAPTER 12: A NEW EMERGENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS, ALEXANDER DE FOE

The out-of-body experience (OBE) is sometimes regarded rather plainly as a change in a person's visual and spatial perspective. But, the psychological implications often run much deeper than this. The OBE can open us to vast inner worlds of potential and in turn expand our self-understanding. Yet, it is often a perilous endeavour to try to talk about OBEs in purely spiritual terms due to the litany of religious and paranormal beliefs often attributed to this profound state of consciousness. Thus, I do not wish to talk here about the belief systems which might account for OBEs. Instead, I'd like to discuss the OBE as a life-enriching encounter, and how we can benefit from out-of-body explorations firsthand.

In the field of transpersonal psychology, the OBE is regarded as a transformative experience that contributes to one's personal development (De Foe, 2012, 2014). The experience can act as a catalyst for recognising that mind is not necessarily confined to a physical body, even if this is a very personal and subjective realisation. As I mentioned in my first book, 'Hearts in Transcendence' (De Foe, 2015), aside from the phenomenal characteristics associated with it, the OBE may also be considered as a metaphor for the exploration of greater worlds of human potential. Whether a person has had 100 OBEs or none at all, the implications are profound. The OBE both metaphorically and literally takes us out of finite body and into the vastest stretches of infinite mind-space.

Allow your imagination to wander here. We can draw upon many OBEr's conceptions of a broader connection to altered state experiences, by which we can come to discover vast, rich inner worlds. Consider Robert Bruce's invitation to explore a cosmic 'Greater Reality' or Anthony Peake's conception of the 'Bohemian IMAX'; a playing field for consciousness, for instance. In this chapter, I would like to present four key meditations, or reflections if you like, on how OBEs may further our understanding of this broader mind. I will also offer some thoughts on modern technologies that could help us work with out-of-body states, and conclude the chapter with a consideration on the nature of consciousness.

Tangible body and intangible mind

As my professional background is in experimental psychology, I would first like to explore what research has shown us about the malleability of our sense of self and the experience of having a subjective body. Laboratory work has demonstrated that a transfer in awareness can be facilitated from one's own body to a rubber hand or a plastic mannequin (1). Experiments along these lines are fascinating, as they have shown just how fluid our body-self boundary is. For example, by using a basic perceptual illusion called the 'Pinocchio illusion' (developed by James Lackner), we can trick ourselves into sensing that our nose is longer than it actually is. In

other instances, a person may begin to feel like a rubber hand is their own, and as though they could in fact move it. When the fake hand is threatened with a hammer, a person will often respond as though it were their very own hand, demonstrating an increased fear reflex.

Although perceptual experiments of this sort are not characteristic of traditional OBEs, as virtual reality technology advances, we will likely see many more implications of transferring awareness away from our local body and into infinite inner space. Conceptual demonstrations of this have already been made clear in high realism virtual reality gaming, and films such as the 2009 motion picture 'Avatar'. Initially, perceptual illusions may trick the senses into an altered perceptual experience, but a consequence of this may indeed become a voyage into broader consciousness states.

Perhaps one of the most interesting observations in perception research is how easily the experience of one's body-self perspective can be altered, much like in traditional OBEs. Take for instance a recent study done by Guterstam, Abdulkarim, and Ehrsson (2015), in which these authors found that shifting one's sense of embodiment to an 'invisible body' in a laboratory experiment resulted in a decrease of social anxiety. In another study, Peck, Seinfeld, Aglioti, and Slater (2013) found that embodying a virtual avatar of different skin colour helped to decrease racial bias. Recent work by Harry Farmer at the University of London has shown that having the sense of embodying an older adult's hand caused slower movements, as participants had on some level believed that their 'new' hand actually belonged to an elderly person. Although each of these experiments were predicated on tricking one's senses into associating with the new body or limb, they were quite effective nonetheless.

Let's very briefly consider some of the key differences and similarities between traditional OBEs and perceptual illusions produced in the lab. In a traditional OBE, a person often finds themselves perceiving an actual representation of their physical surroundings, in close proximity to their physical body. For instance, an individual might find themselves floating above their body which is asleep in bed, or standing opposite their physical body. In contrast, in Ehrsson's (2007) 'Out of Body Illusion', which is produced in a laboratory, a person perceives themselves from a first-person perspective standing behind their physical body.

Although spontaneous OBEs differ from an experience of disembodiment in a laboratory setting, there are some similarities between the two states. Perhaps most importantly, a person actually believes that their body has moved to a new location, or they recount experiencing re-embodiment in a separate secondary body. Distributed embodiment (see J. Waterworth & E. Waterworth, 2014) can also occur in perceptual illusions and OBEs alike, in which a person's consciousness may begin 'spreading out' into the immediate environment; they may sense their body becoming longer or shorter than it actually is. The sense of disembodiment in OBEs can also be partial or progressive, and may be linked to specific limbs or even discrete points of disconnection. Arthur Ellison, author of 'The Reality of the Paranormal' (1988), pointed out that in some OBEs "perhaps the top half sits up" (pp. 68-69) in a secondary body, while the physical body remains laying down.

Although our body is tangible and concrete, we can empirically observe that our mind has quite a large degree of free reign over our sense of embodiment. OBEs are particularly compelling, as a person seemingly recounts a realistic disconnect between body and mind; their mind is then essentially free to wander, and from their vantage point, separate from the body. Figure 5 depicts some of the variations in embodiment described above.

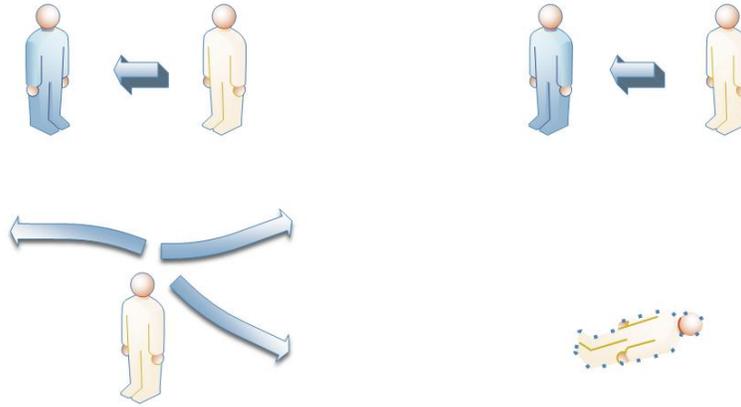


Figure 5. Four different experiences of disembodiment. Note: original body position is highlighted in yellow; newly perceived self-location is highlighted in blue. Top-left: a traditional OBE may be represented by a person floating above the physical body, sometimes with the sense of embodiment in a secondary body. Top-right: Ehrsson's 'Out-of-Body Illusion', in which a person perceives themselves standing behind their body via a camera lens connected to a head-set. Bottom-left: distributed embodiment. Bottom-right: partial disembodiment may occur in OBEs in particular limbs or body regions.

It is likely that as our technology advances, we will be able to induce OBEs and other embodiment experiences more easily. This may even be possible with do-it-yourself technology, which is quickly becoming available on the market. I'd like to explore a few modern technologies that can give us new insights into embodiment, self, and OBEs; namely, 'Google Cardboard' and the Lucia Light / PandoraStar devices. The discussion of these induction technologies will form the basis for the remainder of this chapter, which will focus on the OBE as a gateway to the broader mind.

Induction technologies

Applications compatible with Google Cardboard (see Figure 6) may make the induction of OBE states more accessible. Based on my experiences with these 'apps', I've found that virtual worlds designed by artists can create an illusory sense of disembodiment; yet, this sense is not necessarily comparable to traditional OBEs. However, as our technology advances, the threshold of mind-travel will may well extend to all forms of broader experience; sensory-perceptual, as well as potentially psi-conductive states of extra-sensory perception away from the body.



Figure 6. Google Cardboard can create the three-dimensional experience of virtual reality by using a very simple goggle setup with the use of a smart phone app.

For example, deep immersion in virtual worlds may bring about the conditions necessary for exploring mind beyond the body in vast imaginal realms. On the other hand, such apps may also serve as a perceptual cue of sort for the induction of a traditional OBE in which one experiences their immediate physical environment while out-of-body. Can virtual reality be seen as a conduit for inducing or navigating the out-of-body state? Perhaps one day this will indeed occur with the aid of these technologies.

I would like to explore the induction of OBEs using light-strobing technologies; namely, the Lucia Light Machine and the PandoraStar devices. Although these machines are relatively new, they are becoming increasingly available throughout Australia and the United Kingdom. Practitioners work with clients individually to take them on inner journeys with the aid of these technologies.

Researchers Dirk Proeckl and Engelbert Winkler developed the Lucia Light in 2009 (Figure 7). The machine applies light pulses in order to stimulate dimethyltryptamine (DMT) production in the brain, which has been associated with OBE and NDE-like states. Todd Acamesis was involved in the development of the PandoraStar (Figure 8), which first became available in 2015; it achieves a similar result as the Lucia Light, but offers a broader number of unique variations of light experience.



Figure 7. Lucia No.03 Hypnogogic Light Machine.



Figure 8. PandoraStar Device.

I have personally found that the PandoraStar can induce an altered state in which OBEs are more likely to come about. However, due to the intensity of the light experience, the out-of-body sensations I recount led to a more imaginal sense of leaving the body rather than a traditional 'physical' OBE. I recall a spatial re-orientation and sense of movement forward away from the body, but I wouldn't necessarily classify this as a common out-of-body state, which I've found usually feels much more kinaesthetic and less visually-driven. For example, after about 5-10 minutes with the PandoraStar, I noticed that my body-self boundary became more fluid, and I recall a sense of partial-limb separation. Aside from this, the experience was accompanied by vivid geometric-type imagery, as well as more detailed psychedelic-like visuals towards the end of the session.

The psychedelic-like imagery brought on by the PandoraStar may help trigger a similar type of OBE to that reported under the influence of marijuana or ayahuasca, in which a fluidity of consciousness is brought about. Again, similar to technologies such as Google Cardboard, the experience may be more dream-like than realistic, yet a tangible sense of movement away from the body indeed takes place. On that point, the immediate impressions I've had with light-strobing technologies is that they may illuminate the broader therapeutic benefits of OBE states, but not necessarily address the veridical question related to OBEs, as the latter would require the induction of OBEs that occur within the physical dimension, or at least a replica of it.

The therapeutic benefits of OBEs should not be minimised or put to the side, however, as there are broad implications of working with out-of-body states that have been illustrated in prior literature (including some of which were mentioned in previous chapters). It is clear that numerous induction technologies will help us to better understand the nature of OBEs and the

broader implications of our self-consciousness. Aside from these technologies, there are numerous other means of inducing OBEs, including hypnotic trance, visualisation practice, and meditation techniques. Each of these can be applied as self-induction techniques.

One major implication of OBEs focuses on our sense of self and our experience of having a physical body. The journal 'Trends in Cognitive Sciences' recently published a paper by Olaf Blanke and Thomas Metzinger (2009) about the question of 'minimal phenomenal selfhood'. In the paper, these authors argued that ownership of a physical body satisfies the minimum conditions for a subjective sense of self to arise. This raises an interesting point: can a sense of self exist without an association to a physical body? As virtual reality becomes increasingly more realistic, where will our minds be able to wander to?

Our awareness is generally fixed on the physical body; but, even with basic meditative practices, such as concentration and visualisation, that awareness can be moved away from the body and inward into mind-space. There does seem to be a part of our consciousness which has immense autonomy in that regard; a part that is not permanently transfixed on the physical body. At least, some OBErs have found this to be the case. More broadly, the question of phenomenal selfhood asks us to examine the relationship between our subjective sense of self and the sense of having a unique body of our own in the first place.

Reflection #1: 'Am I more than my body?'

If you close your eyes for a moment and pretend your body is no longer there, can you identify a distinct sense of self separate from the body? You might like to try this quick experiment now. If you answered 'yes', then where is that 'self' located?

A dance with consciousness

If we follow this reflection further, we can also consider that the consciousness, the 'I am' part of us, can be moved away from body-space and into internal mind-space. If our awareness can move beyond the physical self, where can we travel to? The imagination seems to be the only limit here. Thus, rather than merely asking what we can see and evidence in an OBE, we ought to sometimes ask a slightly different question, from a more practical stance: "what can I experience, and where can I go during an OBE"?

Asking such a question engages us with the very core of our conscious experience. When we posit the question related to 'where' in OBEs, we might just realise that our mind-space is limitless in its potential for inner exploration. Often, in an OBE, when we think of a place, we use mental intention to travel there, instantly, and with very little effort. For instance, it is not uncommon to hear of an OBEr travelling to the pyramids of Egypt or the farthest stretches of our galaxy by having even the slightest mental intention to visit that place while out-of-body.

My questionnaire research has shown that many OBErs commence their experience in a very realistic physical dimension in which they perceive the world as it is, but later progress into more imaginal and far-reaching stretches of the mind (2). As their OBEs progress, they begin to

explore outside of their own room, house, and further away from their immediate physical vicinity. As we explore the rich outer and inner realms of the OBE, we are able to come to a better understanding of our internal terrain, so to speak. We find ourselves with access to an infinite mind which expresses itself through a finite physiological vessel.

Psychologist William James, one of the forefathers of modern psychology, proposed that an inclusive theory of psychological science would encompass all mental states and include the entire consciousness spectrum in its course of study. Any discussion of 'states' must embrace all potentialities of human consciousness. The OBE, the near-death experience (NDE), the lucid dream (a dream in which one is aware of dreaming), are all varieties of transformative conscious experience that open us to new worlds and new potentialities on the spectrum of being. They take us deeper into that mind-space of inner realms. However, while the concept of 'lucidity' in dreams is now widely accepted by psychologists worldwide, the potential of out-of-body travel is far more contentious.

Unfortunately, rather than having the chance to learn OBE-induction skills in a formal manner, many are left to investigate the experience on their own (3). Despite us having come quite far in our openness to spiritual experience as a society, such consciousness states are sometimes still often associated with esoteric or religious phenomena. Experiences once known as 'inner voyaging', 'soul travel', and 'spiritual journeying' have long been practiced in ancient traditions. Yet, in modern times many people have lost the essential curiosity to explore their inner world via OBE-induction or waking dreams (4).

The exploration of OBEs calls for a curious and open-minded attitude. Rather than aiming to categorise our experiences into clear defining criteria, we must be willing instead to throw caution to the wind and delve into the frontiers of our personal consciousness directly. For instance, we can have veridical OBEs in a physical dimension, or vast travels into endless space-time, or even project forth our consciousness towards specific objects or people, sometimes referred to as 'mental projection' (5). It is this ever-unfolding dance with our own consciousness that draws us into a broader exploration of mind.

Reflection #2: 'Does consciousness have a boundary?'

You might like to ask yourself where the boundary between your self-consciousness and the external world arises. How about between your self-consciousness and that of other people? We tend to think of the body as the boundary for our personal awareness, but could it extend beyond that? Rather than rationally aiming to answer this question, aim to arrive at a felt personal sense.

A broader mind

So far, we've explored the notion that our sense of self is more malleable than we might believe, it is not merely contained to our immediate experience of a physical body. Although we can access vast reservoirs of unconscious content via OBEs, such as stored knowledge about

external environments, we can also experience states on the threshold of the broader super-conscious, or collective, mind.

The mythical tale of Prometheus captures the height of such aspirations. The OBEr, or NDEr, is often regarded to travel to profoundly deep internal worlds, beyond the threshold of self, and then to later return with a new wisdom or insight about reality. That insight might come in the form of veridical information, a deep founded sense of peace or acceptance, or contact with other entities or relatives, or it may involve the activation of psi faculties commonly related to post-NDE account (Sutherland, 1989).

The barrier between the tangible body and the intangible mind is temporarily crossed, as one's awareness travels beyond the confines of physical awareness. Despite whether we term this travelling process imaginal or 'real', the implications are immense. Prometheus stole the sacred flame from the heavens – yet, we have forgotten that our ability to manipulate and transfer awareness is intrinsic: the flame of consciousness arises within first and foremost. We do not need any special initiation or ability to interact with this apparently broader mind.

As philosopher Plotinus posited, we have tremendously lost ourselves in the throes of an overwhelmingly physical existence, and we have almost totally forgotten the source of our soul-essence, so to speak, the Awareness contained and hidden within. It is this Awareness itself that enlivens our inner world and opens the scope for vast internal voyages. Perhaps this is what makes the OBE such an exciting human experience: it provides the perfect vehicle for internal voyaging.

Unlike merely travelling to the pyramids in Egypt or to the rings of Saturn in outer space, we can also travel to certain states of emotional and mental experience, such travelling to a certain plane of anger or peace, for instance. For example, it is interesting to note that NDErs often report encounters with other dimensions of consciousness such as 'Heaven' or 'Hell' and may recount spiritual beings of significance (Groth-Marnat, 1994). Their consciousness appears to make contact with places once known only in our wildest dreams and our most profound myths. We are not debating here whether these states represent real or tangible realities, but rather their psychological canvas and origin of significance.

In deeper OBE and NDE states, we can visit conceptual representations of heaven, hell, distant galaxies, other worlds, and so-called higher dimensions of consciousness. These might be personal or archetypal representations, or may even have some kind of objective ground. In Fr Steven Scheier's well-known NDE, he reported being judged and cast to hell for his sins. The experience was no doubt a terrifying one, and it certainly speaks to how the OBE can illuminate certain inner worlds of experience in a very impactful way. Adept OBErs such as Robert Bruce have reported travelling to other dimensions of consciousness where anything we imagine mentally appears right before our eyes, for instance. These accounts show us that it is literally the mind that is the limit for out-of-body exploration, and we can have many broad experiences out-of-body. The question of "where can we go?" is the starting point for inner voyaging.

'Life', 'death', 'love', all take on different forms from the out-of-body perspective, and are not merely fleeting thoughts or emotions, but immersive psychological landscapes. Some OBErs

report travelling to a 'love' plane of consciousness, or a demonic plane of consciousness, in which objects take the form of the awareness or emotional properties permeating throughout them. On an emotional and spiritual level, the experiences can be very profound. Likewise, OBEs can be so realistic that a person who finds themselves travelling to a hellish, demonic world may literally interpret the experience as having visited hell. Visit any 'self-help' section in a bookshop and you will be certain to find at least one or two books in which the author describes having an OBE, NDE, or other transpersonal experience, and being convinced that they actually visited heaven, or God, or another non-physical world that they were absolutely convinced about.

Are these encounters with new psychological landscape merely the results of fantasy proneness, or do they grant us access to a broader mind? From a Jungian perspective, we may argue that OBEs are the keys that enliven the unconscious and collective mind. When we take a step back, we recognise that our experiences occur within the context of an infinite mind-space; they all arise in a play of consciousness. The physical ground of experience is inexplicably linked to an infinitely vast conscious mind. And so, the ultimate answer to the question of "where can I go?" becomes clear: "anywhere imaginable".

Reflection #3: 'Where can my awareness travel to?'

When we think of travelling somewhere, we often refer to a spatial location, but what about mind travel? Reflect on your inner experience and the potential of your consciousness to travel to new psychological landscapes of experience. How does this inform your understanding of mind-away-from-body?

A sky in formless flux

With the risk of touching on the evidentiary aspects of OBEs, it's worth mentioning that psychological landscapes encountered out-of-body may have some objective elements. Two people experiencing a very strong emotion at a similar time may create metaphorical planes for psychological meaning that can be mutually visited; not phenomenally disparate from a shared dream experience. Can two people meet in the out-of-body state? Again, I'm going to avoid the issue of delving into the mind-body debate, which was covered at depth in Section II, and instead encourage readers to explore with this possibility from a practical perspective.

It could well be that OBEs facilitate a transpersonal connection across individual minds: a temporary ground for a sky of formless potential, if you like. This can be likened to Plato's realm of ideas, which we can only grasp towards but never fully capture. Literature commonly places the emphasis on 'out there' in relation to OBEs. However, it is possible that the OBE represents one unique state of consciousness in which we actually move further inward, to access a more encompassing Self. This leads us to question where our mind is actually located, and in fact, whether anything actually travels away from the body, or whether we merely connect with a broader, more collective, mind experience.

Mental and emotional states of being seem to act as a seed for outer experience, or at least, they imbue our external experience with a certain quality, a certain realness. It is in this observation that OBEs can help us better understand the nature of human experience. What is it like being a self within a body? Or a self-out-of-body, for that matter? Perhaps the essential experience of being out of body raises the questions of utmost importance in relation to the very nature of our consciousness.

Reflection #4: 'Where is my mind located?'

Reflect on the location of your conscious mind. When we reflect on the location of the mind, we often point to the physical brain as its source of origin. Although we can measure brain activity, we still struggle with ascertaining for certain where a single thought or mental or emotional process is located. This reflection may shed light on where we actually travel to during OBEs. Like the prior reflection, it is intended to be done intuitively rather than analytically.

A new cosmology of consciousness

As I bring this chapter to a close, I would like to hint at a new cosmology of consciousness, in which the playing ground for experience may arise between minds rather than in a purely physicalistic reality. What if the origin of consciousness is independent to traditional materialist cosmology? Our conception of a Big Bang as an ultimate starting point for the Universe may not be the be-all end-all of explanations. While the theory accounts for time-space observations, where does this leave planes of consciousness that appear to rather be driven by an abstract mind? What of emotional and spiritual experiences; mental places manifesting as out-of-body realms?

The OBE can be seen as a doorway into new ways of conceptualising reality and mind beyond the linear model. This doesn't require us to read literature on quantum physics, nor to have a scientific background, but merely to explore firsthand our consciousness. Consider, what is the origin of vast psychological landscapes in the out-of-body state? Are they subjective phenomena generated by the brain, or do they have an objective ground? In order to answer this question we must arrive at a very personal felt sense, rather than only an intellectual understanding.

If we open a few boxes of matches and begin to stack each of the matches together in an ordered fashion, we may start to find that the matches have a certain coherence and order in their arrangement. There are only so many configurations possible. We understand how the matches work, we can re-arrange each match in unique patterns with the others, and so forth. But, when someone sets one of the matches on fire, all of those dynamics are challenged – a new quality is introduced. Ultimately, the fire may be the OBE in this example, this very experience challenges our foundations for a purely physical reality with mind as a by-product, and rather introduces the premise of mind as a primary driving force for Reality.

The very notion of the OBE, as well as the firsthand encounter itself, invariably asks us to consider a new emergence of consciousness. In this new emergence of self, we are called to explore the limits of our own conscious experience in every way possible. In this chapter I have argued that OBEs do not necessarily touch a place purely outside of us, but actually act as a referent for inner experience, whether we trigger out-of-body phenomena with induction technologies or simply reflect on the implications of mind-body interaction from a meditative frame of awareness. The boundaries of inner experience could well be vaster than we might ever imagine. We are left with only one question: Where to next?

Notes

1. The 'Body Swapping Illusion' was popularised by researchers Valeria Petkova and Henrik Ehrsson at Karolinska Institutet in 2008 (Stockholm, Sweden). The 'Rubber Hand Illusion' experiment was first published in 'Nature' in 1998 (Vol 391, p. 756) by researchers Matthew Botvinick and Jonathan Cohen.
2. My research has found that in a sample of 194 OBEs, 1) 59% reported an experience similar to the usual surroundings in typical reality during their OBEs, while 2) 26% reported perceiving a dimension of experience that was different from typical reality, and 3) 15% said that their experiences could not be plainly categorised in either of those two categories. These findings were first published by De Foe, Van Doorn, and Symmons (2012).
3. Perhaps the OBE can be considered a spiritual rite of passage, as for the first time a person recognises that their personal awareness is not as fixed on the local self and body as they once believed.
4. Psychologist Paul Schenk used the term 'waking dream' to refer to the conscious induction of OBE/NDE-like states via a process of hypnotic trance. Schenk (2006) argued that it is possible to replicate the consciousness state of the OBE/NDE in a therapeutic environment. See also De Foe (2012; 2014) in the reference list for an analysis of some of those techniques.
5. Mental projection is a term sometimes used to refer to an OBE-like projection of consciousness into a particular object. A person may 'enter' the dimension of that object to experience 'self-as-object', or to learn more about the experiential qualities and quintessence of a given object.

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CONCLUSION, ALEXANDER DE FOE

'Consciousness Beyond the Body' aimed to offer readers a balanced and thorough review of out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and other states of consciousness in which a person reports a separation of mind from physical body. By exploring OBEs primarily, as well as near-death experiences (NDEs) and lucid dreams in brief, this book offered a glimpse into the broader states of human consciousness that we are all capable of encountering. If this book has reaffirmed one major notion about the OBE, it is that the experience is so complex, phenomenally rich, and encompassing, that it would be remiss to simply discharge it as a brief hallucination or lapse in perception.

Recognising the nature of the OBE as a unique human experience is critical in our present climate within society in which so many people struggle with forming a connection with their true self. As the authors in this book have demonstrated, states of consciousness in which one's mind appears separate from one's physical body offer us broader perspectives on the world and new creative possibilities for exploring our greater potential. Even if the OBE does not provide immediate nor concrete answers, it sparks a very important question: is my physical body all I am? It is from this question that we can begin to delve deeper into the nature of our individual and collective experience as human beings.

When writing about OBEs, philosopher Thomas Metzinger stated: "For anyone who actually had that type of experience it is almost impossible not to become an ontological dualist afterwards". Put simply, the OBE can be such a profound experience that it often raises a number of questions that we cannot simply overlook. Despite whether an OBE occurs near-death, spontaneously while awake, or in the pre-sleep state, the experience can lead us to wonder about the fundamental nature of existence. Is the mind separate to the body? Does an ethereal soul persist after physical death? There are myriad occult writings which would argue positively towards these points, but the purpose of this book was not to provide readers with answers or beliefs about these issues – rather, it was to illuminate the importance of asking such questions in the first place.

These are questions that scholarly researchers should be asking too. Every day, more scientists are taking an academic interest in OBEs. A query via 'PsychINFO' – one of the leading databases of the American Psychological Association – yields 165 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles about OBEs. In fact, 45 of these papers were published only in the past five years. A broader search on 'Google Scholar' returns 490 entries on OBEs published just since the beginning of 2015; among these are papers, books, and academic studies.

Scientists working in more mainstream psychology fields are also taking a broader interest in the OBE than ever before. While traditionally OBE-related studies were published in special interest journals such as 'The Journal of Near-Death Studies', 'The Journal of Parapsychology', and 'The Journal of the Society for Psychical Research', research on the topic is now frequently appearing in mainstream journals with a focus on neuroscience, cognition, and consciousness studies.

Yet, there still remains so much discord amongst scholars. Researchers argue not only about whether an OBE is a hallucination, a perceptual illusion, or a spiritual experience, but also

about the very fundamental characteristics of the experience itself. There have been 100s of books published on the topic, with differing interpretations. In general, many works have created cult-like followings, with readers supporting certain belief systems and ideologies about OBEs, while discounting others. These conflicting opinions extend far beyond the central scientific-spiritualist debate and are often rife with subjective interpretations of the OBE. This book aimed to challenge some of the common presuppositions by inviting an open collaborative effort.

Although theories of the OBE have come a long way since the oversimplified spiritual notion that one's soul departs the physical body, this is not to say that we have a complete and comprehensive understanding of the experience. The authors that have contributed to this book aimed to share their own understanding and to place their perspective into context of what we currently know, and what we've yet to discover.

In Section I, Nelson Abreu, Luis Minero, Ed Kellogg, and Ryan Hurd indicated that first and foremost, the OBE deserves much more attention than it has been given by the mainstream scientific community. These chapters painted a portrait of a unique type of human experience that is often transformative in nature and can lead to a journey of self-exploration. These authors also distinguished OBEs from related phenomena, including hallucinations, lucid dreams, dissociative trauma states, and NDEs. Although Abreu, Minero, Kellogg, and Hurd do not necessarily arrive at a complete or exhaustive understanding of the OBE, they offer numerous useful theoretical and experiential frameworks from which we can begin to grasp the nature of the experience.

In particular, the social and spiritual benefits of inducing OBEs were highlighted in the first four chapters. The experience cannot be completely separated from one's socio-cultural context, and may often have implications in one's psycho-spiritual development. Researchers such as Stuart Twemlow have been suggesting for decades that psychologists and psychiatrists should approach the OBE from a transformative framework. The chapters in the first section of this book certainly reaffirm that we ought to recognise the psychological and spiritual impact of these exceptional human experiences, rather than dismissing them as meaningless or perhaps aberrative occurrences. Though NDE researchers have arrived at a similar conclusion long ago, perhaps it is time for the broader OBE community to begin recognising the similar theoretical links arrived at here.

Section II was instrumental in unpacking the most difficult and central question that this book presents: could OBEs indicate a true mind-body split, whereby consciousness in fact leaves the physical body, even if temporarily? Earlier work into OBEs by parapsychologists has certainly aimed to evaluate whether extra-sensory perception (ESP) is possible, whereby a person could obtain information nearby, or even on the other side of the planet, by presumably moving their consciousness away from their body and into a non-local perspective.

There are no simple answers to this question of ESP in OBEs, but it is a question I believe worth grappling with. Indeed, many of the frontier philosophers and scientists of our time have suggested that while ESP claims shouldn't necessarily be endorsed without question, neither

should they be rejected outright without critical investigation. In his work on OBEs, Metzinger pointed out that “centuries of reports about “ecstatic” states, soul-travel and “second bodies” as such can hardly be doubted”. On the other hand, sceptics have argued that these centuries of accounts are just that: accounts with no verifiable basis. After all, the gold standard in science involves blind, randomised, controlled, and repeated laboratory-based research. So, with that in mind, what are we to make of the current state of research on reports of so called veridical perception?

Foremost, we have to be careful of making a reasoning error and dismissing accounts outright simply because they are self-reported, or because they fail to meet the best practice standards of science. In relation to the latter, it’s important to remember that research in any field rarely does. At the very least, there are three logic tests we could apply prior to rejecting anecdotal OBE evidence of ESP, namely: 1) volume, 2) quality, and 3) impact.

First of all, we can consider the volume test, or ‘where there’s smoke, there’s fire’ test. Organisations such as The Society of Psychical Research and Near Death Experience Research Foundation continually receive anecdote submissions in which people write about phenomena that they could not explain, ranging from prophetic dreams, to encounters with the numinous, to verified OBEs, and many psi-related narratives in between.

The volume test asks us to consider the following question: could one of these cases be true? Just one? The alternative sceptical argument poses that all verified cases of OBE must either constitute fraud, confusion, or embellishment. In considering the volume test, we must ask ourselves whether every single instance can be disqualified, or whether there may in fact be some truth and validity to certain accounts, however few.

The volume test does not require us to dismiss outright that there is no fraud whatsoever, but it does ask us how open-minded we’d like to become about people’s accounts, especially considering the sheer volume of reported OBEs that have been verified around the world. In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, Robert Peterson and Preston Dennett pointed out several well-known and compelling accounts. These authors examined cases documented by Charles Tart, Edmund Gurney, Frederic Myers, Frank Podmore, Robert Crookall, and Hector Durville, in addition to direct reports such as those of S. R. Wilmot, Vincent Turvey, Sylvan Muldoon, Joan Hartmann, and of course Peterson’s and Dennett’s personal accounts, among the many others presented. In those chapters, readers were asked to examine the anecdotal evidence in order to arrive at their own conclusions. They were asked to think about whether these numerous cases do in fact have something to offer in support of the ESP argument.

The second logic test worth mentioning is that of quality. In Chapter 7, Graham Nicholls pointed out that when we hear the word ‘anecdote’, we may be more likely to dismiss the reported account, as we equate the meaning of the word with stories or gossip. Just as it is true of the words ‘theory’ and ‘hypothesis’, the word ‘anecdote’ is used in an entirely different way in casual chit-chat to its use within scientific circles. As Nicholls noted, a case of verified OBE perception that is documented by a researcher is much more compelling than a mere story or rumour told in social circles. Therefore, not all anecdotes are created equal, as it were. There are

varying degrees of controls and sources of validation, as well as other factors that contribute to the differing levels of quality in the evidence. As the reader, you will likely have come to this realisation yourself when canvassing the reports presented in Section II.

It should also be reiterated that anecdotal reports serve an important role in OBE research. First of all, it is essentially impossible to study the OBE without relying on anecdotes, as we have been discussing throughout this book an inherently human experience. Secondly, anecdotal descriptions of the OBE may help us to better understand which part of the self, if any, leaves the physical body.

Nicholls also critiqued the recently published AWARE research study, led by Sam Parnia. Parnia's study examined the veridical perceptions of those who had an NDE after being admitted into the cardiac arrest unit at five different hospitals. Out-of-body perception of events happening real-time were reported by a small number of the participants. However, strong evidence of ESP was not found. As Nicholls noted, there were a number of limitations to that research; for instance, cardiac arrest survivors likely did not know what to look for [provided they had an OBE], and targets were only present in 22% of the rooms in which cardiac events took place during the research timeframe.

Perhaps, as Nicholls argued, it is important for researchers to gain a better idea of the type of perception that occurs during OBEs. Namely, are OBEr's perceptions and sensations during their experiences comparable to physical perception and sensation? There is a common misconception among scientists working in the field of anomalistic psychology that physicalistic principles are inherently transferable to instances of ESP. Yet, it is well-known that ESP-type phenomena are difficult to capture using traditional instruments. On that point, what I found particularly fascinating many of the chapters are the repeated instances of well-documented experiences of veridical perception by some of the authors themselves. Thus, perhaps seeking out adept OBEr's who are capable of recollecting their experiences in depth may be a better research avenue that relying on the spontaneous accounts of NDEr's or chance OBE occurrences.

An alternative idea was presented by Jurgen Ziewe in Chapter 8, in which the OBE landscape was considered as a 'home ground' for consciousness. Ziewe's intriguing diary account raises again the question of perception during OBEs. As he suggested, perception in OBE states could be more metaphorical and abstract rather than plainly tangible and material at times. The diary experience also reminded me of the concept of 'transliminality' developed by the late Australian parapsychologist, Michael Thalbourne. That idea suggests that information may flow freely between varying states of consciousness, such as between the conscious, unconscious, and collective mind; for lack of a better phrase, we may tap into certain information fields outside our own body space.

As Ziewe rightfully pointed out, OBEs that take us into home ground terrain may include a deeper and more meaningful connection with Self, spiritually significant states, or other sources of insight that we could perhaps term 'trans-rational'. Those states of consciousness may not be necessarily verifiable, yet they may be highly valuable and meaningful, both emotionally and spirituality. On that basis, we could evaluate OBEs with the third logic test I

mentioned earlier: based on their personal impact. By virtue of transformational impact, a person may not feel a need for a rational explanation of the experience, but rather may well be satisfied with the emotional and spiritual content of such an encounter. After all, who are we to doubt the subjective significance of OBEs that may be deemed personally enriching and psychologically transformative? Certainly, OBErs in these cases have discovered some degree of personal proof or meaning that cannot be discounted without inadvertently devaluing their unique experience.

A basic series of logic tests such as volume, quality, and impact, reveals that there is more to the OBE "than meets the eye", to use Luis Minero's wording. Although in recent decades the empirical work in this domain has been limited, I believe that OBE research can contribute as much, if not more, than the remote viewing, NDE, and mediumship research has done in this field of inquiry. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the OBE is by no means the only experience in which a person may report that their consciousness has left their body, but it does appear to be the quintessential experience of this kind. The experience strikes the heart of the dualism debate. In spite of this, clearly a lot of experimental work still needs to be done before we can conclude one way or the other about the role of OBEs in exploring ESP and, more broadly, the survival question. One thing is for certain though: the OBE is a fascinating human experience in its own right, whether we choose to pursue the ESP-related implications or not.

Section III led on from Jurgen Ziewe's conception of the OBE as a gateway into limitless possibilities for conscious experience, offering a number of hands on applications for readers to explore. Robert Waggoner and Clare R Johnson's chapters worked quite well together as an opener for this section – both authors described the OBE as one form of altered consciousness experience on a spectrum of possible states. Johnson's chapter canvassed similarities between OBEs, lucid dreams, and other states. In particular, her techniques offered readers some excellent starting points for overcoming fear related to their OBEs and exploring the vast nature of the environments commonly encountered. Following from Johnson's chapter, Waggoner developed a Shifting States Hypothesis and offered readers additional suggestions for working with altered states. Though Waggoner's chapter focused on OBEs and lucid dreams, I am certain that the new model of interaction between various states will be exceptionally useful for readers in coming to a greater understanding of consciousness beyond the physical body. I believe Waggoner's novel contribution will also assist researchers in working together to conceptualise variations of conscious experience, rather than attempting to study lucid dreams and OBEs as unrelated occurrences.

In the second half of Section III, Preston Dennett canvassed a number of accounts related to the miraculous healing potentials reported by OBErs. Dennett also discussed some of his reasoning for the seeming relationship between having OBEs and psychological/physical well-being. Though researchers such as Greyson and Sutherland have shown that NDEs often have a positive impact on one's self-concept, spiritual growth, and mental health, this area of investigation has received little attention in OBE research, and Dennett definitely sets the scope for readers to explore this area further. In my chapter, I endeavoured to tie the philosophical implications of OBEs to the practical applications of the experience. I explored a number of

personal reflections as well as modern technologies that have been used to explore altered states.

So, where does all of this leave us? I hope that as the reader you have come to a better understanding of the OBE; its origins, historical significance, verified accounts, research implications, and personal applications. Despite the range of theories, evidence, and analyses presented here, as many of the authors have posited, the most critical aspect of OBEs is the personal firsthand experience, rather than the analysis or literature surrounding the topic. I often encourage people to experiment with meditation, OBEs, and other altered states personally, as a single personal experience is worth much more understanding than that derived from reading a thousand books on a topic.

To conclude, I would like to note that debate, conversation, and collaboration is key in the study of OBEs and other altered states. It is crucial that practitioners such as psychologists and other clinicians become more aware of widespread observations on OBEs related to incidence, veridical factors, and therapeutic benefits. It is also important that as a global community we continue discussing and debating mind-body dynamics in general. My greatest hope for this book is that it will re-ignite this very important conversation, not only in special interest groups, but in our broader society. More fully understanding the OBE may indeed pave the path for exploring the final frontier: human consciousness.

CLOSING REMARKS, ANTHONY PEAKE

On completing my reading of this book I was reminded of the Keats' poem 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'. In this Keats' writes:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific – and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise –
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

In 1816 Keats had read a translation of Homer by George Chapman. He felt that this work had opened up new vistas of understanding for him and he was keen to convey this sense of discovery and wonderment by using powerful similes. In the poem he likens the experience to the discovery of a new planet or the first time Europeans caught sight of the Pacific Ocean on a Western horizon. On experiencing the world from a position outside of the body an individual will similarly "fall silent on a peak in Darien" as they take in a seemingly impossible new vantage point, a view that changes all previous held beliefs and assumptions about the true nature of reality; that the mind and the body can exist separately from each other.

With the possible exception of those individuals intellectually wedded to a philosophical concept known as "eliminative materialism" (which denies the existence of any form of self-referential consciousness) each human being (and possibly all higher animals), each sentient consciousness is aware of the fact that they are a perceiver of perceptions and that that locus of perception has an independence from that being perceived. "Self-referential" consciousness, which is possibly an exclusively human trait, is an awareness of selfhood, a selfhood that has a narrative history regarding the past and anticipatory reasoning regarding the future. In other words, it is aware of itself within the flow of time and can conceive of sensory information beyond the present moment.

However, this focus of awareness is a mystery and cannot be explained by any process known to modern science. Our present scientific paradigm is based on a very simple, but powerful, philosophy. We can, by breaking anything down to its constituent elements, understand how it works. For example, by breaking an automobile engine down into its bits and pieces a person with a basic understanding of engineering, chemistry and physics will be able to understand how that automobile engine can create movement and speed. A biologist with knowledge of chemistry and chemical processes can take a plant apart and can understand how the plant metabolises energy from sunlight.

This process of breaking the things down to understand how they function is the most powerful contribution Western science has made to our understanding of the physical universe. This process is known as materialist reductionism. Physical objects can be reduced to their constituent parts and in doing so give up their secrets. This has worked well over the last three or four hundred years. However, there is one thing that is immanent in the world that defies such reductionism, and that is because it is non-material and therefore cannot lend itself to a reductionist analysis. That 'something' is what is processing these words from shapes on a page

on a computer screen into images and ideas, it is that something that is central to each and every one of us. It is called self-referential consciousness.

So let us apply the tenants of materialist-reductionism to consciousness. Our technology is sufficiently advanced for us to be able to monitor the brain and, in doing so, we can isolate what parts of the brain do what. Modern techniques such as PET scans, CAT scans and other machines can show exactly what parts of the brain light up when certain actions are considered, or certain perceptions are perceived. Radical surgery and brain injuries have shown us where memory is processed (but not stored) and how personality can be changed by damage to certain areas of the brain.

However, this is still an overview. It does not tell us how self-referential consciousness is created. There is something in my head that looks out on the world. It has memories, hopes, fears, loves, hates, ambitions and many other traits. It is self-aware and is keen to understand itself and where it has come from. How can I "be"?

Let us try and apply the materialist-reductionist model to the brain in an attempt to find consciousness. We need to break down the brain into its basic building blocks.

If you look at a section of brain matter you will discover that it is composed of neurons, or nerve cells. At birth the brain contains around 100 billion of these cells. Each neuron has a cell body and tens of thousands of tiny branches called dendrites. These dendrites receive information from other neurons. Each neuron also has what is called a primary axon. This is a projection that can travel great distances across the brain. Each neuron makes contact with each other neuron at a point known as the synapse. The neurons do not actually come into contact with each other. At each synapse is a tiny gap between it and its neighbour. These "synaptic gaps" are extremely short, about 200 to 300 angstroms across. One angstrom equals one hundred millionth of a centimetre.

Messages are transferred across the brain via these synapses. Depending upon what you are thinking certain synapses transfer electric current between them in the form of calcium ions. This is called 'firing'. Some synapses will fire and others will not. So rather similar to traffic lights on red or green, the flow of messages across your brain can be channelled in various directions. The width of these synaptic gaps is so small that they are approaching the atomic scale of dimensions.

At the end of each synapse is a receptor site. These are of many different types and each one is designed to work with one of a number of internally generated chemicals known as neurotransmitters. There are two types of neurotransmitter in that they can be excitatory or inhibitory. In simple terms the excitatory variety stimulate the brain to do something and the inhibitory variety calm it down. Over 100 of these have now been identified. The major excitatory neurotransmitters are glutamate, norepinephrine, and epinephrine. With regards to the inhibitory variety, GABA and serotonin are the major players. Those that bring about a response in the adjoining receptor site are technically known as agonists and those that block a response are known as antagonists. With regards to this book, there is another major neurotransmitter

that facilitates both excitatory and an inhibitory response in neighbouring receptor sites. This substance is known as dopamine.

So what have we found? An amalgamation of inanimate molecules reacting to a sea of similarly inanimate electrons. In other words, chemistry reacting with electricity. It seems that the best answer we can find is that consciousness is an "epiphenomenon" of brain processes. It just kind-of happens at some point when a crucial level of complexity is reached. By the addition of one more process, one more molecule, one more electron, consciousness just pops out of nowhere. This reminds me of the cartoon by Sidney Harris in which two scientists stand in front of a blackboard. On one side of the blackboard is a mass of mathematical notation and on the other is another mass of mathematical notation. Linking them is the phrase "then a miracle occurs". The older scientist points at the comment and says to the creator of the formulae "I think you should be more specific here in step two".

There is a growing band of scientists who believe that the only viable explanation as to how inanimate molecules and electrical impulses can create a self-referential consciousness is that the brain does not "create" consciousness, it "receives" it. This is analogous to a radio or TV receiver. The source of the TV programme viewed on the screen is not inside the back of the TV in same way that the radio announcer is not in the radio. An even better analogy is the location of the internet. It is not located in your computer hard drive but is supplied on a needs/demand basis. It exists in an informational "field" that surrounds us.

This radical model is known as "Orchestrated objective reduction" and it was proposed as a specific response to a famous question raised by Australian philosopher David Chalmers. Chalmers argued that with regards to consciousness there are two problems: The first is understanding how the brain actually works, its neurochemistry and its physiology. To gain understanding of how the brain does what it does is what Chalmers calls the "soft problem". By this he means that our present scientific paradigm has the tools to eventually crack this mystery. However, solving the soft problem will only supply us with an overview. The solution cannot tell us how self-referential consciousness is created. There is something in my head that looks out on the world. It has memories, hopes, fears, loves, hates, ambitions and many other traits. It is self-aware and is keen to understand itself and where it has come from. How can I "be"?

Chalmers calls this question the "Hard Problem". This demands answers regarding the true nature of the recipient of this brain-presented information; the entity inside the head which evaluates and reacts to these stimuli. Until the "Hard Problem" is answered, our understanding of the workings of the universe will continue to be incomplete.

The evidence presented in this book supports the belief that consciousness is processed by the brain but not created by it and, in doing so, gives us a totally new area of enquiry. One that may, just may, answer the hard problem and, in doing so, open up whole new vistas of understanding, allowing not just a small group of individuals but the whole of humanity to be able to stand "silent upon a peak in Darien".

Anthony Peake is a writer who deals with borderline areas of human consciousness, he has written several books, including his most recent work written in conjunction with Professor Ervin Laszlo, 'The Immortal Mind: Science and the Continuity of Consciousness Beyond the Brain'.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Nelson Abreu

Currently, some are studying only the brain and hope that the solution to consciousness will emerge by solving the individual mysteries of its working. Some of this research suggests the OBE can be triggered by physiological means. A closer collaboration between lucid projectors and more researchers that employ more “conventional” methodology would help determine whether the experiences produced by physiological induction are actually OBEs or not. If some of these methods are effective, this may be an important advance for facilitating OBEs without harmful side-effects. More people having OBEs means it is easier to perform experiments involving remote target OBEs and shared OBEs, which typically require many trials to get a few “hits”.

Others investigate beyond the body, typically by themselves, away from academia or peer review. It would be more fruitful if there was greater collaboration between OBE investigators, from developing a common language to evaluating each other’s methodologies and results, seeking relative consensus on what works and what seems more universally valid.

The future points to the dialogue between “conventional” and more subjective methods. If consciousness is not produced by the brain, how does consciousness establish two-way communication with the brain? Studying this possible intermediate level could also open up more interest into OBE and psi research in general. Reviving some of the physical detection studies performed in the past could also provide replicable, physical evidence that a real phenomenon is taking place.

Developing and promoting applications and positive effects of OBEs – which includes scientific evaluation of these through psychological and physiological tests – will also provide greater traction for the science and practice of OBEs. The main advances in research, as I see it, will come as more researchers learn to project. This way, scientists can make firsthand observations individually and at times even in groups.

Preston Dennett

While OBE research has been ongoing for decades, it has now evolved to an important new stage. For the first time, numerous OBEers across the world claim the ability to have repeated OBEs. This allows a wonderful opportunity for future researchers. By working closely with established OBEers, it should be possible to build a body of evidence that conclusively proves the validity of OBEs. Armed with this type of evidence, it will be easier to convince a sceptical public of the importance of this subject. The future of OBE research can focus on numerous areas, including (but not limited to) exploring distant astronomical bodies, searching for missing

persons, diagnosing and treating health conditions, facilitating the death and dying process, providing a communication link between the physical and non-physical worlds, and much more.

The body of evidence supporting OBEs can only continue to grow. Already there is enough evidence to provide a solid foundation for teaching this subject. OBEs seem to be a natural human condition that unfolds as people evolve along the spiritual path, which means it can only become more popular. In the future, I foresee that OBEs will be taught in mainstream schools and become widespread. OBEs have the potential to unite all of humanity in a way we've never seen before. As more and more people learn to have OBEs, humanity will become increasingly connected, and we can learn to move towards peace, prosperity and health for everyone on Earth. Optimistic, yes...but I think we can do it.

Ryan Hurd

I'm hopeful about the future of the study of the extraordinary. No longer are scientists waiting for a secure tenure to investigate these perennial interests. In the last ten years alone, for example, research into psi, mediumship and other aspects of anomalous psychology has seen increased public interest as well as tantalising new findings that are backed with a new generation of capable researchers. Due to the same socio-cultural trends, OBE studies seem poised to reach that "sticking point" as a mature field of inquiry. OBEs at their core are about the human ability to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously. To that point, similar to lucid dreaming, I see OBE studies as a unique form of inquiry in which success for researchers involves not maintaining distance but rather participating more fully. Also like lucid dreaming, teaching participants how to have OBEs may be as important as investigating the formal properties of the phenomena. I envision lab studies complemented with open-source protocols that can be tested and refined by independent practitioners and interdisciplinary teams the world over. With multiplicity, there is open-mindedness, tolerance and flexibility in the face of ambiguity – all qualities of mind that we would be wise to promote in the 21st century.

Clare R Johnson

The future belongs to our children. In the rainbow of conscious experience, every altered state, whether it is a dream, an out-of-body experience, a waking trance or a bodiless lucid experience, needs to be talked about. Children need to know that these things happen. They need to know that everything from nightmares to suddenly feeling yourself shooting out of your body are part of normal human experience. They need to know how to embrace and transform such experiences.

I have read so many accounts of children having OBEs and other interesting experiences such as 'seeing people who aren't really there', or meeting divine beings in dreams. Sadly, all too often children have nobody with whom to share this experience until a researcher happens along thirty to fifty years later and asks them about it. Often they have privately cherished their experience, but just as often the experience made them feel they were abnormal, especially if a

trusted adult reacted negatively to it when they divulged it. It is time to change this taboo in culture.

It would be wonderful to see a whole spectrum of states of consciousness discussed in classrooms far sooner than university level, and it would be helpful to have relevant literature and media geared towards young audiences. When we nurture children and teach them empowering tools with which to 'surf the rainbow of conscious experience', this more than anything else flings open the doors to deeper, wider consciousness research. If we can give one gift to the next generation, let it be the key to diverse, happy, creative states of consciousness!

Note: At present Clare is co-editing a book on children's dreams and nightmares which also looks at OBEs, precognitive and telepathic dreams, lucid dreams, and experiences in sleep which teach us more about time, space and the universe. The goal of this book is to share practical advice with adults working with these less-talked-about life experiences with children. 'Sleep Monsters and Superheroes: Empowering Children through Creative Dreamplay' will be published by ABC-CLIO (Praeger) in 2016.

Ed Kellogg

I wrote my chapter comparing OBEs and LDs in part to provide an empirical demonstration of the applied value of phenomenological methodology, in the hopes that future researchers and experiencers who might decide to make use of it themselves. To me it seems critical that future research in this area makes greater systematic use of descriptive techniques, especially in the gathering of first-hand phenomenological reports from experienced practitioners.

Although I see my own observations as significant, the OBE phenomenology I've shared does not seem definitive even for me, let alone for others. Having a critical mass of systematically descriptive reports from a broad range of experienced practitioners might go a long way in clearing away confusion in this area, and in finding solid common denominators. It would also help in the determination of other significant variables, for example to see whether OBEs might differ in significant ways depending on the sex of the experiencer.

Also, with the availability of more systematically descriptive reports, new phenomena might come to light, or at least come into clearer focus. For example, I've experienced three phenomenologically different bodies. A physical body that feels the densest and most stable; an OBE body that feels quasi-physical, and can vary in density; and a dream body, the most subtle and mutable of the three. Reading certain details in the accounts of others reporting on higher spiritual experiences makes me wonder whether they might have transitioned into a higher and more subtle fourth body. But without the availability of suitably detailed reports one can only speculate, and researchers usually end up categorising such experiences as LDs or OBEs for lack of suitable alternatives. Hopefully, this situation will change as we expand our phenomenological understanding of what having an 'OBE' really involves.

Luis Minero

I think that the effort of trying to provide more conventional data is a worthy one. However, since the most interesting OBEs go well beyond the physical reality, conventional data and classic measuring will fall short of those at the moment. Thus, I think that like dreams, the content of which cannot be proven in a laboratory, more should be invested in helping people develop their own skill in order to have more individuals experiencing these realities. This will create a greater consensus regarding the OBE, and once a threshold of critical mass is reached, the idea of proof will become moot. In the same way in which nobody is actually trying to prove the content of dreams. Thus, the focus will turn into what the OBE can be used for, what kind of information we can access with it, and how much we can benefit with the use of this tool.

Graham Nicholls

To move forward in our understanding of the out-of-body experience, I feel in many ways we need to start at the beginning. Much of the research that has been done has focused on veridical perceptions [seeing signs placed on monitors etc.] before we have a clear understanding of the way people 'see' during an OBE. It is clear to me from a review of my own OBEs and those within the literature, that many people experience variation both in tone, colour, perspective, and proportion. The next step in my view will be to build a typology of the OBE, a greater understanding of the experience, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses. I feel we also need to look at the circumstances under which OBEs generally occur in those who, like me, have them on a regular basis. Through this greater understanding we can move towards experiments that will work with the experience and move us closer to a powerful understanding of what the OBE is, and possibly even explore the hard problem of consciousness itself.

Robert Peterson

As OBEs expand our understanding of consciousness, it often feels like we get glimpses behind the curtains of life. It's easy to become arrogant or cocky, revelling in our new-found knowledge. Yet the further I get in the exploration of OBEs, the more I realise the inadequacy of my own human senses, memory, and ability to understand. The more I know, the more I know that I don't know. I see an ever-expanding vastness of human spirit and the potential for further exploration. I sometimes get discouraged that modern science does not take OBEs seriously. At the same time, I'm encouraged by the fact that OBEs seem to be getting more prevalent, and as they do, the mountain of veridical data grows.

My hope is that scientists and clinicians will someday take notice and study the phenomenon seriously. Methods should be developed to make it reproducible in the laboratory. Once reproducible, scientists can design experiments to rule out other more conventional means of acquiring the data. Is something extrasensory happening? Can the physical senses be ruled out? I remember one interesting experiment from the 1980s where subjects were told to travel to a remote location and "look" through a special optical apparatus

(a set of mirrors and lenses) in the OBE state and report what they "saw". A computer randomly chose a target and changed colours and lenses. If the data was acquired through some kind of visual sense, the subject should report one thing (which can later be checked), but if it was acquired telepathically or clairvoyantly, perception would be entirely different. This is just one example of how future scientists can approach double-blind experiments to narrow down what exactly OBEs are. That will lead to hypotheses, theories, conclusions, research papers, and a new scientific understanding of consciousness.

Robert Waggoner

First recommendation: The more precise classification of states of consciousness, such as lucid dreaming and OBEs, would do much to improve the scientific investigation into these phenomena. Having a set of clear phenomenological and physiological/neurological characteristics regarding these two states would speed up the investigation and improve the data collection. As things stand, some lucid dream researchers may inadvertently include OBEs into their data samples (and vice versa), due to an imprecise classification, which pollutes their data samples and results in errant information.

Second recommendation: Creating experiments which might offer an evidential framework to understand 'where' OBEs occur. Though some insist the OBE occurs in the consensus waking physical reality, and point to evidence in support of that position, others can point to evidence in support of some other viewpoint. By creating experiments more thoughtfully, evidence may emerge which settles the question as to whether the person experiencing the OBEs exist in waking physical reality, alternate parallel realities, probable realities and so on.

Third recommendation: Developing easier induction techniques for shifts in consciousness that enable larger segments of the population to have firsthand experience with these unique states. With the idea that more explorers potentially lead to more discoveries, easy induction techniques broaden the population of investigators. By working on biochemical, electromagnetic and mental induction techniques which easily induce new states of consciousness, like the OBE, it opens the field up for greater personal, cultural and scientific exploration.

Jurgen Ziewe

I would like to see a searchable database of OBE reports submitted by experiencers, so inputting certain keywords would yield reports which could be screened for consensus and other data, which would give us a more comprehensive insight into people's experiences, how they are triggered, their content, and other valuable information that can be used for research purposes. This may allow us to arrive at new insights into the nature of non-physical experiences and realities.

APPENDIX B: ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nelson Abreu, BSEE

Nelson Abreu (BS Electrical Engineering) was born in Portugal and currently resides in Los Angeles. He co-founded inspiration and wellness think-tank 'International Applied Consciousness Technologies' (I-ACT) and electrical worker-owned cooperative 'Ohm Institute'. Nelson currently serves as Vice-Director of Research and Scientific Communication at the International Academy of Consciousness (IAC). He has taught and volunteered at IAC since 2003, which offers the award-winning 'Consciousness Development Program' on OBEs, chi, psi and personal development.

He began experiencing and studying OBEs in 1998 while at Nova High School where he co-founded a related student club, a precursor to University of Florida's Science of Self Club. The UF club organised a number of symposia and the first curricular psychology course on consciousness prominently featuring the OBE. He has presented at U. of Arizona, Utah Valley State College, U. of Miami, Florida International U, Miami-Dade College, U. of Florida, Penn State; in California, Tennessee, Texas, Canada, Mexico, Portugal, and Australia.

He has served as Student Representative for 'Society for Scientific Exploration' and is a member of the ICRL consortium where he contributed to the 'Filters and Reflections' anthology. He is also a contributor to the 'Out-of-Body Experiences' anthology edited by Rodrigo Montenegro. His studies have encompassed consciousness and biological evolution, consciousness and physics/engineering, out-of-body experience, bioenergy and psychometry. You can find his work in 'Journal of Consciousness'; 'Journal of Consciousness Studies'; SSE's 'The Explorer'; 'AutoRicerca'; 'Syntropy' and several essays in IAC's Blog.

Nelson Abreu co-developed an acoustical method for training and induction of the vibrational state and the OBE with physicist and musician Thomas Orr Anderson as well as the punctuated progressive procedure for OBEs.

<http://www.conscioustech.com/>

Preston Dennett, Author and Researcher

Preston Dennett has been involved in researching UFOs and the paranormal since 1986. He first became interested in OBEs following the death of his mother. After reading Monroe's first book, 'Journeys out of the Body', he tried the recommended exercises to induce OBEs; to his surprise, they worked. Preston learned to go out-of-body, explore the physical world, walk through walls, visit distant locations, travel to the Other Side, meet deceased loved ones, rescue lost souls, talk with spirit guides, learn about past-lives, visit the Akashic Records, go to healing temples, and much more. OBEs soon transformed for his life, and like most OBEs, he realised how important it was to educate the public about this subject.

In 2004, Preston's book, 'Out of Body Exploring: A Beginner's Approach' was published by Hampton Roads, detailing his experiences. Since then he has written articles on the subject, led many workshops and presentations, and appeared on countless radio shows to talk about the subject. He continues to have OBEs and is working on another book on the subject. Preston is convinced that anyone can have OBEs and that they are a natural part of the human condition. They are so powerful and transformational and healing that their importance cannot be overstated. He will continue to work hard to progress in his own OBE adventures, and to teach others how they too can travel out-of-body and experience the phenomenon themselves.

<http://prestondennett.weebly.com/>

Ryan Hurd, Consciousness Researcher and Author

Ryan Hurd is the founder of DreamStudies.org, a website dedicated to sleep, dreams, and the imagination. His books include 'Lucid Immersion Guidebook: A Holistic Blueprint for Lucid Dreaming' and 'Sleep Paralysis: A Guide to Hypnagogic Visions and Visitors of the Night' as well as a number of e-books. He also co-edited, with Kelly Bulkeley, the two volume reference edition 'Lucid Dreaming: New Perspectives on Consciousness in Sleep'.

As a researcher, he has presented and published papers on sleep paralysis, lucid nightmares, and the application of dreaming for uncovering researcher bias and novelty. Most recently, he has been investigating the effects of ritual drivers on lucid dreaming, including nootropics, technological assists and classic apotropaic devices such as amulets and talisman.

As an educator, Ryan has presented to a wide range of audiences, including invited lectures for 'TEDMED' and Stanford University. He teaches both online and in person about the anthropology of consciousness, lucid dreaming and, in general, the role of the extraordinary in our lives.

Ryan is a member of the International Association for the Study of Dreams, the American Anthropological Association and the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness.

<http://dreamstudies.org/>

Clare R Johnson, Ph.D., Author and Researcher

Dr Clare Johnson's lucid dreaming practice exploded when she was a university student, along with almost nightly sleep paralysis and spontaneous out of body experiences from both sleeping and waking states. She became deeply interested in consciousness exploration and in 1995 she did an undergraduate project on lucid dreaming. This eventually led her to become the first person to do a PhD on lucid dreaming as a creative tool (University of Leeds, 2006). Through her academic and personal investigations, she began to grasp the immense creativity which becomes available to us when we fearlessly enter unfamiliar states of consciousness. This led her to write two novels, 'Breathing in Colour' and 'Dreamrunner' (Little, Brown, 2009 & 2010) under her novelist name of Clare Jay.

Dr Johnson's Lucid Writing technique can transform nightmares, dissolve creative blocks and initiate healing. Like a waking version of lucid dreaming, it can have similar therapeutic effects, including helping those who have had frightening OBEs to transform their fear.

A Board Director for the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD), Dr Johnson has spoken at conferences and international multi-media platforms for the past decade on many aspects of sleep and the role of lucid dreaming, OBEs and lucid void states in healing and dying. Her retreats combine lucidity tools and creative dream-work with yoga, art and nature walks, and she is currently writing her first nonfiction work on lucid dreaming, and co-editing a book on children's dreams and nightmares with US publisher ABC-CLIO.

<http://deepluciddreaming.com>

Edwin Welles Kellogg III, Ph.D.

Ed Kellogg earned his Ph.D. in biochemistry at Duke University. He held a postdoctoral position at the Membrane Bioenergetics Laboratory at U.C. Berkeley, and later directed the program at the Air Ion Laboratory (also at U.C. Berkeley). He has published over 100 papers in fields as diverse as the biochemistry of aging, bioelectricity, optimal health practices, voluntary controls, general semantics, parapsychology, lucid dreaming, and the phenomenology of consciousness. He has published his scientific work in peer reviewed journals such as the Journal of Neurochemistry, the Journal of Biological Chemistry, the Journal of Gerontology, Nature, Photochemistry and Photobiology, Toxicology Letters, the Journal of Bioelectricity, and the International Journal of Biometeorology.

From 2002 to 2005 he created, organised, and hosted the International Association for the Study of Dreams' first four online PsiberDreaming Conferences, and he currently serves on IASD's Board of Directors. He has presented papers and workshops on topics such as the lucidity continuum, lucid dream healing, lucid mutual dreaming, lucid dream alchemy, psychopompic dreaming, psi-dreaming, and OBEs.

Ed has recorded and indexed well over 35,000 dreams, several thousand of which qualify as at least minimally lucid (knowing that one dreams while dreaming), and around a hundred OBEs, some of which occurred spontaneously, but many of them incubated intentionally. In respect to his own dream-work, he writes: "I take a phenomenological approach to dreaming, in which I try to explore and to describe dreaming experience with a minimum of presuppositions as to its nature".

<http://lucidbeing.com/>

Luis Minero

Born in 1972, Luis Minero graduated with honours in Chemistry from Florida International University. He began studying and developing his abilities in paranormal phenomena in his early teens. After becoming a volunteer with the International Academy of

Consciousness (IAC) in 1995 in Miami, Florida, he began giving classes on OBEs, paranormal phenomena and spiritual growth in 1996, including at the college level (Miami-Dade College) from 1997 to 2002. Minero is the author of the book 'Demystifying the Out-of-Body Experience', which helps to explain non-physical realities, as well as to teach individuals how to develop their OBE abilities. Since he speaks English, Spanish, Portuguese, and German, he has lectured on various topics related to the OBE in several cities and countries across Europe, North America and South America, and Australia.

Luis has been featured in dozens of television and radio programs around the world as well and has been the subject of interviews by magazines, newspapers, and periodicals of global distribution. He has also been invited to speak at several international congresses: Florianopolis, Florianopolis, Brazil (January 1999), New York City, USA (May 2002), Iguazu Falls, Brazil (February 2006), and at the IAC Europe Campus (November 2006, October 2008, October 2010, and May 2015).

As a researcher, he has published several papers and has developed research lines in the fields of Projectiology and Conscientiology. Several of his works have been published in the scientific Journal of Conscientiology. His research projects have led to the development of courses on Assistance (1997), Universalism (1999), Experience (2000), Intuition (2001), Evolutionary Intelligence (2006), and Non-Physical Beings (2015). He was the Director of the IAC Florida centre from 1999-2001, and has been the Executive Director of the IAC California centre since 2003. After being part of IAC's global board of directors since 2006, he is now the President of IAC.

<http://www.iacworld.org/>

Graham Nicholls, Author and Researcher

Graham Nicholls is the English author of 'Avenues of the Human Spirit', and 'Navigating the Out-of-Body Experience'. He is also the founder of the Out-of-Body and Near Death Experience Society (UK), and a course leader for The Rhine Educational Center (US). He has been researching and developing his out-of-body experiences since 1987. His exceptional out-of-body abilities have led commentators, including Allreality.com, to state, "Graham Nicholls has probably had more verified evidential OBEs than anyone". Graham Nicholls is also a pioneer in the field of immersive art and technology, which he began developing in 1998. His largest virtual reality project was exhibited at London's Science Museum in 2004. His focus on science has led him to work alongside Dr Rupert Sheldrake on research into telepathy and precognition, and also to take part in Dr Dean Radin's quantum double-slit psychokinesis experiment at The Institute of Noetic Sciences, all with positive results.

He now teaches via his online Navigator Course, personal tuition, workshops, and lectures at venues including Cambridge University (UK), The Society for Psychical Research (UK), The International Remote Viewing Association (US), and The Rhine Research Center (US). His work and life have been featured by the BBC, The Times, The Telegraph, The Independent, The

Daily Express, and The Epoch Times, as well as many alternative podcasts, media, and books by other authors.

<http://grahamnicholls.com/>

Robert Peterson

Robert Peterson has been studying and inducing out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and psychic experiences since he graduated from high school in 1979. He graduated from the University of Minnesota Institute of Technology with a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science in 1984. While attending the University, he became proficient at out-of-body exploration, while keeping detailed journals of his experiences. At the same time, he did volunteer work for a student-based organisation called the Minnesota Society for Parapsychological Research (MSPR), which gave him experience as a "Ghost Buster" before the movie made the subject popular.

Since college, he has had a very successful career as computer systems analyst. From 1987 to 1996 he compiled his experiences and journals into his first book, 'Out of Body Experiences: How to have them and what to expect' (Hampton Roads Publishing, 1997), which is sold in several languages. His second book, 'Lessons Out of the Body: A Journal of Spiritual Growth and Out-of-Body Travel' was published in 2001. His third book is a novel titled 'The Gospel According to Mike' (2011). His fourth book is 'Answers Within: How to Use Your Inner Voice for Wisdom, Spirituality and Psychic Awareness' (2012). He has given OBE lectures at the Institute for Neuroscience and Consciousness Studies (INACS) in Austin, Texas and taught a variety of OBE classes.

<http://obeoutlook.blogspot.com/>

Robert Waggoner, Author

Robert Waggoner is the author of the acclaimed book, 'Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self', and co-author of the recently released book, 'Lucid Dreaming Plain and Simple'. A lucid dreamer since 1975, Waggoner has logged more than 1,000 lucid dreams and co-edits the free online magazine, 'Lucid Dreaming Experience', at www.LucidDreamMagazine.com. His books have been published in German, French, Chinese, Finnish, and Czech languages.

A past president of the International Association for the Study of Dreams, Waggoner gives presentations at universities and conferences worldwide on lucid dreaming's revolutionary potential for investigating the nature of consciousness, the unconscious and the psyche. He also hosts a month-long, on-line workshop with www.GlideWing.com twice a year to train beginners and experienced lucid dreamers in the practice of lucid dreaming.

Waggoner has been interviewed by CNN, CBS News and ABC News (KABC - Los Angeles) about the practice of lucid dreaming. His comments have appeared in media as diverse as DETAILS, The Huffington Post, Pittsburgh Post Gazette, Popular Science and Brides magazine.

During 2009-2010, he had a regular Iowa Public Radio show, discussing dreams and lucid dreams.

<http://lucidadvice.com/>

Jurgen Ziewe

Following a stint of intensive meditation of several months in 1972, up to five hours a day, Jurgen Ziewe experienced a spontaneous STE (Spiritual Transformative Experience). Following this he had a series of out-of-body experiences. Once his curiosity was aroused he probed deeper into the phenomena which occurred, often spontaneously of the next 35 years. He kept a diary of the most noteworthy reports which were published in his first book 'Multidimensional Man' (2008). In late Spring of 2013 he went on a weeklong solitary retreat in Scotland, meditating intensively. He chronicled his meditations in his diary and on day five experienced another powerful STE. The diary with his experiences was published the following autumn in his book 'The Ten Minute Moment' (2013).

Since the publication of his first book Jurgen Ziewe gained further insights into the nature of consciousness via a number of vivid and highly detailed OBEs which went deeper than ever before. Over sixty hours of OBEs captured in his journals were published in his latest book 'Vistas of Infinity – How to Enjoy Life When You Are Dead' (2015), which on one hand can be seen as a follow-up to his first book, but also as a guide book to give people a better understanding of what non-physical reality holds in store after death.

Apart from his writing, Jurgen has worked as a successful commercial illustrator for an international client base, represented by the DebutArt artist agency in London, Paris, Berlin and New York. In his private work he tried to recreate the impressions from his OBE journeys in his digital illustrations and is currently involved in using virtual reality in order to give people a more immersive experience of his impressions.

<http://multidimensionalman.com/>