

## BICS Essay Contest

### What Is The Best Available Evidence For The Survival Of Human Consciousness After Permanent Bodily Death?

By Nick Cook

In the 1946 Powell and Pressburger film '*A Matter Of Life And Death*'<sup>1</sup>, Squadron Leader Peter Carter of the Royal Air Force, almost home from a harrowing mission over Nazi Germany in the final days of the war, is forced to bail out of his burning bomber without a parachute. Before he jumps, Carter, played by that quintessential Englishman, David Niven, holds a poignant conversation with June, an American radio operator at a USAAF base on the English coast below. Although they have never met, the connection they forge is palpable; and when, finally, he jumps, we know there is no chance of survival. But this being fiction, the next we see is Carter washed up on a beach, injured but alive. On his way to hospital, he meets June, played by Kim Hunter, and their love, kindled in what they both believe to have been his final moments, becomes powerfully real.

This, however, being the movies, there's a catch. Carter is supposed to be dead – an angelic messenger sent to transport him to the 'Other World' at the moment he jumped had been unable to locate him in the thick English fog. Carter's reprieve, though, is temporary – the matter of his survival, we are told, needs to be corrected. He is given three days to prepare his appeal to a heavenly court that will decide his fate: whether or not he can remain on Earth with June. The case against him is that the law of the universe is immutable – that to maintain its order, he has to die. In his defence, Carter maintains that the Other World's clerical error has changed the rules of the game – he and June have fallen in love; his future, he says, now lies with her.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Matter of Life and Death* was released in the USA as *Stairway to Heaven*. It was directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger and starred David Niven, Roger Livesey, Raymond Massey, Kim Hunter and Marius Goring.

Why choose this fictional story to open an essay on the best evidence for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death? The answer, as I hope will become clear, is manifold. In the film, Carter's friend and doctor, Frank Reeves, who has been helping to treat his increasingly debilitating visions as he approaches his heavenly trial, becomes his counsel in the Other World – this after Frank's death in a motorbike accident on the night of the operation to stem bleeding from the lesions in Carter's brain - lesions his surgeons believe to be killing him. Reeves, unlike the towering figures from history who are offered to Carter as his defence counsel – all of whom Carter rejects - is untrained in the ways of the courts. How, then, will Reeves defeat the infallible logic of the Other World's petition, which is to see universal order restored?

In the pages to come, we will meet an extensive *dramatis personae* of witnesses and expert witnesses who will present proof beyond a reasonable doubt that our consciousness persists after bodily death. It is my intention for these witnesses to speak for themselves – and for the evidence to do likewise. If I have a role in the proceedings, it is to tap the spirit of Dr Reeves, because the question in the title – the question of our consciousness's survival when we die - couldn't be more timely.

Like Carter, we are, I will argue, approaching a moment of crisis - a fork in the evolutionary road. One direction leads toward a 'transhumanist' future, in which advances in computing, nanotech and medicine will permit the fulfilment of a materialist desire to extend our *bodily survival* to its absolute limit. In the other, lies what might be termed an 'exoconscious<sup>2</sup> future' in which we learn to explore – and, ultimately, to unlock – capabilities within us increasingly ignored in the hallways of science since the 17<sup>th</sup> century - that speak to the *potential* of humans to be so much more than they – we - currently are. This latter journey is one that we can make only by travelling *inward* – a direction that is presently anathema to science. Yet, throughout this essay, the subjective experience will be called frequently to the witness stand as being not just relevant to the case for 'survival', but critical to it.

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<sup>2</sup> A term coined by Rebecca Hardcastle Wright, PhD, to denote the study of extraterrestrial dimensions of human consciousness.

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I am a rationalist by nature – trained professionally in both the arts and the sciences. As a young journalist working for a trade publication<sup>3</sup> that served a professional readership interested in technology and technology development, I was fortunate to have been mentored by other trade journalists who thought and analysed critically – there was no room in the business I had entered for sentiment or woolly-minded thinking: we were, I was told, all about the hard facts of science and engineering.

But there is one facet of journalism (of whatever stripe) that no mentor can ever teach: to pursue ‘the story’ you have to have curiosity. Everyone, to some degree, is curious, but in journalism, especially *investigative* journalism, you have to have good, liberal doses of it. I acquired mine, I am certain, from my father, an engineer and inventor. Long before I understood anything about the workings of the brain, my neural pathways were likely encoded by our discussions about the natural world and, as my father saw it, its inherent orderliness.

Which is why one particular story he used to tell troubled me – because it troubled him: the events he described surrounding the death of his mother, my grandmother, when my sister and I were very young.

My grandmother, Pamela, was an American who survived the Great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. The only child of divorcees, she journeyed with her mother to England, where she eventually married my grandfather, an old school Englishman. My father and his brothers grew up in a large country house in the south-east of England, where my passionate, hot-blooded, highly literate, and curious grandmother, found herself encircled by the buttoned-down, stiff upper lip insouciance of the English class system. This was especially pronounced, post-World War 1, in the so-called Home Counties that surround London.

When she died, at the (even then) comparatively young age of 67 during what should have been a routine operation, my father spent the next several days in the

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<sup>3</sup> *Jane's Defence Weekly*, for which I was Aerospace Editor from 1987 to 2005.

family home with my grandfather, who had been especially affected by her sudden death.

To begin with, the signs of Pam's presence were barely noticeable – during the small hours, clacks of a broom against pieces of furniture were audible in the attic above my father's bedroom. Sweeping the attic was what she had done during persistent bouts of insomnia, but my father was able to put down what he thought he'd heard to grief and imagination. Lights turning off and on elicited a similar response. What neither he nor my grandfather could ignore, however, was the moment when, as they were discussing a part of her will whose interpretation they differed upon, a heavy lamp on the table beside them lifted six inches into the air and rocked from side-to-side, before settling back on to the table with a thump.

This being a household imbued with a requirement to display indifference to anything out of the ordinary, my father and grandfather looked at each other, but never said a word – indeed, they never spoke about it at all (although they did move on from the contentious clause of the will). But my father did speak to my sister, my brother and me about it – frequently – and we knew that he was not a man to make things up.

As an engineer, he wanted to know how energy had been transferred to that lamp *apparently from nowhere*. The bigger question – the matter of the energy's connection to a surviving consciousness – was placed to one side. For me, too, the story remained little more than a tale to tell friends on dark nights, until, some years into my journalistic career, when I found myself researching material for what eventually turned into a book about anomalous science.

That experience was salutary – what I saw as a trail of evidence, my colleagues saw as a fool's errand. This exposed me to a pleasure/pain principle that has permeated both, I am ashamed to say, my former profession, and, to an equal, if not even greater extent, the conservative hallways of science.

For many people, the pain of ridicule – and, worse, ostracism – whether they are media, academics, or any other career-professional, outweighs the pleasure that can come from the pursuit of knowledge. "In any field, find the strangest thing and then

explore it,” said John Archibald Wheeler, the theoretical physicist (a man, ironically, ill-disposed to parapsychology). Long before I had heard this aphorism, I realised I had been unwittingly applying it in my journalism – not always to my long-term career advantage.

And I learned, second-hand, about its effect on material science. Parallel to my journalism, I had embarked on a career as a writer, initially of fiction, later of non-fiction. In between times, I ‘ghost-wrote’ – that is, I would occasionally write the autobiographical books of people who were either too busy, too famous or perhaps unqualified to write their stories themselves.

One such (he was too busy) was an eminent psychiatrist, from whom I learned a great deal about the physical workings of the human mind.

Something that came to interest him greatly was the out-of-body experience (OBE), which had begun to crop up increasingly in his clinical work. This, for him, was an anomaly that needed to be explored. He was led to the work of Susan Blackmore, a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of the West of England, who had written extensively about near-death experiences (NDEs) as a formidably rigorous sceptic – her belief being that the NDE was an essentially physiological event brought on by lack of oxygen, the structure of the brain’s visual cortex and other factors.

Her explanation sat comfortably with my psychiatrist’s own training. Informally amongst his trauma patients - especially a small group of them who had made little to no progress towards a cure - he began asking them one-by-one if ‘anything odd’ had happened when they had been exposed to their trauma – anything ‘beyond their understanding’. Not altogether to his surprise - but very much to theirs (that they were even being asked the question) – all of them revealed that they had gone ‘out-of-body’ during the life-threatening event that had triggered their PTSD. When the psychiatrist decided to share this statistical eureka moment with a group of psychotherapists at a professional seminar soon afterwards, he was greeted with silence, accompanied by numerous strange looks. Nobody wanted to know, he said, because, in his world, he had just brought up a taboo – even though he subscribed

heavily to the Blackmore view that what his patients had experienced had been nothing spookier than a hallucination. And this was as recently as the late 1990s.

By coincidence, at the time that he told me this, the world of science was beginning to come to terms with what may turn out to be the biggest scientific anomaly of our times: the riddle posed by observations that the universe isn't expanding at the constant rate predicted by the 'Big Bang' and general relativity – that, instead, its expansion is accelerating. This led science to introduce us to a form of energy – 'dark energy' – that explains how an accelerating, expanding universe might be accounted for.

Ninety-five per cent of the total mass-energy content of the cosmos is composed of dark energy and an analogue hypothetical form of matter known as 'dark matter'. As is clear from the millions of words that have been written about these subjects in scientific papers and journals ever since their 'discovery', science has exhibited no awkwardness at all during its discussion of these terms – this, despite the corollary to the whole conundrum: that it – we - can account only for five per cent of existence.

What this tells us about science's attitude to the so-called paranormal – for this, of course, is what we are really referring to in our discussion of the anomalous phenomena associated with the permanent survival of consciousness post-death – is that we're not just talking about a science problem here, but one of communication.

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In 2014, I gathered with my wife's family at her family home to be with my much-loved mother-in-law as she slipped into unconsciousness after a long illness. Besides my mother-in-law, there were six other family members in the house.

After a day in which we'd taken turns to be with her, her breathing changed suddenly, and we all assembled by her bed for what her nurse told us would be her last moments. My wife, who had been exceptionally close to her mother, took her hand. At the precise moment of her mother's passing, still holding Sylvia's hand, she turned unexpectedly to the rest of us and, in a joy-filled voice that belied the pain

everyone knew she was feeling, announced to the room that ‘all was well’. When, some hours later, I asked her what had happened in the midst of her turmoil to make her say this, she looked at me, perplexed. “Didn’t you experience it, too? Didn’t everyone?”

She told me that what she had experienced had been so vivid – so real – she was convinced everyone in the room had been ‘there’ too: a place where time didn’t exist, but where it also seemed to stretch endlessly. In this realm, she told me, everything had felt so primally ‘connected’ that she had been presented with every piece of information that had ever existed across all time - and every bit of it ‘made sense’. Fear, anxiety, and pain had all disappeared to be replaced by a different state of being - a *realm*, my wife described it as - that felt infinitely ‘more real’ than our own; the world that for a second or two (as we had experienced it) she had left behind.

She felt in this moment overwhelmingly that her mother had gone ‘home’; and that for some reason she had been allowed to experience that place too. These were words that had come from someone who wouldn’t have categorised herself for a moment as ‘religious’ in any recognised sense.

The other word my wife used was ‘love’ – love of the purest and most joyous kind had permeated this place at every level of its being and of hers; and, in this sense, she said, there was no distinction, no separation, between ‘it’ and her; they were, in effect, one<sup>4</sup>.

Over the next several months, this event had a profound effect on me. As had happened with my father, I had been given testimony of an anomalous event from someone whom I trusted intimately – and here, too, there was no question but that, for the person to whom the event had happened, it had been real. When I Googled it, I found it was something others had experienced – a phenomenon allied to the OBE and the NDE known as a ‘*shared* death experience’. There were books even on the subject.

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<sup>4</sup> For my wife’s witness testimony, see Appendix Section.

But did this constitute 'real' in the sense that my profession knew it? In the course of a career that had required 'veridical evidence' – objective evidence that would, in effect, stand up in a court of law – how could I possibly investigate it? Because, by now, a deep curiosity had kicked in - investigation was what was now required.

The answer, I felt, after some soul-searching, was 'no', I could not - and for reasons I would later find instructive.

If I applied the court-of-law principle, whomever I called as a 'witness' – a person in a journalistic context I would term a 'source' – in the end, whatever that person described would be *subjective* testimony, no more valid in evidential terms than a thought or a feeling.

Even though I had been in the room when my mother-in-law had died, what had happened to my wife had been a wholly internal experience – she could describe the 'place' she had been transported to, but she couldn't *show* it to me. And when I revisited the events concerning my grandmother that my father had described – in particular, the levitating lamp – this fared no better. Aside from the fact the witnesses were no longer alive, even if they were, I realised, no evidence they could have presented would appear credible (however credible *they* were) before that imaginary court of law. A picture of a levitating lamp could easily be faked – and an invigilator would have charged anyway that the witnesses had been in a highly emotional state. And so, I saw, what *I* was left with would merely come across as *incredible*, too.

For this and other reasons besides – I wasn't a psychologist (despite having worked on a book with a psychiatrist), had little knowledge of parapsychology and, above all, wanted to maintain my reputation, such as it was, in my chosen career – I dropped any further thought of investigating my wife's experience. And this, on one level, is how censorship works – at the very first level, at the level of the profession we work in, most of us censor ourselves.



The impulse, however, would not go away and, in a body-swerve of sorts, I ended up doing the next best thing: turning the research into a work of fiction, a book that was published in 2019<sup>5</sup>.

But when, shortly afterwards, I was offered a small research grant to study the science that I had depicted in the book – science that might have been responsible for the anomalous event that my wife had experienced - I took it. The grant would allow me the time I needed to ‘get granular’ on the whole subject of consciousness.

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My informal research to this point had furnished me with the following observations and questions:

- Science doesn't know what consciousness is – *nobody* knows.
- Science and philosophical enquiry give us two schools of thought: consciousness – our experience of ‘mind’ - is either generated within us, i.e. via electrochemical reactions in our brains and central nervous systems, or is *external to us*: our brains acting like ‘transmitter/receivers’, exchanging data much as a computer does with ‘the cloud’.
- This gives rise to a further complication: is consciousness the fundamental, underlying ‘substrate of reality’ or is the material world of objects ... *things*?
- The trouble here is that the ‘science of reality’ is defined, in so far as it can be, by two incompatible strands of physics: the way the universe works ‘at scale’ – as stated by classical physics and Einstein’s general relativity - and quantum mechanics: its workings at the sub-atomic level. There is no ‘theory of everything’ to marry the two, leaving sizeable holes in our scientific knowledge.
- The dark energy/matter conundrum was a case in point – both dark energy and dark matter are, in effect, postulated artificial components – some have gone so far as to refer to them as ‘fudges’ - with properties that permit mainstream science to explain deviations from standard predictions. These

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<sup>5</sup> *The Grid*, Bantam Press, an imprint of Transworld Publishers, Penguin Random House.

properties do not alter the fact: we can account only for five per cent of the stuff of the universe; the rest is an abject mystery.

- With the precedent, to corrupt Wheeler, that the study of anomalies gives rise to breakthroughs in new paradigms of understanding, what would it take, I wanted my research to examine, for mainstream science to be comfortable with the study of the paranormal, whose phenomena might hold clues to breakthroughs in this impasse – as well as in many other areas – that has so successfully impeded much-needed scientific progress in the past several decades?

Here, by corollary, was what I wanted my small research programme to accomplish:

- To present the paranormal as ‘science that is not yet understood’ to facilitate a needed discussion between scientists, parapsychologists and related researchers on the true nature of reality.
- To explore consciousness as it relates to the above – what it is or might be: a, or perhaps *the* missing link in the formulation of a grand unified theory of physics (and, *de facto*, reality), linking the macro world of classical science and general relativity with the micro world of quantum mechanics.
- To determine whether there are ‘shortcuts’ to individual experiences of the ‘deeper reality’ gained through ‘experimenter data’ – the kind of subjective evidence that would normally be thrown out ‘pre-trial’, so to speak, before a ‘scientific court of law’.
- To allow silo’d scientists to talk to each other on the subject of consciousness and paranormal/esoteric phenomena using a ‘*lingua franca*’ understandable to outsiders and acceptable to science.
- To set the framework for a cross-disciplinary approach to our understanding of the above by – in the future - bringing scientists and experiencers together in an ‘intellectually safe’ environment, in which sensible opinions, *no matter what*, would be respected; this for the purpose of exploring common threads of understanding regarding the true nature of reality.

My lack of formal knowledge would be both a hindrance and a help. On the deficit side, I was entering an unknown field from a near-standing start.

But I was also coming to the subject with few, if any, preconceived notions about what was and wasn't permitted discussion, which might, conceivably, be an advantage.

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In laying the foundations of a modest research effort that would include subjective evidence I was able to tap a professional body that *had* attached great value to subjective data: the military-intelligence community. In particular, through some connections that had arisen out of my earlier writings<sup>6</sup>, I had been put in touch with – and subsequently came to know – Ingo Swann, who had been one of the original founders of the US military-intelligence community's remote viewing programme.

Remote viewing was a methodology that had permitted the US to conduct intelligence-gathering via the use of techniques that might perhaps be described as 'clairvoyant'. I considered the experience of remote viewers to be timely and relevant, because, knowing the military, a strong case could be made to say that it would not have thrown good money year-on-year at a technique that didn't work.

Remote viewing, in one guise or another, had been funded since the early 1970s and had patently worked, because it had remained in existence – fully funded by the US government – for the best part of two decades.

And lest an accusation were proffered that RV had been a particular whim or foible of the *US* intelligence community, it could be demonstrably proven that the Soviet Union had been engaged in remote viewing – and other paranormal activity deemed to have some kind of military purpose – for even longer. As part of anyone's due diligence on this, a book called '*ESP Wars: East and West*' ought to be required

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<sup>6</sup> *The Hunt for Zero Point*, Nick Cook, published by Century, 2001.

reading<sup>7</sup>. In it, several of the individuals who had, at one time or other, led these programmes in their respective countries were brought together during a narrow time window in geopolitical history – the 1990s - when thawed relations between the two sides had allowed for discussions on particular aspects of the Cold War standoff.

On the Russian side, parapsychological military activity culminated in the late 1980s with the formulation of a special unit – Military Unit 10003 led by Lt. Gen. Alexei Savin – tasked with exploiting the capabilities of what Savin described as ‘extraordinarily gifted psychic individuals’ for military purposes.

Under the direction of Army General Mikhail Moiseyev, the Chief of the General Staff (the Soviet equivalent of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), Savin was ordered to hone Military Unit 10003 into the Soviet military-intelligence community’s ‘centre of excellence’ for the development of ‘extraordinary human potential’, including what is known as ‘*psi* functioning’, the so-called psychic aspects of our nature. Unit 10003 employed an equivalent number of personnel as the US remote viewing programme had at its height.

A very high level of secrecy was established for Savin’s department from the outset. All of the information was reported only to the Chief of the General Staff and was compartmentalised amidst deep secrecy. “We were so successful at disappearing that almost a decade went by before the first vague rumours about our work filtered through to the press,” Savin told his US counterparts<sup>8</sup>.

Even after the dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991, this led to remote viewers being forward deployed with Russian military units during the Second Chechen War of 1995. “In Chechnya, I would test the work of my most talented psychics and instructors,” Savin explained. “After the Chechen War, we can now boldly assert that on the whole ESP is a proven and effective tool in the arsenal, not only of strategic military means, but of tactical and operational ones.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *ESP Wars East & West: An Account of the Military Use of Psychic Espionage as Narrated by the Key Russian and American Players* by Edwin C. May, PhD; Victor Rubel, PhD; Joseph McMoneagle, PhD; and Loyd Auerbach, MS, *Panta Rei*, an imprint of Crossroad Press, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> *Op.cit.*, p.264.

<sup>9</sup> *Op.cit.*, p.288.

As part of my continued due diligence in this area, I was led to a declassified 1983 US Department of the Army study entitled '*Analysis and Assessment of (the) Gateway Process*'<sup>10</sup>.

The report was written by US Army Lt. Col. Wayne McDonnell in an apparent bid to 'sell' the Army's Intelligence and Security Command, INSCOM, on the 'Gateway Experience' developed by the Virginia-based Monroe Institute (along with a technique the institute had developed to bring the brain's two hemispheres to a state of coherence allegedly permitting altered states of consciousness) – this as a tool to acquaint the service with the mechanics of what it paraphrased as 'astral projection'.

As McDonnell explained, the 25 pages of the Gateway Report (although one page, to the chagrin of conspiracy theorists, had been missing from the copy held in the CIA's files until recently) was designed, at a high level of overview, to provide a 'lucid model' of how consciousness functions so as to put out-of-body states into the 'language of physical science' – this to 'remove the stigma of its occult connotations.'

As part of my own efforts to create language that bridged the world of science with terms that described the paranormal, therefore, 'Gateway' could serve a purpose by establishing precedence and authority: this was the military endorsing *as science* – a science pooh-poohed by virtually all mainstream science communities – techniques, *per* the report, that might confer intelligence advantage over the US's military rivals.

Early on, the paper promised to explain 'the mechanics by which the mind exercises the consciousness function'. This, of course, in the context of something as elusive as 'mind' versus 'brain', is an assertion that cannot confidently be sustained, but what Gateway does do is alert the neophyte consciousness researcher to terms and concepts that will dog his/her efforts to get to grips with the 'consciousness function'.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP96-00788R001700210016-5.pdf>

Amongst these, I extracted the following:

- **Frequency and resonance:** Frequencies that bring the brain's left and right hemispheres into coherence set up a resonance that turns the body into a 'tuning fork' of sorts that allows for a transfer of energy, the report states, in a range between 6.8 and 7.8 Hertz into the Earth's ionosphere, which resonates at about 7.5 Hertz<sup>11</sup>. Its associated wavelength, of around 40,000 km, 'knows no obstacles', and hardly attenuates over large distances, making it the 'ideal medium for conveying a telepathic signal'<sup>12</sup>. This coherence between Earth and human, the report tells us, can produce an out-of-body experience that shifts the seat of consciousness into the surrounding environment, where the mind can 'communicate with other minds similarly attuned'. 'Data' from the universe (what it has, perhaps, become fashionable amongst Millennials to refer to as 'downloads') – also become obtainable at appropriate resonances.
- **Matter and energy:** Although enshrined in Einstein's  $E=mc^2$  equivalence formula, the idea for most of us that matter is energy in another form and vice versa is certainly not intuitive. The report prepares us for this by setting up a discussion about these two different states: 'If the term matter is taken to mean solid substance as opposed to energy which is understood to mean a force of some sort, then the use of the former is entirely misleading'. Solid matter, it says – as represented by the atom, its neutron and electrons – is made up of nothing more than oscillating energy grids – thus, solid matter, strictly speaking, 'does not exist'<sup>13</sup>. The appearance of solidity, it tells us – and what appears to us as the separation of things - is explained by different vibration rates in the oscillations<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Op.cit., p.6

<sup>12</sup> Tests before and since have demonstrated, persuasively, that radio waves (alone) are unlikely to act as a/the carrier-wave for ESP phenomena.

<sup>13</sup> Op.cit., p.7.

<sup>14</sup> McDonnell quotes Itzhak Bentov on various different vibration rates of matter: The energy grid that composes the nucleus of the atom vibrates at approximately  $10^{22}$  Hertz; at 70 degrees Fahrenheit, an atom oscillates at the rate  $10^{15}$  Hertz; a molecule in the range of  $10^9$  Hertz; and a live human cell at  $10^3$  Hertz.

- **The cosmos as a hologram:** The universe, being composed of interacting energy fields, some at rest, some in motion, is 'one gigantic hologram of unbelievable complexity', the report goes on to tell us<sup>15</sup>. The mind is also a hologram that attunes to the 'cosmic hologram' to provide us with consciousness. Perception is derived by filtering the holographic information entering the right hemisphere of the brain and processing it via the left, where it compares the imagery with the part of its hologram that constitutes memory. This process, in essence, converts the nonlinear, nonverbal information of the universe into the linear, '2-dimensional data' that provides us with the 'raw stuff' of reality<sup>16</sup>.

Whilst the science of Gateway could in no way be taken as gospel, it did serve – in part through its blend of science and mysticism - to remind its readers that we lived in a miraculously fine-tuned universe, in which fractional deviations in the values of the fundamental forces post-Big Bang would have created an entirely different universe – or, more likely, one that would have killed it at birth.

Gateway also could be taken as evidence of the military-intelligence community's ongoing interest - albeit from 1983 and in discrete corners – in the paranormal; an interest that has extended far beyond psychic surveillance.

In Section 18, it enters into a lengthy discussion of 'unconfined energy' or energy in a state of 'inactive infinity', *aka* 'energy in an absolute state' that it condenses simply as 'the Absolute'. *'Between the Absolute and the 'material' universe in which we experience our physical existence are various intervening dimensions to which human consciousness in altered states of being may gain access'*<sup>17</sup>.

The timeless consciousness my wife had experienced at her mother's death appeared to reside somewhere on this spectrum. If consciousness had the capacity to do this as an out-of-body, shared- or near-death experience, by extension it

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<sup>15</sup> Op.cit., p.8.

<sup>16</sup> Op.cit., p.9.

<sup>17</sup> Op.cit., p.11.

seemed permissible to look for clues to its existence *after* our actual, physical death too.

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In 2016, I was asked by the family of Ingo Swann, who had died in 2013, whether I would write a retrospective of his life. After a great deal of research, we agreed that there wasn't much more that could usefully be added that Ingo, a prolific writer, plus others, hadn't already written. But, meantime, we had discovered amongst his papers two 'lost manuscripts' and it was agreed that I would work on these with a view to publishing them as one volume – a work that appeared in August 2019<sup>18</sup>.

The two manuscripts contained breakdowns, as Ingo saw them, of the 'psychic systems' at work in the human mind and body, as well as a 'map' of the 'Matrix', as he referred to it, with which these psychic systems interfaced.

It also went into many of the anomalous phenomena – phenomena Ingo had studied in depth throughout his life - that characterised consciousness's paranormal realms.

This was invaluable, because the standard questions on consciousness – such as you would find in a reputable science book on the subject, only went so far. To wit:

- What is consciousness?
- Does consciousness create reality?
- Is the universe conscious?
- What is consciousness like in other animals?
- Can physics explain consciousness?
- How many kinds of consciousness do we have?
- Can we know if a machine is conscious?
- Can you see consciousness in the brain?
- What is consciousness for?

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<sup>18</sup> *Resurrecting The Mysterious* by Ingo Swann, published by Swann-Ryder Productions LLC.



- When did consciousness evolve<sup>19</sup>?

Since the whole subject of ‘off-board’ consciousness – consciousness outside of the brain – was/is taboo, *QED* I needed to incorporate all the *taboo* questions associated with consciousness alongside the mainstream ones posed *inter alia* by those above.

Thus, the ‘standard questions’ morphed with those I’d derived from Ingo Swann’s two manuscripts and desktop research from Phase 1 of my study into the following:

- What is reality? What is consciousness?
- How do we account for the origins of awareness?
- Do gaps in mainstream scientific knowledge hold keys to paranormal phenomena and vice versa?
- What are consciousness’s links to quantum processes?
- Do ‘new physics’ shed light on consciousness and anomalous phenomena?
- Do these phenomena have relevance to the consciousness story?
- What evidence exists for ‘action-at-a-distance’ in these phenomena?
- Is there scientific evidence for the afterlife and the ‘soul’?
- What evidence exists for rebirth/reincarnation?
- What are the core characteristics of Ingo’s ‘Matrix’?
- What is our interface with reality?
- Is there evidence for ‘leaks’ between ‘our dimension’ and other ‘planes of existence’?
- What ‘language’ characterises the channels of communication between ‘our dimension’ and (any) others?
- What roles do vibration and resonance play in our perception of reality?
- Is there evidence for the universe as a hologram and a repository of retrievable information (as expressed mystically in the ‘Akashic Field’)?
- What are the characteristics of the ‘psychic self’?

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<sup>19</sup> The standard questions on consciousness are well known. I have taken these from a recent issue of *New Scientist*: Special Issue: ‘What is Consciousness? The 10 Biggest Questions About the Greatest Mystery in the Universe’, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

- Do primal ‘energies and forces’ (an Ingo term) thread through reality’s substrate as influences on our lives?
- Is there evidence for fate and destiny?
- How does intention shape reality?
- Is there evidence for a ‘creator’?

Critical to a new narrative emerging from my Phase 2 exploration of these questions, via my interviews with many expert scientific witnesses, were the following themes:

- **Reality:** By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, physicists thought they had cracked the fundamentals of existence, but the Standard Model governing the quantum realm at its microscopic end is woefully incomplete, as is space-time/general relativity theory – how the game plays out at vast, cosmological scales. To quote the theoretical physicist and writer Carlo Rovelli: “If you want a theory of everything where it all fits, I see no hint we’re even close – zero.”<sup>20</sup>
- **Consciousness:** Of its many sub-fields, consciousness research can be divided into two broad categories: the ‘easy problems’ and ‘the hard problem’ as defined by philosopher David Chalmers of New York University in 1994. The easy categories are associated with brain-functioning, the integration of sensory information and different states of consciousness, such as waking, sleeping, dreaming and ‘altered’. The hard problem relates to how and why we have subjective experiences (such as the feelings that accompany an aesthetic moment) at all. While the physics of the easy problems can be probed with relative ease, there is no consensus at all on the hard problem. What’s more, the argument as to whether consciousness originates in the brain or outside of it morphs into an even deeper issue concerning the primary ‘state’ of the universe. The ‘accepted narrative’ – promulgated with great gusto by the hegemony of the science mainstream – is that it is ‘matter’, although this is not backed up by definitive scientific evidence, a disconnect epitomised by the ongoing search for the seat, or seats, of consciousness in the brain, and the mechanisms responsible for it/them. This leaves open,

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<sup>20</sup> *New Scientist*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020, Special Issue: *What Is Reality?*

however counter-intuitive it may seem, the possibility that consciousness is the primal pre-existent state and that all else, including matter, emerges from it.

- **The origins of awareness:** Why did awareness first manifest in humans? What happened in the 150,000-year gap between the first 'anatomically modern humans' 200,000 years ago and the first tangible evidence of awareness in the human species 50,000 years ago, as portrayed, for example, in cave art? While science has many theories, definitive answers are lacking. This has left scope for new theories to emerge – as, for example, that posited by Prof. David Lewis-Williams of the Rock Art Research Institute at South Africa's Witwatersrand University. He says that our awareness developed out of a shamanic culture in which hunter-gatherer societies around the world ingested natural psychedelics such as psilocybin (magic mushrooms) and DMT held in ayahuasca. Bestselling author Graham Hancock takes this further, telling us it may well have been shamanic explorations of hallucinatory realms during the Upper Palaeolithic that played the catalytic role in extracting our ancestors from the five-million-year torpor of the hominid line.<sup>21</sup>
- **'Quantum consciousness':** One of the pillars of quantum mechanics is 'superposition', the recognition that particles don't exist except as a kind of 'probabilistic entity' (known as a 'wave-function'), until an act of observation – by us or in an experiment - causes them to 'collapse' into physical reality. This and many other aspects of the quantum realm defies logic, but it is verifiably real. If the land of the very small lies outside our logic system, says Robert Lanza MD, author and specialist in stem cells and regenerative medicine, why must the meta-universe, the cosmos as a whole, be 'any more obliging' as far as our thought-systems operate? "Rather, we should face up to something that's rarely if ever voiced in modern cosmology: the possibility that the true nature of the universe as a whole has *nothing* (his emphasis) to do with the

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<sup>21</sup> See *Supernatural: Meetings with the Ancient Teachers of Mankind*, Graham Hancock, Century Books, 2005.

way its parts work.”<sup>22</sup> Since ‘quantum weirdness’ is an accepted facet of physics, why should aspects of physics *at scale* (my emphasis) be any different?

- **Biological unknowns:** It isn’t just the dark energy/dark matter conundrum that confounds our relationship to/with reality and our environment. Holes of ignorance, too, for example, dog our understanding of DNA. The ‘molecule of life’, and ‘epigenetics’ (its relationship to/with the environment). Breakthroughs in epigenetics portend better mental health, deeper knowledge of the mechanisms that make us ‘us’, disease control and perhaps, even, why humans have *psi* abilities such as ESP. There may be mechanisms within DNA that permit depth-level communication with realms of reality beyond the reach of our five senses. These and other putative roles of DNA include its capacity to store vast amounts of data, its capacity to act as a distributed processor – and as a distributed antenna (akin to a phased array) with transmit/receive modes to/from a universe that is beginning to be seen as far more dynamic than the cosmos as it is portrayed by Newtonian physics and general relativity.
- **New physics:** What used to be seen as empty space isn’t empty at all, even in a vacuum chilled to absolute zero (-237.15 degrees Celsius). Instead, science shows<sup>23</sup>, it is teeming with ‘vacuum fluctuations’ composed of particles that blink in and out of existence around their ‘zero-point baselines’. This view of the universe, considered heretical as recently as half a century ago, is increasingly accepted as fact. Instead of the ‘many worlds’ hypothesis within quantum theory which imagines that a new universe splits off with every collapse of the wavefunction, the emergence and disappearance of these ‘virtual particles’ points to a dimension of the cosmos that is beyond the reach of observation and measurement. This version of the ‘quantum vacuum’ creates space-time and ‘*in-forms*’ the physical universe (including, at its most

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<sup>22</sup> *Beyond Biocentrism*, p.164, Robert Lanza, MD (with Bob Berman), Benbella Books, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> As demonstrated by the Casimir Effect, when two plates are pressed together by the fluctuations arising from the ZPE field.

basic level, the four fundamental forces of nature<sup>24</sup>). Is 'organised matter' (versus the energy created in the 'Big Bang') 'extruded' from this non-physical realm via the zero-point energy field into our physical universe as 'reality'?

- **Objective paranormality:** It is false for science to hold that 'the paranormal' exists purely in the realm of subjectively experienced events – or that it doesn't 'imprint' on our three-/four-dimensional reality. 'Psychokinetics' – whether in the form of poltergeist-type activity (of the 'lamp kind' witnessed by my father and grandfather) or as phenomena manifested by psychics – has an incontrovertible energy signature. 'Hotspots' of paranormal activity exist (for example, at numerous ranches across the US Southwest), where a multiplicity of highly unusual phenomena observed (and, in many cases, filmed) by multiple witnesses may be counted as veridical, and therefore *objective* evidence that 'our world' is not defined purely by the science that comes to us from our text-books. Not only are these phenomena seen, they leave real, physical traces.

In one of Ingo's two manuscripts there is a chapter about a fictional account of a gigantic ship called the *Titan* that hits an iceberg mid-Atlantic with the loss of many lives<sup>25</sup>.

The story, published in 1898, presages the sinking of the *Titanic* fourteen years later. Ingo points us to the story – and to a list of verified premonitions by many people leading up to the *Titanic* event – as evidence of linkage to a realm in which the events that manifested as the physical *Titanic* disaster were already forming ahead of their appearance in the material realm.

Ingo never took his 'psychicness' for granted – one of his mantras was that his abilities were latent in us all. In pursuit of the facts he felt supported this, he spent a

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<sup>24</sup> Gravity, electromagnetism, the strong and the weak nuclear forces.

<sup>25</sup> The chapter is 'Fate & Destiny: Being with the Future' from *Resurrecting The Mysterious* by Ingo Swann, Swann-Ryder Productions, 2020. The fictional account Ingo refers to is a novella, *The Wreck of the Titan*, by Morgan Robertson.

great deal of his life looking for the links and nodes that bind us to each other – and to the ‘Matrix’ his research and experience told him existed beyond our five senses.

This view, as we have seen, has been endorsed on many levels by the military-intelligence community, which has, for several decades, as we have also seen, been far less reticent about studying the paranormal than its physics academia counterpart.

The passage about the *Titan* and the *Titanic* held profound clues for Ingo to the true nature of reality – clues he bound into a hypothesis that speaks of a ‘virtual realm’ that disobeys our concepts of linear time and defies our present psychological logic – very much as, for me, the ‘new narrative’ emerging from my Phase 2 study had.

A short section of the book that crystallises Ingo’s theory is worth quoting in full<sup>26</sup>:

*‘If our hypothesis be true, then there is ‘another’ non-immediate existing realm congruent to our material, physical realm. It is ‘governed’ by laws that are different, as far as time is concerned at least, than time as we experience it on a moment-to-moment basis.*

*‘In our immediate, physical realm, only the now is here and real: the past has ‘vanished’ and the future doesn’t exist as a tangible entity. In the other realm, however, either the ‘present’ is longer, extending deeply into the past and future, or time doesn’t exist at all as we know it. The laws that govern both realms are not mutually exclusive, but both realms interpenetrate and interact with each other.*

*‘Advance information ‘leaks’ from the other realm into the material realm through dreams, visions, artistic renderings and direct prophecy from ‘gifted’ psychics. Rather, we might say that there is some sort of information exchange between the two.*

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<sup>26</sup> Op.cit, p. 207.

*'But the clearest point is that the two are interconnected, and because of this we should no longer consider them to be two, but rather, since they are interconnected, as one.'*

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Science has a long history of compartmentalisation. The chief architect of the revolution that has marked our science paradigm of the last 250 years was the 17<sup>th</sup> Century French natural philosopher René Descartes, who pronounced that mind and matter were separate. 'Cartesian dualism' has coloured our perception of the world ever since and maintained other divisions besides. Thanks to dualism, science has been left to explore the universe with objective detachment, leaving the business of spirit to religion. In this paradigm, it was tacitly agreed that each would stay out of the other's way.

The cosmos as mapped by the classical mechanics of Descartes' contemporary, the English natural philosopher (as he also referred to himself) Sir Isaac Newton, was – and still is – a cold, detached place that operates much as a giant clock. Until the emergence of quantum mechanics at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we, the observer, had no capacity to affect it. Even now, officially, that capacity is limited to the micro-world of particles and atoms. Consciousness, if it had any role at all in this universe, was deemed to have somehow arisen from the matter made up of these atoms and particles, even though matter itself could be seen to occupy a fraction of its endless expanse.

The cold hand of Cartesian dualism still predominates – especially in the laboratory, where its unwritten rules state that objective data are the only data that count and only then if the experiments that derive them are repeatable. If Ingo's hypothesis *is* true, however, it would make the alternative landscape emerging out of my science exploration of Phase 2, where next to nothing is straightforward - and science is far more squirrely, actually, than a lot of scientists would want us to believe - much more understandable. Because in Ingo's 'non-immediate realm', the precise opposite of the Cartesian world held true – *everything* was a little bit (or, at times, a lot) weird;

and next to nothing was repeatable; the paranormal operates on what seems to be its own terms, but its impacts in our 3D/4D space can unquestionably be physical.

If we extend its range to a wider set of phenomena beyond those associated (rightly or wrongly) with the dead - to ESP, the study of unidentified flying objects (UFOs), the study of cryptozoology (mythological creatures such as werewolves, bigfoot, the yeti etc that are said to roam parts of the planet as 'cryptids') and discarnate entities characterised as angels and demons – then these phenomena, too, can be said to 'leak' into our realm, just as the information pertaining to the *Titanic* tragedy did.

Except, *per* Ingo's hypothesis, the interconnection between the two worlds meant we had to stop looking on them as *two* but as *one* – no more 'normal' and 'paranormal'. In *this* model of the universe, we needed to consider an aspect of it in which the reality we customarily experience gets 'bent out of shape' in the presence of certain kinds of anomalous phenomena. In this small, but quirky corner of the 'reality envelope' – populated as it had become by my Phase 2 research data – reality is both 'real' and 'unreal' (ghosts that come and go), distorted by odd time effects (the missing time reported by UFO abductees), populated by 'miracle cures' (examples of spontaneous healing) and benign and malign 'intelligences' (good and bad spirits).

As I grappled to come to terms with the features of this bizarre and slippery corner of existence, I wrestled, too, with what to call it. One term I had encountered in my literature trawl was a 'metaphorical reality', another was a 'non-literal reality'. But neither of these seemed to do total justice to what the data indicated were *three sets of conditions* that appeared both to underpin the phenomena and to influence them:

Location, environment and culture.

This corner of the reality envelope had been deeply explored by two researchers whose pioneering work I had come across frequently in my research: that of Jacques Vallée and Eric W, Davis, who had charted the hinterland of this place in a paper on



the ‘physics of high strangeness’, a model whose core features are found in six layers<sup>27</sup>:

- **Layer 1: *Physical*:** the encounter (usually, but not always with a UFO) exhibits physical effects and leaves physical traces in the environment.
- **Layer 2: *Anti-physical*:** Effects that manifest in our 3D/4D space but conflict with Layer 1, e.g. instantaneous appearance/vanishing and producing missing time.
- **Layer 3: *Psychological*:** The tendency of witnesses to rationalise an unreal encounter in rational terms – until faced with the inescapable conclusion that the object/phenomenon is unknown.
- **Layer 4: *Physiological*:** The phenomenon is reported to cause effects perceived or felt by humans as: sounds (e.g. buzzing, rushing), burns, paralysis, extreme heat or cold, metallic taste, loss of volition, severe headache etc.
- **Layer 5: *Psychic*:** Involves a class of phenomena with the encounter e.g. impressions of communication without a direct sensory channel, poltergeist type, levitation, premonitions, healing etc.
- **Layer 6: *Cultural*:** Concerns the way society reacts to such encounters, including secondary effects, such as hoaxes, absorption into books/films, scientific theories, leading to a gradual consciousness shift in the way humans perceive ‘fantastical events’.

While this model charted the in/out, on/off, real/non-real weirdness (which is all it had ever intended to do) of what I now referred to as a ‘*conditional reality set*’, it hadn’t accounted for *why* it existed. Still needed was a model providing a cogent explanation for the interconnected, ‘as-one’ worldview Ingo had called for – one that would stop the paranormal from being treated as something *separate* from science.

This led me to a theory put forward by Donald Hoffman, a professor of cognitive sciences at the University of California, Irvine.

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<sup>27</sup> *Incommensurability, Orthodoxy and the Physics of High Strangeness: A 6-layer Model for Anomalous Phenomena* by Jacques F. Vallée and Eric W. Davis.

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Professor Hoffman likens our experience of reality to the relationship we forge with the 'graphical user interface' of a computer, its screen<sup>28</sup>.

In the classical physics model, everything we perceive involves illusion. What we see is not a direct representation of the objects in our vision; it is a translation formed by our brain's interpretation of the light reflected *off* the objects. This is high school physics and well understood. The reality represented *by* those objects - and the meaning we attach to that reality - will be different depending on who is doing the observing.

In Hoffman's 'conscious realism' model, we don't need knowledge of the 'guts of the machine (a laptop, for example) - its hardware and its software – in order to interact with it. Instead, we forge a relationship with the icons (and apps) it displays on-screen. We ourselves create the icons, but the icons themselves, being an on-screen representation, aren't conscious. At heart, conscious realism states that consciousness is primary and the physical world – our world of matter - emerges from it.

This, Hoffman says, gives rise to the idea of 'conscious agents'. "The way one agent in a network perceives, depends on the way some other agents act," he tells us<sup>29</sup>. In this world, our brains function as 'reducing valves' to give us 'just the reality we need' for 'survival'. To take this a step further, we agree on reality, because we've all evolved the same reality interface.

It is this interface that, over eons, has allowed us to play the same game. It is also the process that provides us with our perception of consensus, objective reality.

What Hoffman wants to do is develop maths, an algorithm, to allow him to unpick the 'source code of the game' – leading, potentially, to technologies by which we can access the 'greater reality' in the parts of the machine we don't normally experience.

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<sup>28</sup> See *The Case Against Reality: How evolution hid the truth from our eyes*, Donald D. Hoffman, Allen Lane, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Op.cit. p.184.

Meantime, ‘crude methods’ – methods we might refer to loosely as ‘technologies’, as well, including meditation and psychedelic drugs (even though it might be hard to think of a psychedelic as a *technology*) – give us a limited capacity to do the same thing.

*So, where – and what - is this ‘interface’?*

The light that enters our eyes projects upside-down on to the retina, the sensory membrane at the back of the eyeball. There, millions of cells, each adapted to pick out one of three primary colours, send signals to the occipital lobe in the back of the head, where a trillion synapses help forge them into our world of vision. A similar sensor-fusion process takes place inside the brain with inputs from our other senses.

Matter, as we have already seen, is 99.9 per cent empty space. Dr Lanza, whom we met earlier, wants us to be ‘really clear’ on how and where we forge our construed, consensus picture of ‘objective reality’: *with and within our minds*; and that the world we perceive to be a world of *separation* – an ‘out there reality’ of trees, houses, tables, rocks, animals, *things*; and an ‘in here reality’ of *us* – doesn’t exist. The icons on our user-interface, then – of which, *per* Hoffman, there are an infinite number and variety – might be said to arise out of the vibrating energy grids we also encountered earlier, informed, as *they* are, by the quantum magic that permits an infinite range of sub-atomic probabilities to collapse into the particles that make up the things – the material objects we all agree upon - in a format that contributes to our sense of hard, cold reality. Here, Hoffman says, our brains filter out anything not to do with survival.

Here, too, ‘survival’ isn’t *just* about the physical things - food, water, shelter, warmth etc. – we agree on for the furtherance of our species, but a more tenuous consensus of colour, taste, aesthetics, our sense of right and wrong ... love, even. But you’ll find little discussion of what makes this, or any other definition of our reality in a textbook, because it relies on something science can’t agree on to begin with: consciousness.

The question at the heart of this essay – whether human consciousness can survive permanent bodily death – hinges on the ability of ‘the mind’ to exist outside of the body.

Consciousness, because we are immersed in it and it in us, is, essentially, non-provable. But anomalous aspects of it that manifest as paranormal phenomena *are* – which is what makes them so important. They are the clues we must examine from the outside in that alert us to a fundamental feature of existence – the idea that there are depths to our everyday reality that we don't customarily see; and that existence is based on a set of commonly agreed protocols that give us, for the moment, all the reality we can handle - no more, no less - via a panoply of agreed 'everyday icons'.

But the evidence, too, says there's some malware in the machine that's throwing icons we *don't* all agree upon on to the user interface – what we might, perhaps, refer to as '*rogue icons*'.

These manifest as ghosts, UFOs, cryptids, angels and demons, miracle cures and any number of 'anomalies' that mainstream science wants to tell us aren't 'real'.

Except, since they exist as shared experiences for so many, at some level, they have to be.

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Alerted by patients who, after massive heart-attacks, came 'back from the dead' – almost universally they had attested they had been to, and returned from, a state in which they had left the body, entered a realm of infinite connection and non-existent time, been drawn to a light and imbued with a feeling of connection and pure love – Dr Pim van Lommel has pulled together a lot of data on near-death experiences.

"The point is," he told me in the early stages of my Phase 2 research, "information and energy are never lost – and that's what we see in the veridical evidence of what people say they see when they are clinically dead, things it should not be possible to see. And here I'm not just talking about NDEs, but out-of-body experiences, too.

What it all amounts to, is clear evidence of what I call a continuity of consciousness.”<sup>30</sup>

The point he makes that we need to discuss here is ‘veridical’.

Of the many definitions found online, the *Oxford Dictionary’s* - ‘a coinciding with reality’ - comes closest as a scene-setter for the short diversion that follows.

Van Lommel, now retired, forged a career as a renowned cardiologist. In 1969, as an attendant doctor in a coronary care unit in the Netherlands, he had his first experience of a cardiac patient who ‘came back from the dead’ to report all the classic signatures of an NDE. His curiosity awoken, in 1986, he began to ask all the patients at his outpatient clinic who had undergone resuscitation whether they had ‘any recollection of the period of their cardiac arrest’. “I was more than a little surprised to hear, within the space of two years, twelve reports of a near-death experience among just over fifty cardiac arrest survivors,” he wrote later<sup>31</sup>.

He gained international recognition following the publication of an article in the *Lancet*, a highly respected UK-based, peer-reviewed medical journal, in which he and his colleagues discussed 344 cardiac patients who were successfully resuscitated after cardiac arrest<sup>32</sup>. One group that reported having had an NDE was analysed against a control group that did not, with the two being compared two and eight years later.

Of those 344 patients, 62 (18 per cent) reported an NDE, of whom 41 per cent described a ‘core experience’ (its meaning unaffected by ‘external variables’ like gender, age the time of the NDE, and latency and intensity of the NDE). Van Lommel went on to write half a dozen or so other papers on the subject of NDEs, as well as a book, ‘*Consciousness Beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience*’, a best-seller in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

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<sup>30</sup> Skype interview with the author, 15.6.20

<sup>31</sup> *Consciousness Beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience*, p. vii, Pim van Lommel, M.D., Harper Collins, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Van Lommel, P., van Wees, R., Meyers, V., & Elfferich, I. (2001). *Near-death experience in Survivors of cardiac arrest: a prospective study in the Netherlands*. *The Lancet*, 358 (9298), 2039-2045.

The purpose of this diversion is not to seek to verify the survival of consciousness through the myriad NDE studies that have been performed by van Lommel and others – whether you're a proponent of NDEs or not, they attest to *something* valid at the centre of the phenomenon – but instead to look at the *kind* of evidence a 'court' would accept as veridical; proof that what happened was 'coincident with reality'.

Broadly, two criteria get called into question: the first is whether the patient was dead in any clinically acknowledged sense; the second is whether, *while* 'dead', they were afforded an ability to see or know things they couldn't possibly have known via the senses we employ when we're fully conscious (or, for our purposes here, 'alive').

A case that illustrates the point is related by Kimberly Clark Sharp, a social care worker in the critical care unit of a Seattle hospital, regarding what has come to be known as the 'case of Maria and shoe'<sup>33</sup>. In 1977, Maria, a middle-aged Mexican migrant worker visiting Seattle to see friends, suffered a massive heart-attack, followed by a second while in hospital. As Clark Sharp watched efforts to revive her, Maria 'flatlined' – she wasn't breathing, and the monitor indicated no heartbeat. She was, fortunately, resuscitated quickly and stabilised, but soon afterward began to tell Kimberly, in a highly excited manner, what she had experienced while 'clinically dead'. She had left her body, she said, and had watched the efforts to revive her from a corner of the ceiling in the room. She accurately described everything that had taken place, all of it highly persuasive; although, it has to be said, not impossible to derive by surreptitious means – prior knowledge of hospital procedure being one.

But the part that really got Kimberly's attention was Maria's description of what she had perceived during the emergency from other viewpoints around the hospital - in particular, while outside, three or four stories above the ground, staring very closely at a strange object that had grabbed her focus on a window ledge. It turned out to be a tennis shoe, which she described as being dark blue, with a scuffed outer side, near the little toe, and a white shoelace tucked under the heel. Maria was so keen to

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<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 6, *The Shoe on the Ledge*, by Kimberly Clark Sharp, MSW, from *Surviving Death: A Journalist Investigates Evidence For An Afterlife* by Leslie Kean, Three Rivers Press, 2017.

prove that she had been ‘alive while dead’ she persuaded Kimberly to go and look for the shoe, which she eventually found on a hard-to-see, let-alone-access ledge outside of the building’s third floor. The shoe was exactly as Maria had described it.

Here, then, is what veridical evidence is: *if* it could be proven Maria was clinically dead and that she had seen things she could not possibly have perceived from her gurney, or any other vantage point using her five senses, then *QED* something remarkable must have happened; enough, perhaps, to invoke Wheeler’s aphorism.

But instead, it seems, Wheeler’s ‘strangest thing’ conflicts so markedly with some people’s belief systems that their first instinct is to want to kill the anomaly, rather than ‘get curious’ about it.

NDE research is no exception; and, in a sense, this isn’t unreasonable: extraordinary claims rightly demand extraordinary evidence. But, as with other areas of anomalous science, what we see in the ‘case of Maria’s shoe’ is the dismissal of whole bodies of research because of a sceptical tendency to pick apart one or two cases, rather than evaluate the body of data as a whole. Are we really to dismiss the work of van Lommel, Janice Holden, President of the International Association for Near-Death Studies, Bruce Greyson, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia, and Dr Sam Parnia, associate professor of Medicine at the NYU Langone Medical Center<sup>34</sup>, because Clark Sharp failed to prove (to the satisfaction of some) that she received the salient details of the shoe from Maria *before* she went and located it on the ledge? There is a wealth of research across thousands of cardiac arrest and other near-death survival cases that point toward some form of ‘nonphysical veridical perception’ among a hard core of cases<sup>35</sup>.

Does this mean that we have to accept *all* their evidence and analysis?

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<sup>34</sup> He is also director of the Human Consciousness Project at the University of Southampton in the UK.

<sup>35</sup> For example, whilst at the University of North Texas, Dr Holden – in her paper *More Things in Heaven and Earth: A Response to “Near-Death Experiences with Hallucinatory Features”* – identified 107 cases of apparently nonphysical veridical perception, in which a case would be designated ‘inaccurate’ if even one case were found not to correspond to consensus reality. Thirty-seven per cent of the cases ‘involving apparently completely accurate perception’ were determined to be accurate by independent, objective sources.

No, it does not.

Van Lommel, for instance, comes to the ‘almost unavoidable conclusion’ in a chapter that he wrote for Leslie Kean’s book, *‘Surviving Death’*, that ‘at the time of (our) physical death consciousness will continue to be experienced in another dimension, in an invisible and immaterial world, in which all past, present and future is enclosed’. But, as Kean herself points out in a preceding chapter of the same book, ‘there are other considerations to contemplate’ – considerations that don’t necessarily support evidence for the permanent survival of human consciousness post-death. One of these is that Maria’s ‘detached consciousness’ may have been dependent on her *living body* for its existence<sup>36</sup>, even if, as Kean points out, it was capable of making ‘a short excursion into the external world’<sup>37</sup>. Going a step further, she quotes Holden: “The consciousness associated with a body that *has not yet lost* the potential to live may or may not be the same as the consciousness associated with a body that *has lost that potential*” (emphases in the original). Kean rightly alerts us that Maria’s ESP – her clairvoyance allowing her to view objects (e.g, the shoe) remotely – may have become active while she lay unconscious, thus facilitating a sort of ‘vivid dream state’.

This capacity of the NDE’er to acquire *by psychic means* the kinds of veridical knowledge that is often presented as ‘clear evidence’ of *post-death* survival is rightly called into question here.

We should not tag veridical data emerging out of an OBE as evidence of an NDE – they are clearly not the same.

*Per* Janice Holden, there are two sides to an NDE: the ‘material aspect’, involving earth-bound evidence of the shoe kind, which shares some characteristics with an OBE; and the ‘trans-material aspect’, in which the experiencer ‘perceives

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<sup>36</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>37</sup> Op.cit., p.93.



phenomena in transcendent dimensions beyond the physical world'<sup>38</sup> – much as my wife had when her mother died.

For NDE'ers to acquire veridical knowledge by psychic means doesn't make their experience any the less remarkable – an OBE *is* remarkable.

But it isn't conclusive proof that our consciousness survives permanent bodily death. For this, we must continue to look elsewhere.

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Dr Christopher Kerr, CEO and Chief Medical Officer of Hospice and Medical Care Buffalo, NY – a psychologist and physician with a PhD in neurobiology - has pulled together, with the active cooperation of his many patients, a large dataset of so-called end-of-life experiences (ELEs)<sup>39</sup>. These mostly comprise 'visitations' by deceased relatives, friends and even pets. Some appear in dreams, others as manifestations in what we would describe as everyday 'waking reality' - but most, if not all, are "qualitatively different from hallucinations", Dr Kerr explained to me<sup>40</sup>.

Dr Kerr was a hard-boiled, 37-year-old cardiology fellow finishing his specialty training while working weekends at Hospice Buffalo to pay the bills, when he had a transformative experience. In expressing a thought to a veteran charge nurse called Nancy that his patient, Tom, would respond well to IV antibiotics and fluids, she told him it was too late – Tom was dying. When Kerr queried how she could be so sure, she told him that he had been dreaming about his dead mother. Kerr responded: "I don't remember that class from medical school." To which, Nancy – with the wisdom and directness that comes from a career spent on the front line – replied that he, Kerr, must have 'missed a lot of classes.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Leslie Kean, quoting Holden, on p.97 of *Surviving Death*.

<sup>39</sup> Since I interviewed Dr Kerr, he and his research team now refer to ELDVs (end-of-life dreams and visions) as ELEs: end-of-life experiences.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with the author, 27.7.20

<sup>41</sup> From Introduction, *Death Is But A Dream*, Dr Christopher Kerr with Carine Mardorossian, Quercus Editions, London, UK, 2020.

Dr Kerr's ELE research is focused on his patients – his first and only concern is on how these experiences can help them and their caregivers as they approach death.

The study he subsequently launched had a two-fold objective: first, to demonstrate that pre-death dreams and visions exist and occur routinely; second, to address their 'prevalence, content, and significance' from the patient's perspective.

To document ELEs as related by the patients themselves, he and his team utilised a standardised questionnaire in conjunction with more open-ended questions. Every participant was asked the same questions about dream or vision content, frequency and degree of realism, many of them having reported, as NDE'ers and SDE'ers (like my wife) so often did, that they seemed 'more real than real'. A numbered scale was used so that answers could be quantified and compared.

In a fusion of the research carried out to date, what it has shown is that 88.1 per cent of patients report having at least one ELE; 99 per cent report their ELE as seeming or feeling real; and 60.1 per cent that their dreams were comforting (18.8 per cent that they were distressing)<sup>42</sup>. The ELEs they most frequently reported as soothing included the presence of dead friends and relatives (72 per cent), followed, in order, by living friends and relatives, dead pets or other animals, past meaningful experiences, and finally, religious figures. 'Taken together,' Dr Kerr concludes, 'the data suggest that the dying process includes an extraordinary but built-in mechanism that soothes our fears as our inner world becomes ever more populated by those we have loved and lost.'<sup>43</sup>

Can it be said, then, that ELEs have some kind of purpose? Many dying patients describe having been 'put back together' by their experiences; others to have significantly higher 'post-traumatic growth scores' than their non-ELE-experiencing counterparts – evidence, Dr Kerr says, that, even as we approach death, we are yet afforded an opportunity to grow.

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.drchristopherkerr.com/research>

<sup>43</sup> Percentage and quote, p.49 'Death Is But A Dream'.

Dr Kerr makes no judgment on whether ELEs are physically real. Dr Peter Fenwick, on the other hand, insists they are – that they are evidence of the so-called ‘non-dual state’ which we enter as we transition from what we experience as our physical bodies to what Dr Fenwick – a neuroscientist, psychiatrist and renowned expert on near-death experiences – describes as our natural state of consciousness; one that is indivisible from the universal field of consciousness – the ‘substrate’ - to which we revert when we die.

“We need to start thinking about death as a radical change in consciousness,” he told me<sup>44</sup>. “As we approach death, the data “show unequivocally that the fabric of consciousness is pulled apart in dramatic terms in three broad phases,” as documented by Swiss psychotherapist and palliative care physician, Monika Renz<sup>45</sup>:

The first, *pre-transition*, involves the kinds of phenomena documented by Dr Kerr in the weeks and days before death. This happens before an ‘inner transformation of perception occurs’, according to Renz. ELEs, Dr Fenwick says, which often begin during this phase, may indicate the state in which we enter death to be critical – a ‘good death’, one that is eased by the comforting appearance of ‘familiar’, as they are referred to, may be key to our initial experience of what he terms ‘an afterlife’.

The second is death itself, in which the *transition* is characterised by a loosening of ‘ego consciousness’ – the ‘egoic function’, as Dr Fenwick refers to it, replete with the attachments that bind us to our material existence - and the third is *post-transition*, when, Dr Fenwick says, we attain a ‘fully non-dual state’ – and the attachments of the egoic function dissolve completely and we become ‘one with consciousness’.

Can any of this be seen? The short answer, according to Dr Fenwick is, yes. ‘The perception of something leaving the body around the time of death is a little discussed phenomenon, reported consistently by professional carers and, most importantly, relatives, but usually only when they are directly asked about it,’ he

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<sup>44</sup> Dr Fenwick’s remarks to me are drawn from two Zoom interviews: on 8.7.20 and 15.7.20.

<sup>45</sup> Dr Fenwick credits the data of the phases themselves to Monika Renz. See: ‘Dying Is A Transition’ by Monika Renz PhD *et al*, American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine, 2012.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229153806\\_Dying\\_is\\_a\\_Transition](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229153806_Dying_is_a_Transition)

wrote in the paper *'End of Life Experiences and their Implications for Palliative Care'*<sup>46</sup>. The accounts are varied, his report explains, but central to the experience is a form or shape that may leave the body – and, often, he reported separately, light witnessed at the precise moment of our passing by friends and relatives in the room.

This light phenomenon has been reported by almost all NDE researchers, including psychologist and physician Raymond Moody MD, who coined the term 'near-death experience' in his 1975 best-selling book, *'Life After Life'*. In his book on *shared* death experiences, *'Glimpses of Eternity'*<sup>47</sup>, Moody cites a large number of witnesses to light phenomena amongst relatives and carers of the dying. One, Sharon Nelson, told Moody about her encounter with the light at the death of her sister. *'About one week prior to my sister's actual passing, a bright white light engulfed the room. It was a light that we all saw and a light that has stayed with us ever since.'* In another case, Moody was approached by two sisters, Maria and Louisa, at a medical conference in Spain who told him about a 'brilliant light' that filled the room at the death of their father. *'The light stayed for maybe ten minutes after he died,'* said Maria, *'We saw no forms or figures in the light, but it seemed to be alive and have a personal presence.'* And this from a hospice nurse in North Carolina, who, having had a deep fear of witnessing her first death – that of a Mrs Jones – told how she heard Mrs Jones's voice in her head calling her into the room: *'I saw her draw her last breath. Right then, a light that looked like vapour formed over her face. I never had felt such peace. The head nurse on duty was very calm and told me that Mrs Jones was leaving her body and wanted me to see the dying experience. I saw a luminous presence floating near the bed, shaped somewhat like a person.'* The experienced nurse witnessed the light in the room, but not Mrs Jones's 'presence'.

Dr Fenwick, who has studied the physics of the phenomenon, says the light takes other forms, including a 'globular' and 'stringlike' appearance. He has compared its deathbed manifestations with light witnessed by students of French spiritual teacher,

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<sup>46</sup> P. Fenwick, H. Lovelace and S. Brayne, *International Institute of Environmental Studies*, Volume 64, No.3, June 2007, 316-323.

<sup>47</sup> *Glimpses of Eternity: Sharing a Loved One's Passage from This Life to the Next*, Raymond Moody Jr., MD, PhD, and Paul Perry, SAKKARA Productions Publishing, 2010.

Alain Forget<sup>48</sup>, whose methods for ‘dissolving the ego’ have, he says, enabled Forget to ‘manifest light’ during EEG, fMRI and CT monitoring sessions<sup>49</sup>.

Fenwick breaks down the characteristics of the (Forget) light in the following way:

- First, not everyone is able to see it, “which, tells us something about its inherent qualities,” he told me.
- Nor did it show up in photographs, “so we know it can’t knock electrons out of the sensitive material in a camera.”
- The light *is* visible through different kinds of glass but becomes weaker.
- The presence of ‘normal light’ – daylight or electric - serves to *increase* its intensity; and darkening the room doesn’t cause it to shine beaconlike as might be expected, but instead makes it dimmer.

“This gives us the beginnings of an idea as to what may be happening. What, is augmented by light and doesn’t show up in darkness?” Fenwick asks rhetorically.

The answer, he suggests, has something to do with the visual cortex. Something, clearly, is happening in the brain – but not *just* in the brain. Something else is at work, too<sup>50</sup>.

Connecting Forget to an EEG, Fenwick observed clear changes in brain functioning. Using a measure called a phase slope index (PSI), he compared read-outs between Forget and his students, the PSI telling him which ‘channel’ was ‘leading’ and which was ‘following’ and the correlation between the two. What he found was that Forget’s brain led in the 10 Hertz range, while the student’s led at around 1 Hertz – the two brains being intertwined in “quite a marked way”. The areas of the brain that are involved are the parietal region in the back of the head (used for sensory perception and integration), the fusiform region (used mainly for reading facial expression) and

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<sup>48</sup> Forget, who became a mentor of Dr Fenwick’s as well, has written a book on the ‘mechanics of the ego’ and methods for its ‘dissolution’ in *How To Get Out Of This World Alive*, translated from French into English by Antoine Laurent, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Electroencephalogram (EEG), functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and computerised tomography (CT).

<sup>50</sup> Dr Fenwick’s comments about Forget and the light are drawn from his two interviews with me, see above.

the primary visual cortex (used for the conscious processing of visual stimuli). “When Forget is leading, then you can argue these areas (in the student’s brain) are being stimulated in some way,” Fenwick says. “However, when the student affects Forget’s brain, the student does something different – he stimulates the executive area in Forget’s frontal lobes, as if he is giving him direct feedback as to what is going on.”

The experiment is highly suggestive that the ‘giving and receiving of light’ is some form of ‘entanglement phenomenon’, Fenwick says, and that “there is a real change in brain function that couples the (entangled) people together”, indicating a telepathic mechanism of some kind – a connection, under certain conditions, that becomes supercharged between a person who is dying and a loved one in the moment of ‘transition’.

When the dying person becomes fully ‘non-dual’, this is when we lose all the “filters related to the structures of the world,” Fenwick informs us, providing us with a clue, perhaps, to the true nature of the ‘interface’ that we discussed earlier. Light, which should at all times be objective and measurable, is seen by some but not others – and not always by technology, because, to be clear, in the ‘giving and receiving of light’ between Forget and his students, as discussed above, scanning equipment measured the brain’s reaction to the *perception* of the light, not the actual light itself.

What does this say about the nature of ‘mind’ – about the nature of reality itself?

Shorn of the ‘attachments of the ego’ - that function of the ‘self’, according to Carl Jung which provides us with the armour we cloak ourselves in progressively from birth - the ‘essence of a person’ becomes visible to some but not others. There’s a lot to unpack here, but it suggests that the regulating system of the ‘interface’ is governed as much by the immaterial processes of ‘mind’ as by the physical brain.

If reality is holographic in nature and our brains tune into the ‘depth data’ in the hologram under particular conditions, then, as the Gateway Report told us, what we may be doing is converting the non-linear, non-verbal information of the universe into 2-dimensional data that’s understandable in, and relatable to, our material existence.

What might this *non-linear, non-verbal* information look like?

Carl Jung would tell us that it is 'symbolic' in nature and appears in archetypal form through the 'collective unconscious'.

Archetypes are signs, symbols and patterns of behaviour or thinking that are shared by all of humanity.

'The experience of light has no known origin in the brain,' Moody writes in *Glimpses Of Eternity*. 'Numerous scientific researchers have documented that every element of the near-death experience – being out-of-body, travelling up (a) tunnel, seeing dead relatives, having a life review, seeing visions of heaven (etc) – can be found to reside in various parts of the brain, yet none of the reductionist researchers has been able to find the anatomical origin of the mystical light.'

Per Dr Peter Fenwick's research, this is because it manifests and resides in something that isn't physical.

In the English language, we often use the words 'brain' and 'mind' interchangeably, but they are very far from the same thing.

The brain is an organ, but the mind isn't. The materialist viewpoint is that the brain is the physical location of 'mind' and mind is the manifestation of thought, perception, memory, imagination, emotion and attention and intention – all the things that make us 'us' – the things that provide us with our capacity to function as autonomous, independent human beings. The materialist reductionist viewpoint, therefore, would say that the brain is the 'interface', but the 'phenomenon of the light' says it can't be.

If the brain (along, quite likely with other parts of the nervous system) is the receiver, mind is the 'organiser' that takes the essential information we need for our survival and transposes it as 'icons' on to our user-interface. Most of these we agree on by consensus – they are the icons we experience as our everyday reality. But subtler information of the 'non-physical' - the universe as experienced by Ingo Swann and countless others – a universe most of us don't experience directly – is represented

on the interface, too; and, as evidenced by the shared phenomenon of the light, this information is occasionally made available to us as a consensus reality – albeit one that transcends what we perceive of as ‘normal’. Mind, then, *is* the interface – the place where ‘our reality’ plays out. But this reality, as our witnesses have been telling us for a while now, is far subtler than materialist science would like us to believe.

Sharon Nelson, whom we met in Moody’s book about shared death experiences, said of Mrs Jones’s light: *‘Words cannot express what impact this experience had on me. This was certainly not something I had ever thought before. The wisdom and peace of this light have not left me since.’* Maria and Louisa said they felt ‘changed for the better by the light’. And the hospice nurse from North Carolina who had been dreading witnessing a death has since used her experience to teach student nurses.

It is tempting at this point to transpose mind and ‘consciousness’, but they are clearly not the same thing either. Consciousness is the ‘thing’ that allows us to witness what plays out on the screen.

If we survive bodily death, then, logically it is this part of us – whatever this part is - that goes on. It is this part of ‘us’, therefore, we need to focus on as we go forward.

For now, there is something else the phenomenon of the light speaks to: something we may express as ‘the universe’ is communicating to us and the meaning we take is that ‘everything will be OK’ (this, you may remember, was the meaning my wife brought back from her shared death experience with her mother: that *all is well*). And this, maybe, as its follow-up: that what science tells us is the end may not be the end at all.

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The world’s leading authority on reincarnation, Professor Ian Stevenson, was a Canadian by birth who worked at the University of Virginia’s Department of Medicine for 50 years until shortly before his death in 2007. In 1968, eleven years after being named its chair of psychiatry, he was bequeathed a million dollars by Chester Carlson, the inventor of the Xerox copying process, to pursue parapsychological



studies at the University of Virginia. Carlson's funding allowed Stevenson to travel the world in search of the best evidence of reincarnation – research he eventually compiled into *'Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects'*, a 2,268-page, two-volume book published in 1997<sup>51</sup>.

This phenomenal work detailed accounts of people of all races, creeds and religions who professed to have memories of previous lives.

A typical case was that of an Indian girl, Kumkum Verma, who, aged three and a half, began to relate how she had lived in Darbhanga, a city of 200,000 people approximately 25 miles from her then home. Her aunt wrote down all the things Kumkum remembered about her previous life, which included the name of her son, her grandson's name, the town where her father had lived and a pet snake that she used to feed milk to. A friend of Kumkum's father went to the district in Darbhanga she had described and found that a woman who had died five years before Kumkum was born matched all the details the little girl had provided.

Hundreds more cases uncovered by Stevenson in India and elsewhere attested to certain common features, for example a tendency of subjects to talk about their previous life at a very young age - starting at two or three and stopping by six or seven. Most made their statements spontaneously and without the use of hypnotic regression. Some told of being deceased members of their own families; others, like Kumkum, of being part of families they had no knowledge of. Whilst most described ordinary lives, what often distinguished them was the way they had died: 70 per cent, Stevenson's research showed, had died of unnatural causes, often violently and suddenly. In these cases, 35 per cent showed phobias related to their mode of death.

While some critics saw confirmation bias in this portion of Stevenson's work, less easy to dismiss were subjects born with birthmarks and/or deformities matching the wounds inflicted upon them in their former incarnation.

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<sup>51</sup> The work is currently unavailable. Published as (1997a), *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*. Some details are available here: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Reincarnation-Biology-Contribution-Etiology-Birthmarks/dp/0275952835>

In 'Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect'<sup>52</sup>, another seminal work that he published in 1997, Stevenson listed 200 cases, many including autopsy reports and police records, in which the birthmarks or birth defects of those with past life memories matched wounds they had suffered as their former personalities.

The subjects included a boy with birthmarks on the front and back of his head that matched the entry and exit wounds of the bullet he said had killed him in his former life; and a girl with what Stevenson described as the most extraordinary birthmark he had ever seen that corresponded to the skull surgery she said she had undergone in her previous existence.

All these cases, Stevenson said, represented tangible evidence of 'carryover' from a deceased individual, with concomitant impacts on a developing foetus.

Jim B. Tucker, the Bonner-Lowry Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, became intrigued by children's past life memories after reading Stevenson's work. In a paper published in 2006, he raises an often-overlooked aspect of past-life experiences: the memories reported by children of events occurring during the *interval between death and rebirth*.

Approximately 20 per cent of children in reincarnation cases, he found, make such reports<sup>53</sup>.

Here, suddenly, I found myself back at the nub of the near-death issue that had vexed the question of veridical evidence surrounding Maria's shoe.

It is impossible, critics of the post-death survival thesis say, to separate an NDE from an OBE because the 'psychic interpretation' - the difference between a

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<sup>52</sup> Published as (1997b), *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, Westport, CT, Praeger.

<sup>53</sup> Raised in a section of Prof. Tucker's paper – *Children Who Claim to Remember Previous Lives: Past, Present and Future Research*, Division of Perceptual Studies, Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia - that discusses work beyond individual cases to include examinations of groups of cases, with correlations from across the department's database.

consciousness associated with a body that *has not yet lost the potential to live* and the consciousness of a body that *has forever lost that potential* – can never be resolved.

To clarify: since it is impossible to ‘come back from the dead’, whatever the clinical definition of ‘death’ may be, we can never say for sure, based on those aspects of an NDE involving veridical evidence of the earth-bound variety (exemplified by Maria’s shoe), that consciousness survives *permanent* bodily death. The best we can say is it does *temporarily*, since, for a while, it operates outside the body, as in an OBE.

Which, potentially, takes us into a very thorny corner of our research envelope – because, technically, the only data under the court-of-law, beyond-reasonable-doubt principle that would stand up would be evidence of the ‘trans-material testimony’ kind - from someone who has *permanently* crossed into that other realm. Which by any yardstick is impossible, since this evidence has no means materially of being conveyed.

From Professor Tucker’s research, we learn that past-life subjects who reported ‘interval memories’ tended to make a greater number of statements about the previous life that were verified to be accurate, recalled more names from that former life, had higher scores on the strength-of-case scale, and were more likely to state the names of the previous personalities and to give accurate details about their deaths compared to those who hadn’t reported such memories<sup>54</sup>. There is something about this testimony, perhaps then, that may be considered to be inherently reliable.

Close analysis of 35 ‘interval memories’ in Burma indicated that these memories could be broken down into three parts: a ‘transitional stage’; a ‘stable stage’ in a particular location; and a ‘return stage’ involving a choice of parents or conception.

The reports of the Burmese children’s interval memories were compared to the testimony of people who had had NDEs – and were found to contain features that were similar to the transcendental (or trans-material) component of Western NDEs

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<sup>54</sup> Op.cit.

as well as having significant areas of overlap with Asian NDEs. ‘It thus appeared,’ Professor Tucker concluded, ‘that interval memories and NDEs could be considered part of the same overall phenomenon, *reports of an afterlife* (my emphasis added).’<sup>55</sup>

The interval memories cast doubt, too, Professor Tucker went on to say, on the materialist reductionist explanation of NDEs as mere fantasies produced by dying brains, since the subjects reporting the interval memories were young and healthy.

Ordinarily, we would say that of the two aspects of the NDE identified earlier - the ‘material aspect’, involving earthly impressions, and the ‘trans-material aspect’, in which the experiencer perceives phenomena in dimensions *beyond our world*<sup>56</sup> – only the former, because it relates to material ‘stuff’, can be brought back, discussed by a witness under cross-examination, and checked against the known, material facts.

But here, the research of a leading academic was hinting at an alternative: a set of data pointing to evidence of ‘permanent post-death survival’ in *the trans-material realm* might be cross-checkable via these two sets of experiencers, NDE’ers and past-lifers, if only a means could be devised of evaluating the evidence veridically.

Dr Pim van Lommel, who, as we saw, spent his career at the sharp end of the near-death experience, doesn’t refer to the survival of human consciousness *post-death*, but instead to what he terms a ‘*continuity of consciousness*’. The real question, he and others broadly agree, isn’t about how consciousness goes on when we die, but about the existence of an all-connected, all-knowing state with no beginning and no end, which, under certain conditions, happens to manifest in our 3D/4D reality as an out-of-body, shared-death or near-death experience – and has come to be known by millions. The core features of these experiences are similar, suggesting we need to look on them in the way van Lommel urges us to – not as distinct and unrelated, but as evidence of some property of our condition that is non-local, infinite and unbound.

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<sup>55</sup> Op.cit.

<sup>56</sup> The ‘material aspect’ and the ‘trans-material aspect’ discussed earlier, from Leslie Kean, quoting Holden, on p.97 of *Surviving Death*.

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Here, I took a short diversion into the research journey of Apollo 14 astronaut, Dr Edgar Mitchell, the sixth man to walk on the Moon, and for two essential reasons.

First, the scientific evidence I had amassed outside of the mainstream materialist view – which, had failed to my satisfaction to provide an adequate explanation for a reality that encompassed all the ‘icons’ on the user-interface of our experience – seemed to point, as the US Army’s Gateway paper had, to the universe as being ‘quantum holographic’ in nature; and Mitchell had formulated just such a theory.

The first glimpses of it came to him in a ‘peak experience’ on the way back to Earth in Apollo 14, when he became filled with a profound sense we were part of a living, harmonious, sentient cosmos, in which everyone and everything was connected.

This vision was a very long way from the cosmos of our textbooks – we and the matter of the universe, Mitchell maintained, were in a resonant relationship in which information was constantly being exchanged between perceiver and percipient.

The medium that facilitated this exchange, he said, was the zero-point field – the foam of quantum potential and unmanifest energy that arose from, and vanished back into the quantum vacuum – the substrate beyond which physics can’t see.

Our capacity to tap this data, Mitchell said, hinged on the ability of our brain and central nervous system, functioning as a quantum computer, to derive two fundamental aspects of the data held in the field: the material and the *immaterial*<sup>57</sup>. The former, vested in its particle aspect, emerged as *physical and local* – energy that did work and matter we could see and touch; while information held in the particle’s ‘alter-ego’, the wave function, allowed us to sense and intuit *non-locally, universally and psychically*.

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<sup>57</sup> From Chapter 5, Nature’s Mind: The Quantum Hologram, by Dr. Edgar Mitchell, in *Beyond UFOs: The Science of Consciousness and Contact with Non Human Intelligence, Volume 1*, The Dr. Edgar Mitchell Foundation for Research into Extraterrestrial and Extraordinary Experiences, FREE, Inc.

It was the second aspect of the exchange that provided us with our experience of the paranormal, Mitchell maintained, including the OBE and the NDE. In *'The Way Of The Explorer'*<sup>58</sup>, the book that he wrote in 2008 that sought to portray his life's journey through the lens of what he called a dyadic model of the universe<sup>59</sup>, he described the OBE as 'likely a trick of the psyche' – a survival mechanism - that allowed us to dissociate when faced with an uncomfortable, traumatic or life-threatening situation.

'The classic near-death experience,' he wrote a few paragraphs later, 'seems to be but an extension of the OBE'. This carried with it the emergence of archetypal images that 'provide assurances of well-being and eternal survival.' This information, conveyed often by entities with religious and cultural significance to those that it affected, he said, was recovered 'either from the deep subconscious or from non-local memory, rather than being evidence of 'discarnate entities from other realms'.

Whilst this tallied with key elements of the 'exchange of light' phenomenon we encountered earlier – the possibility that phenomena around a dead or dying person were symbolic, archetypal communications from the collective unconscious (or perhaps, even, from the universe), rather than from a *person* who had transcended bodily death – it seemed an uncharacteristically bleak portrayal of our place in eternity from a man who'd sought to integrate his scientific and spiritual worldviews for much of his life.

The fact that Dr Mitchell had gone on to become Chairman Emeritus of Eternea<sup>60</sup>, an organisation that espouses the survival of consciousness beyond the brain and body, told me his view of consciousness's capacity to 'go on' wasn't as stark as these two statements made out. But it raised an important point: if the universe is quantum holographic, could it be that our consciousness continued as a kind of 'infinite hologram' – a feelingless shadow of our earthly essence as opposed to one that held our *awareness*? And if it was the former, would this constitute true *survival*?

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<sup>58</sup> *The Way of the Explorer*, Dr. Edgar Mitchell, The Career Press, Inc, NJ, USA, 2008.

<sup>59</sup> An evolutionary cosmological model using energy and information as fundamental concepts.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.eternea.org>

All I could say up to the end of my Phase 2 research with any beyond-reasonable-doubt conviction - that passed muster for me - was that consciousness was primary and extraordinary evidence existed for the survival of our 'individual consciousness'.

I had gone as far as the research would allow. The more refined picture derived from across the project was that consciousness didn't just *survive*; it *continued* – it had no beginning and no end; it just *was*. We exist as holograms in a holographic universe that is, in effect, 'alive'. The next question was, were *we* - if by 'we' we mean an entity with intact awareness and aspects of the personality that we enjoy in this life?

To go beyond this point, I needed to address two questions: *How/why phenomena project as 'rogue icons' on the screen of our 'user interface'? And: what conditions underwrite the 'conditional reality' effects that manifest as paranormal phenomena?*

This impasse brought me to the second reason for my interest in Edgar Mitchell.

In addition to founding, in 1973, the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), an organisation that brings scientific rigour to the exploration of mind and consciousness, he had been instrumental in setting up a body called 'FREE' - the Foundation for Research into Extraterrestrial and Extraordinary Experiences<sup>61</sup>.

FREE theorises that all types of contact with what it calls 'non-human intelligences', including the departed – might actually be a single phenomenon that should be studied holistically. In this, it endorses what Pim van Lommel and others had concluded about the near-death experience: that experiences of the OBE, SDE and NDE variety were underpinned by a core, *continuous aspect* of consciousness.

FREE has gathered data across a range of what it refers to as 'contact modalities' – NDEs, remote viewing, shamanic encounters, channelling and others – that had, it said, yielded 'numerous commonalities and variables'. One day, it hoped that these

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.experiencer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Initial-Research-Data-Summary-FREE.pdf>

data would allow it to develop a 'viable hypothesis for a possible unification theory of consciousness and contact with non-human intelligence'.

Hoffman's 'conscious realism' model had allowed me to visualise how reality presented itself to us – by giving us just enough for us to be able to handle. Any more and we might undergo perhaps what is known as a 'consciousness shift'.

We talk about consciousness shifts all the time, mostly without stopping to think what this actually means.

With deep, fundamental change in the world around us, we seem to be going through such a shift right now – and the appearance of unfamiliar icons on our user-interface may be indicative that 'new lines of code' are rewriting our whole conception of reality. For pointers to this, we need look no further than the acknowledgment in the Director of National Intelligence's report to the US Congress<sup>62</sup>, delivered this June, that the UFO phenomenon (or 'unidentified aerial phenomena' in the parlance of the report) is real.

The subjective experience is no longer the pariah that it was, without place in the experimenter's laboratory. Quantum mechanics – with its pivotal acknowledgment of the 'observer in the loop' - tells us how wrong it is that this was ever allowed to be.

FREE's 'contact modalities' were heresy by any scientific yardstick, but since I was now beyond the view that mainstream science had primacy in any claim to providing us with a picture of the true nature of reality, I found myself looking at the 'modalities' as a tool that might, possibly, allow my research to go beyond Phase 2 to a Phase 3 - by probing the corner of the reality envelope beyond the last thing mainstream science currently acknowledges to be real: the in/out virtual particles of the zero-point energy field. This is where the final part of my research ultimately took me.

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<sup>62</sup> <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Preliminary-Assessment-UAP-20210625.pdf>



In seeking the best experiencers from each of the modalities, I received the valued advice of Dean Radin, Chief Scientist at IONS and Associated and Distinguished Professor of Integral and Transpersonal Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Dean had been a close colleague of Dr Mitchell for many years, until Dr Mitchell's death in 2016.

Having explained what I was looking to do, Dean put me in touch with experiencers whom he said were amongst the best exemplars across the modalities that I wanted to explore.

They included:

- An 'evidential medium' (mediums whose data is deemed to be provable via third party evidence) tested exhaustively at IONS and at the University of Arizona;
- A California-based shaman, tested extensively at IONS, who has worked with native healers around the world, most notably in North and Central America and South and East Asia;
- A trance-channeler tested exhaustively at IONS;
- And a neuroscientist whose 2008 near-death experience of realms he visited when 'clinically brain-dead' was detailed in a best-selling book.

In addition, I spoke with:

- An ex-US Navy officer who had undergone a series of unnerving experiences with 'non-human intelligences' after his ship encountered a UFO in the North Atlantic;
- A former US Army officer trained to remote view by Ingo Swann in the 1980s;
- And several practitioners of 'DMT therapy', in which experiencers – known as 'DMT voyagers' – open their minds supposedly to other realms via ingestion of the psychedelic drug *dimethyltryptamine*.

While I couldn't claim the approach was rigorously scientific, it would employ proof-of-principles that would test the core assumptions.

A set of commonly ascribed features of different paranormal experiences would be plotted as yes/no responses along the x-axis. The experiencers would populate the y-axis. These, *per* the above, were: a UFO/ET contactee; an evidential medium; an NDE'er; a shaman; a channeler; a remote viewer; a deep meditator/lucid dreamer; and a DMT voyager.

The commonly ascribed paranormal features were:

- Entoptics<sup>63</sup> and symbols;
- Entity and NHI encounters;
- A sense of knowing and deep connection;
- Instances of warning and precognition;
- 'Psi gifts' – psychic abilities that are claimed to be given to, or acquired by the experiencer during or after a psychic event;
- Instances of 'miracle healing';
- An overcoming or conquering of the fear of death;
- The acquisition of a sense of clear mission and/or purpose following an experience;
- An encounter with light;
- And an encounter with, or a profound sense of an omniscient intelligence at the heart of the encounter/experience expressed as 'creator' or 'source'.

A tick (check) denoted a strong feature of the encounter/ experience<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> 'Entoptics' appear as seemingly nonsensical symbols and hieroglyphs in a kaleidoscopic format, often, in the case of a DMT voyager, at the beginning of the encounter/experience. See Graham Hancock's book, *Supernatural: Meetings with the Ancient Teachers of Mankind*.

<sup>64</sup> The data are drawn from the interviewees and the literature I had researched during Phase 2 and are not intended to be exhaustive, merely indicative.

As can be seen from the table below, certain modalities gather more ticks than others.

Modality/ Experience	Entoptics /Symbols	Entities /NHIs	Knowing/ connection	Warning /Precog.	Psi Gifts	Miracle Healing	Death Fear	Mission/ Purpose	Light	Source/ Creator
1.UFO/ET		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2.Medium comms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
3.NDE/OOB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.Shamanic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
5.Channeling		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
6.Remote viewing	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
7.Meditation/ Dreaming	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
8.DMT/drugs	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓

**Table 1:** Strongly associated features of paranormal encounters per 'contact modality'.

The near-death and shamanistic experiences, for example, score fully across the scorecard, while the remote viewing and meditation/lucid dreaming experiences do less well.

To repeat: the scorecard was never intended to capture all the features of an experience; the registering of a tick (check) is indicative of weighting only; and the modalities themselves are not exhaustive. What the table does show, however, is the degree of overlap amongst typically reported features of inner experiences – revealing, in effect, a set of common or shared features. These can be said to provide us with a level of 'intersubjective verifiability' about non-ordinary states of consciousness.

What it also shows – *per* the two pink shaded columns – is that all contactees across the modalities attested to encounters with 'entities' or 'non-human intelligences'; and almost all to the presence of an omniscient, all-pervading intelligence – described variously as a 'creator-presence' or 'source' – as being embedded in the encounter.

The question is: are any of these entities, which include amongst them the souls of the departed, *real*?

The evidential medium I interviewed at length was Suzanne Giesemann, a former US Navy commander, who once served as an aide to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff<sup>65</sup>.

Suzanne's capacity to derive verifiable, veridical information from the souls of the deceased has been scientifically scored by Gary E. Schwartz PhD, professor of psychology, medicine, neurology, psychiatry and surgery at the University of Arizona.

Professor Schwartz is a leading afterlife researcher who has conducted multiple exploratory investigations into the continuity of consciousness at the university's Laboratory for Advances in Consciousness and Health. Having evaluated many mediums using the same process, he has rated Suzanne's skills as amongst the very best – an endorsement I came across in her book, *'Wolf's Message'*<sup>66</sup>, which tells of her interactions with the spirit of a young man tragically killed by a bolt of lightning.

In a 'pre-reading' she details in the book – a pre-reading entails a spontaneous, unexpected communication with the deceased, without any feedback from relatives or friends about the deceased at the time the information is received (and thus represents much 'cleaner' data) – the number of 'hits' (i.e. verified pieces of data) about Wolf versus a 'control' were 73.5 per cent versus 5.6 per cent for the control.

Professor Schwartz points out that the probability of the difference between the scoring for Wolf versus the control as being 'explainable by chance' is less than one in a million. By contrast, he adds, the required criteria for statistical significance used in psychological research is less than one in twenty. He goes on to say that these findings do not in and of themselves prove that Suzanne had been communicating with Wolf but, along with other evidence, they do form a 'compelling argument that Wolf's efforts to communicate with Suzanne deserve to be taken seriously'<sup>67</sup>. This, to

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<sup>65</sup> My three interviews with Suzanne Giesemann were on 4.12.20, 10.12.20 and 19.1.21.

<sup>66</sup> Copyright © Suzanne Giesemann, [www.suzannegiesemann.com](http://www.suzannegiesemann.com)

<sup>67</sup> From Appendix A, *Wolf's Message*, 'Statistical Analysis of Wolf Pre-Reading with Suzanne Giesemann', Gary E. Schwartz, PhD.

me, appeared to point strongly to Wolf's post-material existence as a functioning conscious entity retaining attributes of his personality. I asked Suzanne, therefore, about her conception of reality and our place in it – before, during and after 'life'.

“(The) computer screen analogy is good,” she told me<sup>68</sup>, revealing that, guided by a team of spiritual helpers she refers to as her 'A-team', she has come to use a similar analogy herself. “The screen is limitless intelligence, so we can call it the 'One Mind'. But it arises as *individual* minds – and these minds experience life as a projection of stories. We are dense stories in physical form. I know that I, Suzanne, the story, am not the fulness of consciousness which is the screen itself – I am a *projection* of it.

“When I die,” she added, “my body is just one dense layer of that projection, but without it this pattern of consciousness – that's my definition of a soul – still exists.”

The neuroscientist whose NDE resulted in his best-selling book *'Proof of Heaven'*<sup>69</sup>, Dr Eben Alexander, said that cross-over data gathered from the modalities may be key to our understanding of the interconnectedness of consciousness.

Dr Alexander became ill with acute bacterial meningoencephalitis in November 2008 and quickly fell into coma. For the next seven days he remained on a ventilator – scans of his brain showed massive damage. This, however, was his portal into an extraordinarily rich NDE, in which his conscious awareness was transported through levels of experience to arrive finally at what he described as 'the Core', a void 'filled to overflowing with the infinite healing power of the all-loving deity at the source'.

Hoffman's ideas are interesting, Dr Alexander told me, but they don't go far enough<sup>70</sup>. “The literature is there, the data is there – it's not as if we need to ask what we have to do next to prove this.” This doesn't mean, he went on to say, that we don't have a lot more work to do to uncover what he calls the 'mechanisms of consciousness' – as a neuroscientist he remains intrigued by the way in which we

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<sup>68</sup> From Suzanne's first interview with me on 4.12.20.

<sup>69</sup> *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, Dr. Eben Alexander, Piatkus, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> From my interview with him on 15.12.20.

communicate with the 'deeper realms' – psychedelic drugs, or entheogens, as he refers to them, being a case in point.

In his second book, *'Living In A Mindful Universe'*<sup>71</sup>, Dr Alexander quotes a 2012 report from Imperial College London, in which fMRI was used to evaluate various brain regions under the influence of psilocybin, the active ingredient in psychedelic mushrooms.

The most remarkable finding, he wrote, was that it demonstrated a *reduction* in activity of the major connection regions of the brain in those who were having the most profound psychedelic experiences – the opposite of what was expected.

This may be evidence, he told me, that DMT, LSD, psilocybin and other entheogenic plant medicines are affecting the brain's 'main calculator', the neocortex, and in so doing "revealing the vast reality that exists that we're not normally aware of – the reality that comes into view in near-death and shared-death experiences. It's by going into that ancient circuit that you can actually separate your conscious awareness from the here and now of the physical brain and the sense of self."

'DMT voyagers' I spoke to agreed with this assessment – that there is a high degree of consensus amongst voyagers with regard the key aspects of the experience; and that the experiences appear to bear a striking resemblance to NDEs and SDEs.

Some of the common, recurring themes and characteristics of the DMT experience include:

- A subjective feeling of traveling outside or beyond the human body and human identity, which is often described as a process of ego-dissolution;
- An experience that often begins with traveling through a tunnel or portal before 'breaking through' to the DMT realm;
- A sense of sacredness pervading the experience;

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<sup>71</sup> *Living in a Mindful Universe: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Heart of Consciousness*, Dr. Eben Alexander, Piatkus, 2017.

- A sense of timelessness and a transcendence of time and space;
- Perceiving and interacting with sentient beings ranging from those with dull, almost machine-like attributes to ET-like figures and angelic divine beings;
- A noetic quality, yielding profound intuitive insights and knowledge;
- A sense of oneness, interconnection and unity with all things;
- Entering into a reality that is felt to be ultimate, absolute and infinite – accompanied by a subjective feeling that this reality is objectively ‘real’ and more fundamental than the human experience;
- The paradoxical nature of what is perceived and experienced;
- An ineffable quality to the experience that is fundamentally beyond the capacity of language or human mental concepts to describe.

A DMT voyager I interviewed at length maintained that the high levels of consensus amongst voyagers to the DMT realms crossed over appreciably with experiences reported by NDE’ers. “In my perspective,” he explained, “DMT, NDEs and mystical experiences all seem to represent direct encounters with the same ultimate truth, the same infinite source/ultimate reality out of which all has emerged” – what he called a “cross-cultural consensus”. Indeed, a recent study led by Imperial College, London, revealed ‘an intriguingly strong overlap’ between the phenomenology of NDEs and those associated with DMT<sup>72</sup>.

One of the most intriguing aspects of DMT and other psychedelic experiences are the beings that are routinely encountered. “Whoever these beings are,” the same DMT voyager maintained, “they exist in a way that is not constrained by our laws of physics; nor, too, by space or time or by any system of logic or rational thought.”

A central characteristic of the DMT realms and the beings therein, he went on to say, is that they are completely paradoxical, non-linear and non-physical - and only when we recognise that this paradoxical, multidimensional aspect of existence, and the forms of ‘life’ within it, play to a different set of rules will mainstream science come to

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<sup>72</sup> DMT Models the Near-Death Experience, Christopher Timmermann, Leor Roseman, Luke Williams, David Erritzoe, Charlotte Martial, Helena Cassol, Steven Laureys, David Nutt and Robert Carhart-Harris. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30174629/>

the understanding that there is a bigger, more expansive ‘theory of everything’ within which existing scientific frameworks are embedded: “A more expansive theory of everything may include alternate realms or dimensions of existence beyond the physical universe, where our laws of physics and logic seemingly break down.”

That ‘beings’ – including, potentially, our souls - exist as independent functioning entities in these alternate realms/dimensions of existence is one view. Another, expressed by Ede Frecska PhD, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Debrecen in Hungary, is that all entities are ‘quasi-autonomous structures’ whose identity is ‘informed’ – *literally* – by our conscious belief-systems<sup>73</sup>.

This offers a persuasive explanation for entities that appear to cross into our 3D/4D world with what Frecska describes as ‘veridical potencies’ – the energy to impact it physically. These range from poltergeists and angels to cryptids and mythical beasts. “Our expectations have a morphing-plastering effect on them,” Frecska says, “and not only ours – for people from the past and future who had or will get into contact with them, their expectation shapes them because they are in a non-local realm.”

In short, any ‘thing’ that can exist in this version of the universe can, does and very likely will – and, as is attested to by paranormal hotspots where ‘high strangeness’ witnessed by many people occurs frequently, it has energy to perform ‘work’ here.

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I began this essay with an introduction to the fictional heaven in which Squadron Leader Peter Carter finds himself in ‘*A Matter Of Life And Death*’. In the film, the court’s verdict will determine whether he can return to Earth and to June, the girl he loves, or remain forever in the Other World. In this, *our* trial setting, it is the reality of the Other World that is itself being judged.

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<sup>73</sup> From Chapter 6, ‘Why May DMT Occasion Veridical Hallucinations and Informative Experiences’, by Ede Frecska, from *DMT Dialogues: Encounters with the Spirit Molecule*. Edited by David Luke and Rory Spowers, Park Street Press, Vermont, USA, 2018.



I explained, too, that in my quasi-role as counsel for the defence of the proposition that our consciousness survives bodily death – a role that emulates the part played by Dr Reeves in the film - I would allow the witnesses to speak for themselves.

This, I believe, they have done powerfully and persuasively - and to have proven the proposition behind the question beyond a reasonable doubt. And, further, that it is the unmitigated weight of the evidence that has allowed them to do this.

But I am aware, too, that this isn't quite enough, because the data I amassed in the course of my project's research – thanks almost entirely to the witnesses heretofore assembled – call on me to draw conclusions of my own as to the nature of reality – a reality that happens to incorporate the continuity of consciousness, and therefore its survival following our permanent bodily death, as one of its inherent features.

And so, although now, as it were, 'the defence rests', I crave the indulgence of the court for a few moments longer, because what follows – unlike what I consider to be the concreteness of the data presented thus far – are my *inferences* from the data.

In the 1983 Gateway Report prepared by the US Army – an attempt by its author to map a reality that went far beyond the precepts of materialist, reductionist science - we were introduced to the ideas of vibration, frequency and resonance, matter as something that is far more elusive than our senses tell us, and the substrate of reality as a hologram that we, having resonant properties ourselves, are able to tune into. *Per* Dr Edgar Mitchell, our brains, acting as quantum computers, download information from this substrate – a realm beyond space and time that acts as a repository for all the information that ever was, is, or will be, including our memories.

*Per* Prof Hoffman, the only data we need are those that are germane to our survival. In a co-creative dance with the intelligence that is a facet of the universe, we are presented with just that - what we need, and no more - on our 'reality user-interface'. This interface is what we might refer to as 'mind' – a screen on which, broadly, we project our perceptions, which aggregate as consensus 'icons' – objective reality, as we know it.

By 'we', what we actually mean is 'consciousness'. But consciousness isn't us, exactly, and nor is mind, because something – some deep, fundamental aspect of consciousness – plays the part of 'the witness' to everything that's on the screen.

It is this part of us, I believe, that acts as a kind of IP address for 'our' consciousness; the part that we usually refer to as a 'soul', and this is the part that 'continues'; the timeless, placeless, *non-local* part of us that 'just is', with no beginning and no end.

Back on Earth, where everything also is vibration and frequency, our resonant frequency accretes in material form, as does everything in our reality – the universe that we see and sense; a universe precisely fine-tuned to the reality we experience within it. The data from the contact modalities speak to this idea of frequency and the 'Creator/Source' encountered by all the experiencers - or what Gateway called 'the Absolute' – vibrating at highest possible frequency.

Everything, therefore, would appear to reside on a spectrum – and somewhere on it we 'materialise' (literally) in the form that we do. Because all matter has its own resonant frequency, this is how the world of things takes form and appears as, and to, us.

But the 'rogue icons' that we occasionally encounter on our reality user-interface – the paranormal phenomena that some would say we are *increasingly* encountering – attest to the fact that there are entities 'out there' that do not exist at or on the same frequency as us. Some of these entities will have a lower frequency; some higher.

If Ede Frecska, whom we met in the last section is right, when the 'conditional reality' permits it, these entities may form as archetypal 'projections and reflections' on the screen of our reality user-interface in endless forms of 'non-human intelligence' – from 'tricksters', to creatures of mythology, to angels, demons and extra-terrestrials.

This conditional reality, identified in my Phase 2 research as something that could and should be probed and tested, will form the basis of a next-stage 'Phase 4'. The plan is to co-design experimental protocols with credentialed academics to identify

what combinations of conditions – elucidated earlier as ‘location’, ‘environment’ and ‘culture’ – need to be present for this conditional reality-set to take form in our 3D/4D world; all of it in the cross-disciplinary, ‘intellectually safe’ environment to which the project originally aspired, where sensible opinion will be respected no matter what.

The wild card in this ‘conditional laboratory’, as I foresee it, is ‘us’ and the energy, if that’s the right word, that we bring to bear on the other three conditions. Whilst it is entirely possible that Frecska is right and that we ourselves are responsible for the entities that appear to shadow us in particular locations, our intuition tells us that the beings encountered by experiencers across all eight contact modalities possess ‘conscious agency’ in their own right - which is why, in a limited way, we are able to interact with them. This, I am certain, science can prove. When *mainstream* science takes the same view - that the rogue icons we know as ‘the paranormal’ are a part of a consciousness we can test - then truly we will have entered a new scientific age.

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To conclude, I need to return to where we began: to ‘*A Matter Of Life and Death*’.

In my consulting work, I use the power of story to help deliver strategy and reach target markets and, one way or another, usually end up citing the work of Joseph Campbell, an American professor of comparative religion and mythology who came up with the concept of ‘monomyth’: his theory that the great stories of the world are descended from a single ‘origin story’ conceived at humanity’s awakening. In his seminal book, ‘*The Hero With A Thousand Faces*’<sup>74</sup>, published in 1949, he broke the monomyth down into its constituent parts via a model he called ‘*The Hero’s Journey*’.

Almost all the stories we love – particularly of the epic kind – follow the journey’s twelve waypoints, which starts with an ordinary person getting a ‘call to adventure’; his or her reluctance being assuaged by a wiser, older mentor; a series of trials that culminate in our hero acquiring a prize, or ‘boon’; the boon’s return to the ‘ordinary world’ and it then acting in such a way that the ordinary world is forever changed.

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<sup>74</sup> *The Hero With A thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell, Princeton University Press, 1949.

*The Lord Of The Rings*, *The Matrix* and *Star Wars* are all testaments to the power of monomyth – George Lucas, indeed, consulted Campbell on the original *Star Wars* script.

We resonate with these stories, because the characters in them – from the hero and the heroine to the fool and the arch-villain – are all archetypes: facets of our own psyches.

Expressed another way, the challenges faced by these heroes are mythic representations of the trials each of us faces and undergoes in life.

On a recent assignment with a ‘top ten’ consulting organization to deliver themes that its senior partners believed would be critical to business success in the coming decade, one of the biggest themes to emerge during our discussions was ‘purpose’. Unless companies developed a culture that engendered purpose, we were informed, 60 per cent of Millennials would walk out the door to seek alternative employment with an employer that more genuinely shared their values. Sixty-eight per cent of employees, we were also told, believed businesses didn’t do enough to instil a sense of ‘meaningful purpose’ in their culture. To develop this culture, they needed to be vulnerable, confessional, own up to past mistakes and show the next generation of talent that they were serious about recruiting and retaining them. Businesses that succeeded going forward, these consulting gurus all agreed, would need to ‘do good’ in addition to ‘doing well’. And if they didn’t – i.e. they merely paid lip-service to that ambition - heaven help them: there were any number of ‘hashtag movements’ out there to ensure that they got their name in lights - and for all the wrong reasons.

Being ‘authentic’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘purposeful’ – and, most importantly, ‘human’ - in the era of artificial intelligence and the Fourth Industrial Revolution are terms that are increasingly becoming hardwired into the playbooks of organisations and multinationals seeking to survive and thrive in the 2020s.

Alongside this, however, the world has never been more anxious.

According to the World Health Organization, one in four of us will experience a mental health problem at some point in our lives. Around 450 million people currently suffer from a mental health condition, placing mental disorders amongst the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide. In the US, according to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 43.6 million Americans – more than 18 per cent of the population over 18 years of age – suffer from mental illness in any given year; almost ten million – 4.2 per cent of the adult population – will suffer from a seriously debilitating mental illness. Elsewhere, the stats are no better. Phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as general anxiety and depression are the order of the day for large swaths of the population<sup>75</sup>.

And this was *before* Coronavirus. Emerging from the pandemic, we still have any number of potentially cataclysmic events to look forward to, most of them of our own making.

Thanks to exponential advances in technology and medicine, every day brings news of what we're able to do to change our physical bodies – either so we can adapt to an increasingly hostile world, or so we can live longer and/or smarter; or merely to make us look better. This is the transhumanist route many see as humanity's future. What it ignores, however, is the part of us we have discussed in these pages; the part that plugs us into the sea of connection and information that is our *real* world - integrating the part we've ignored for too long; the part we don't see in the mirror.

As 'stories in physical form', to quote Suzanne Giesemann, we have the power at any given moment to decide what our stories are going to be – and, if we want to, in this moment or any other, to change them. We can also look back and see that what we've achieved to get to where we are – no matter what those achievements are - harbours all the elements of the mythic stories Joseph Campbell tells us are the interplay of our archetypes as we struggle to understand who we are and why we're here.

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<sup>75</sup> <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/mental-health-and-mental-disorders#4>

The testimony of our witnesses, along with a growing body of scientific evidence that consciousness is primary, ought to tell us that every life on the planet is part of an interconnected story that matters – and that these stories – *our* stories – imprint forever in the fabric of existence. This, I believe, is a far better narrative than the transhumanist one and, at a subliminal level, is one that it is hardwired into us all; the proof of it being held in the stories we resonate with that tell us this is so - including those that come to us from the great religions.

At the end of *A Matter Of Life And Death*, Peter, of course, triumphs before the court, because, whilst the law of the universe is 'immutable', nothing, the court is told, is stronger than love.

In amongst all the pieces of remarkable testimony given by our expert witnesses here, we have been confronted with actual, physical evidence that this may indeed be so.

For, in the 'giving and receiving of light' – a light that is shared in the moment of physical death via a connection that appears to be based on an unbreakable bond between the essence of two or more people – we are offered clues to a form of entanglement, a foundational pillar of quantum mechanics, that may prove to be the true substrate of existence.

That this light appears only to people who have this bond is not at odds with the view that it is also a symbolic message from the universe – a message that 'life goes on'.

The screen that we experience as reality is 'one mind', Suzanne Giesemann tells us, but it also arises as *individual* minds. For these two statements to square with one another we and the screen - the 'one mind' - have to be that same limitless intelligence.

Why would an intelligent, sentient, self-aware, loving universe put itself through all the trials and tribulations of life as we experience it, with its suffering and its beauty and everything in between?

The answer, perhaps, is that it is the only way it has of experiencing itself.

And, thus, maybe, when you strip away all the science, this is why existence 'is': so that it can know itself, learn and evolve.

As well as being a *measurable* communication from the universe, the light, I believe, is a sign of the hope that is given to us all.

## **Appendix: Witness Statement**

This statement was given to me by my wife as testimony per the events as described on pp. 6-7 in the main text relating to the death of her mother on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2014:

*“I felt like I’d been taken part of the way with her. I felt, as I was holding her hand, something else was holding her, and that I was a part of that moment. I just felt loved. I knew everything. I didn’t need to know what I knew. I just understood it. I felt a part of everything, connected with everything. It was like: ‘Ah, I get it’, but I can’t tell you what it is that I got. There was no division. I was it and it was me. All I remember (on returning to the room) is turning around and going: ‘All is well. It’s all OK. She’s fine.’ I had never felt more loved, more safe. I was just one with everything. I had perfect understanding of everything and knowing that where she was was real.”*



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