

NONEVIDENT PSI

By William Braud

One of the major assumptions underlying most experimental parapsychological research is that psi and sensory processing are redundant. Psi is assumed to exist to the extent that it provides the same kinds of information that our conventional senses provide. We ask our subjects to psychically detect and describe the formal, sensorily evident properties of target materials and call psychic impressions "correct" or "accurate" only when those impressions happen to provide the same sorts of information (forms, colors, sizes, etc.) that would be immediately evident were we to inspect the target materials at one point in time with our regular senses. Further, we typically restrict ourselves even more by working almost exclusively with visual target materials. Therefore, our research projects may be telling us a great deal about the commonality between psi and visual information processing, but little about possibly unique nonperceptual aspects of psi.

Should we expect psychic functioning and sensory functioning to be redundant? I suspect not. Certainly there is some overlap between what we learn psychically and what we learn sensorily. If this were not the case our usual experiments would not succeed, since the very success of these experiments requires sensory verification. However, the degree of this overlap may not be very extensive. Psi may provide us with information about the world that is quite unlike the information provided by the senses. An analogy with sensory processing might be useful here. There is some overlap in the operating characteristics of our various senses. However, there are important differences as well. While it is possible to learn some things about vision by studying audition, many things will not be learned until we study vision itself and discover its unique characteristics. To fully understand vision, at some point we must *see*, and see many different things under many different conditions; it is to no avail to restrict ourselves completely to inferences and analogies based upon what we know of audition. Nature has provided us with different senses for different types of information. Perhaps Nature's bequest of psi provides us with the possibility of still other forms of information. For things to be otherwise would be just as maladaptive as would the possession by a human being of five pairs of ears, but no eyes, nose, tongue, or touch organs. Of what use is psi if it does only what the senses do? Lawrence LeShan once stated the problem picturesquely in a comment to me at a Parapsychology Foundation Conference. "Have there been any experiments designed to evaluate what kind of information [psi] is designed for?" he asked. "For example, is it possible that psi might better be viewed as a sensory processing system to communicate mood and emotion rather than specific information? To use an analogy, more like listening to the Triple Concerto rather than directions on how to change spark plugs."

Indeed, for what kind of information is psi designed? It may be designed, in part at least, to detect information *potentially* available to the senses, but not yet available at the time due to distance or time constraints. Thus, psi may participate in "anticipatory redundancy" experiences in everyday life and in the laboratory when it provides a percipient with information that will become apparent at a later time to the percipient's own senses or to the senses of judges or

experimenters. But this is a trivial case, although it consumes almost all of our research efforts. Of greater interest are those cases in which psi might provide information *not immediately evident* to the senses of those who later inspect a target.

What might some of this nonevident information be? Information might be provided about *larger relationships* in which the target participates, information about the manner in which the target is *connected* with other events, distant now from the target in time or space. For example, psi might tell us about the past and future *histories* of some object or person, or about other events with which the object has interacted in the past (or will interact in the future). Psi may indicate which objects are or were once parts of some greater organization. Psi may provide information about nonevident emotion or mood, nonevident contingencies, the nonevident truth or falsity of a statement, the meaning of some object or event, the purpose or function of some object or event. It might provide information about the locations of objects or events on some psychic dimensions not obviously correlated with easily defined physical dimensions.

This last possibility requires further elaboration. Two objects or events may be quite dissimilar physically, yet have very similar positions in "semantic space." This space is not evident from physical properties alone, but may be measured by means of a psychological instrument such as Osgood's semantic differential (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). So too, psychic scaling procedures (accomplished, perhaps, through the aid of gifted psychics) may reveal consistent similarities not evident through nonpsychic methods of measurement. Several psychics could provide independent assessments, and aspects of those assessments that possess significant commonality would be accepted as "real" even if they did not agree with typical sensory validations. Of course, suitable precautions should be taken to rule out confounds such as response bias, "stacking effects," nonparanormal inference, and so on. Some of the suggestions put forward by Charles Tart (1972) in his "state specific sciences" paper may be useful here as well.

It is my purpose in this brief paper simply to suggest some nonevident psi possibilities and to provoke psychological researchers to devote some thought to this issue. Together, perhaps we can conceive of some of the less obvious "messages" psi might provide about the world and develop ways of testing the validity of such messages.

An Unsuccessful First Attempt

A pilot investigation was conducted, with the assistance of Michael Jordan and Byron McKinney, in which we explored one possible means of testing the psychic apprehension of relationships which are not sensorily evident. Objects may be related or "connected" in several ways. They may be copies or parts of some common whole. They may share similar past or future histories, common ownership, common source, common purpose. They may have been acted upon by the same person, have the same function, be conceptually related. They may have shared spatial or temporal proximity.

For this initial effort, we chose to investigate psychic reactions to concealed objects (human hair samples) related to each other in two ways. The hairs had a common origin and were fragments from the same lock. We sought to determine whether volunteers could psychically detect the relationship shared by the two hair samples. Of course, the individual hair samples could be

detected directly through clairvoyance and the relationship determined through rational inference. However, it may be the case that psi is more sensitive to relationships *per se* (or to any of the characteristics mentioned above) than to the physical characteristics of targets. If this is the case, one might expect a higher hit rate for the relationship than for "straight" clairvoyant detection of the physical target itself. In fact, the relationship might be detected even in the absence of knowledge of the elements contributing to that relationship.

Fifty-three volunteers participated in the pilot study and were tested individually by M.J. and B.M. Forty volunteers were tested by M.J. and 13 volunteers were tested by B.M. After approximately 15 minutes of informal interaction, the volunteer was confronted with five identical white cardboard boxes (20 x 5 x 2.5 cm.) each bearing a code number between 1 and 5. Inside each box was a light object taped to a cardboard support and covered with a layer of cotton. Two of the objects were hair samples; the other objects were candle wax, a rubber band, and a plastic paper clip. These last three control objects were selected from an office supplies storage cabinet and had no long term association with a particular person. The hair samples were from a person very favorably disposed toward psi. A lock of hair was cut and this lock was cut again to provide two related hair samples. The five objects had been placed in their respective boxes previously by W.B. according to a preexisting randomizing protocol. Weight differences were well controlled. M.J. and B.M. were aware of the five objects but unaware of which boxes contained which objects. For the first 20 volunteers (all tested by M.J.), the objects were simply placed in the boxes as described. For the next 33 volunteers, the objects were completely sealed inside of glass tubes (by a local glassblower) and the tubes were placed in the boxes sandwiched between layers of cotton. This was done in order to eliminate any possible olfactory cues that could have been provided by the materials.

The volunteer was asked to freely discuss the contents of each box. When this had been completed, the experimenter opened an envelope that indicated which box was the "key" (i.e., was one of the two boxes containing hair). He then asked the volunteer to rank order the remaining four boxes from "most related" to "least related" to the still sealed key box. This ranking provided the primary data for the experiment. On the basis of chance, "hits" (rankings of the hidden hair sample as 1 or 2) should occur equally often as "misses" (rankings of the hidden hair sample as 3 or 4). A statistically significant excess of hits would indicate the accurate psychic awareness of a concealed relationship. The experimenter then asked two further questions of the volunteer. The first question asked exactly how was the "most related box" related to the "key box." The second question asked about the exact contents of the boxes.

Results indicated that of the 53 volunteers tested, 31 yielded binary hits while 22 yielded binary misses, a distribution that did not differ from chance expectation. Analysis of the 17 direct hits (rankings of 1 for the hidden hair sample) also yielded chance results. Thus, there was no overall evidence in this experiment for paranormal awareness of the concealed relationship.

If this experiment had yielded positive results, we would have gone on to design a second experiment in which paranormal awareness of the concealed relationship would have been directly compared with "conventional" clairvoyant awareness of the contents of the boxes.

Despite the negative findings of this preliminary study, we urge others to explore other strategies which might shed light upon nonevident psi. Psychometry (or "token object") tests and "psi

mediated instrumental response" tests are steps in this direction, but surely there are many others awaiting discovery.

Additional Possibilities

We are currently exploring the possibility that a particular characteristic of an object that remains nonevident until detected by psi is that object's *prior or concurrent interaction* with psi. It may be the case, as has been suggested by Milan Ryzl (1982), that attempts to psychically discern some hidden object result in a relatively permanent "mental imprint" or "psychic impregnation" of the object which might be psychically detected at a later time. Ryzl's research on Stepanek's "focusing effect" certainly suggests this possibility.

Also relevant is the suggestion (Osis, 1953; Osis & McCormick, 1980; Rhine, 1947) that ESP is accompanied by a concurrent psychokinetic influence upon the target and *vice versa*. The Osis and McCormick (1980) finding of an ostensible psychokinetic effect near a target during successful, but not during unsuccessful out-of-body psi detections of that target, and the sketchily reported "biodetector" findings of Yongjie, Hongzhang, Jing, and Aihua (1982) are consistent with this view.

In both of these cases, psi may leave traces upon some object or event that remain opaque to physical measurement, but become transparent to psi measurement. Soon, we hope to report the results of our explorations of these nonevident psi possibilities.

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