

EDITOR'S NOTE

The year 2007 has been a year of ups and downs. We've had an election in Australia, and it seems the people voted on the strength of the seemingly more substantial promises made by the incoming Labor government concerning issues on the international scene, not just here on the home-front. Nationwide, our universities have implemented various changes to their research agendas, perhaps to the advantage of some staff, and presumably to research fellows, adjuncts, and affiliates, but definitely at great cost to others. I have even seen colleagues resign as a result of these changes. And where does parapsychology as a discipline sit amongst all these changes? For every sad story, I would like to believe that there is one that suggests great possibilities. For myself, there is an option or two, but on the whole nothing much has changed for parapsychology as a discipline in Australia or worldwide—we are still marginalized by academia. If one feels compromised by such changes, there's not a lot one can do, other than roll with the punches, play by the socio-cultural and institutional rules by which we are all bound, and hope and work for positive change.

But what kind of change is needed? Parapsychology has a history of delivering variable results, and it has been argued that this has gone a long way to undermining the discipline's credibility—it doesn't seem to matter that other disciplines are as inconsistent. Consider too how it might be possible that the true value of lab psi may be undermined by its conversion to an ineffectual statistical datum (recall that in some circles psi is referred to as a statistical anomaly in need of explanation). Since academia does not seem interested in anecdotal accounts of psi, the only option left to us has been a long-standing but over-zealous attempt at producing a test-tube brand of psi, which probably helps weaken the effect, thus contributing further to the disinterest in parapsychology, not to mention the loss of the greater purpose of the experience. Walter von Lucadou (2001) raises such issues. He points out how lab experimenters try to prepare "pure situations," where simple cause-and-effect relationships can be identified, but these are far from "real life" (p. 6). Von Lucadou's Model of Pragmatic Information (MPI) states that "psi is not a signal" *per se*; it is a "correlation in an entangled psycho-physical system" (p. 13). Von Lucadou claims that psi is a consequence of natural human behaviour, which is compromised in artificial situations where psi is inhibited by the truncation of natural avenues or channels of psi function.

I would agree that the illusiveness of psi in the laboratory (often manifested as a decline effect) seems in itself to make a very big point (one that loses something in the telling), as if the ecology (i.e., the pragmatics) of psi were constantly being violated in the lab, whereas psi, all things being

equal, may well be a stable and consistent effect in real-world situations. If psi is more consistent in real life than the lab experience suggests—maybe even ubiquitous—can we make any practical use of psi? Maybe we already are. While many parapsychologists see the ‘big picture’ for the psi function in terms of applications in the medical and scientific fields, others (e.g., those who favour traditional eastern viewpoints or other, more ancient cultures) argue that the only thing of importance is personal transformation, not psi *per se*. That might mean one cannot expect to see psi except in situations that involve personal transformation (though that still does not rule out objective applications). To go further, I entertain the possibility that paranormal behaviour and functioning manifests in ways we cannot necessarily gauge scientifically because it overlaps so much with normal behaviour and functioning. This would surely be the general state of affairs to be expected for a species that evolved in an environment that constantly threw up complex, inter-connected, multi-faceted *challenges* requiring *solutions* that may well be just as complex, inter-connected, and multi-faceted. Accordingly, these *challenges* and *solutions* may well defy the relatively simple, analytical, linear procedures to which the typical scientist and researcher has grown accustomed.

This necessary digression brings me back to my earlier point—even though von Lucadou is making a more logical case for psi that has historically been overtly determined because the positivist approach is preferred in science, my point is that we engage in day-to-day paranormal behaviour in ways that often cannot be detected as such because the psi influence contributes to world-ordering effects that very often appear to the un-suspecting experient to be the result of normal processes, though the outcome might have been quite different had psi not functioned at all. In other words, maybe there are events that *seem* exclusively normal, though we acknowledge that there are events that may *seem* exclusively paranormal! In the light of these comments and views, consider the articles in this current issue: We open with a study I worked on with Dr. Nick Burns in the School of Psychology, University of Adelaide. We hypothesized that paranormal process takes over, or indeed steps-up, when normal processes are impeded, and we may do this unconsciously. This psychic ‘spill-over’ is key in Thalbourne’s (2004) theory of psychopraxia. Is this what we do everyday—let psi swing in when normal functioning is compromised?

From a cloistered lab in the Great Southern Land to the wide open ranges of North America, Bryan J. Williams describes the parapsychological dimensions of life amongst four Southwest Indian groups: the Hopi, Navajo, Laguna Pueblos, and Zuni Pueblos. ESP and PK phenomena appear to be intricately enmeshed with the peoples’ environments, and this inter-connectedness helps sustain identity and

meaning that extends beyond the person to the group and to the world. Here psi is so enmeshed with normal day-to-day activities it might seem impossible to draw out pure psi effects, or replicate them in the lab. Williams even discusses some conventional (normal) explanations of alleged psi phenomena that prove the point.

Then follows an article by Michael Thalbourne on reincarnation: If reincarnation is a reality, then we might expect grand figures like Abraham Lincoln or Napoleon to put in an ‘appearance’ from time to time! But *belief* coupled with *subjective conscious experience* is one thing, whereas there may be the *possibility* that we can never know of the even greater influence the past has on us that is outside awareness and forever inaccessible, whether we are influenced normally and paranormally by our historical collections and recollections, or by the ever-present *influence* of ‘personalities’ long since gone, regardless of how ‘they’ might exist.

Finally, we have a debate on methodology. Does a single question suffice as a predictor of people’s experience, or is it better to use a multiple-item questionnaire? And since we’re asking questions, here’s another: What of our linguistic omissions about those crucial *numinous* aspects of experience that we simply cannot express in words? How do we measure these as self-reported effects when words can only fail?

Readers might like to consider these studies and the questions I have raised in the light of von Lucadou’s ideas. My personal feeling these days is that lab tests of psi serve great purpose, and we may be able to tailor our methodologies to suit the contingencies of which von Lucadou speaks. But maybe we *are* just scratching the surface; merely glimpsing the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps that great unknown dimension of our everyday experience will always remain just that—unknown. But if we do develop scientific methodologies that allow us to peek more deeply into what we perceive as ‘reality’, we will undoubtedly learn a great deal more about psi and ourselves. That’s a reasonably challenging and optimistic thought on which to end the year 2007.

Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

—LANCE STORM

REFERENCES

- Thalbourne, M. A. (2004). *The common thread between ESP and PK*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation.
- Von Lucadou, W. (2001). Hans in luck: The currency of evidence in parapsychology, *Journal of Parapsychology*, 65, 3-16.