

A Discussion of the Evidence that Personal Consciousness Persists After Death with Special Reference to Poltergeist Phenomena

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Abstract: Humans have a dual mind, the mind of the left hemisphere and the mind of the right hemisphere. The left hemisphere has an organ for language and when awake can be conscious of things with linguistic labels. The right hemisphere is good at operating with mental images as in dreams. The functions of the right hemisphere include extrasensory perception and psychokinesis. However, the findings that have been advanced in favour of the idea that personality survives death have mostly been discussed in terms of the continuation of the left mind. This paper explores the pro and cons of this approach.

THE TWO BRAIN HEMISPHERES AND THE IDEA OF SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH

Following the lead of Frederic Myers (1903), the possibility of survival has been discussed in terms of the survival of *personality*, but with little attention to the organ where the idea of personality originates. Studies of the brain reveal that humans possess two very different personalities: the personality of the left-brain hemisphere and the personality of the right-brain hemisphere. Physiologically and psychologically each of us has a split personality. In the healthy individual the two sides of brain work together. In the simple act of walking, now it's the right hemisphere and the left leg, then the left hemisphere and the right leg. Similarly the right hemisphere is in charge of the left arm and hand, and reverse for the left hemisphere. Our eyes and ears also come in pairs, each primarily controlled by the opposite hemisphere.

The two hemispheres are bridged by the corpus callosum, a large bundle of neurons. If it were not for this bridge, the left hand would not know what the right hand is doing. For a person whose corpus callosum has been cut, usually to relieve epileptic symptoms, neither side of the body knows about the other.

Poltergeist Phenomena

Poltergeist phenomena (e.g., Roll, 2004a; Roll & Storey, 2004) mainly consist of the movement of household objects and pieces of furniture and of loud percussive sounds. The occurrences have been questioned because as a rule they are only investigated after they have taken place, which may leave room for fraud. But in two of our cases (Roll, 2004a, ch. 10; Roll & Storey, 2004, ch. 17), we set up experiments and observed the incidents when fraud and other familiar causes could be ruled out. In fact, RSPK tests are not rare: In a survey (Roll, 1977) of 116 cases from the professional literature, 48 investigators performed minor tests of which 46 succeeded. For instance, the observer would throw an object somewhere, hoping that it would be thrown back, which then occurred.

Poltergeist is German for rowdy ghost, but most researchers are convinced that the incidents are due to psychokinesis by the living people who are at the centre of the turmoil. This view has been questioned by well-known investigators, Ian Stevenson (1972), and Alan Gauld and Tony Cornell (1979). Both parties believe that some cases may be due to discarnate entities. The term RSPK, for recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis, which is commonly used, allows for either interpretation.

Stevenson (1972) lists several features that he believes may indicate discarnate agency. He expects heavy objects to be affected, over great distances and in complicated trajectories. He expects little breakage, but that objects will be deposited gently as if carried. Moreover, the occurrences will express the purpose and intelligence of the departed, for instance, by injuring or inconveniencing a living person or persons. There may be intelligible communication by raps, collectively seen apparitions, and auditory communication from ostensibly discarnate entities. The living person at the centre may enter a mediumistic trance and be of any age. Finally, the phenomena may abate after exorcism.

Conversely, Stevenson predicts that cases, which are due to PK from living agents, will tend to involve light objects, travelling short and simple trajectories, with forceful landings and much breakage. There would be no communication by raps, no collectively seen apparitions, no auditory communications, and no mediumistic trance for the subject. The phenomena would mainly serve to release psychological tension, would occur around someone below 20 years of age and may cease with psychotherapy.

While some RSPK is *prima facie* suggestive of spirits insofar as apparitions are seen or raps spell out intelligible messages, the other characteristics mentioned by Stevenson do not suggest spirit involvement. The more violent cases and those where heavy pieces of furniture are moved about, as seen near 12-year-old Roger Callihan (Roll, 2004a, ch.11) and 14-year-old Tina Resch (Roll & Storey, 2004, ch. 6), showed no

evidence of spirits. Objects that moved around corners were frequently reported near Tina.

Gauld and Cornell (1979) debate another feature of Stevenson's distinction:

The totally blind and purposeless poltergeist is perhaps a rarity even among obvious 'living agent' cases. . . . There is . . . a good deal of evidence that living agents can produce not just mere whirlwind-like explosions of energy around them, but, for example, communicative rappings through which pseudo-personalities manifest themselves. (pp. 351-352)

Gauld and Cornell propose a modified version of Stevenson's spirit hypothesis:

If there are indeed both living agent cases and discarnate agent cases we should surely expect, not the absence of intelligence and purpose in the former, but different kinds of purposes and different degrees of intelligence in the two sorts of case. (p. 351)

They advance four criteria (p. 355) for discarnate agency:

1. The phenomena are wholly or partially independent of the presence of any living person. This condition would obtain if the incidents . . . linger on for some while after his departure, occur in his absence, occur inside a locked empty room away from him, and so on. A particularly curious form of the latter is when 'arrangements' of objects into patterns are made inside empty rooms or in empty houses. . . . It is as though some intelligent entity is present which can store and make use of some form of energy even in the absence of those who may have generated it. (p. 353)

I do not think that momentary independence of the phenomena from the living agent suggests a discarnate one. The focusing effect found in most cases, where the same object or area is affected when the agent is absent, may indicate that the agent transmitted energy to the object or area when he or she was near which was then released as object movement when the person was away. Joines and I (Roll & Joines, in press) have outlined a mechanism for such a process.

I now turn to Gauld and Cornell's three other criteria for discarnate agency:

2. The purposes exhibited by the phenomena appear quite alien to the known aims and purposes of the poltergeist agent, or, in the absence of an obvious agent, of any other person in the household. (Gauld and Cornell, 1979, p. 354)

All cases I have investigated at first sight seemed foreign to the motives of the central person as these were known at the time. But in all our five cases (Roll, 2004a, ch. 4, 6, 13 & 14; Roll & Storey, 2004, ch. 20) where psychological or psychiatric examinations were made, the agents showed signs of anger, usually repressed, in relation to parents or the parental figures on whom they depended. The parent figures seemed harsh or uncaring for their charges, usually children in their teens, an age that in any case may be emotionally unstable. It should be emphasised that the anger was not general but directed only at parent figures.

The anger theory does not apply to all occurrences in a case. While anger may ignite RSPK, once underway the phenomena may be elicited by visitors who are solicitous to the agent. Positive attention no less than the negative sort may facilitate RSPK. When the visitors are scientists, they may be rewarded with occurrences that take place when the agent is under full observation (Roll, 2004a, ch.10 & 11; Roll & Storey, 2004, ch.18).

I discuss Gauld and Cornell's (1979) two last points together:

3. On more than one occasion several witnesses simultaneously see, or failing that, a series of separate witnesses not knowing of each other's experiences see the same phantasmal figure or figures, or similar misty shapes, etc., in association with, or better still actually bringing about, certain of the phenomena. (pp. 354-355)

4. Phenomena take place which . . . so far as is known exceed the capacities of any living agent, however powerful his repressed emotions and however saturated he may be with 'psychic force' or 'RSPK energy'. . . . Perhaps certain forms of 'apport' phenomena belong here, e.g., the ostensible 'eating' of fruit by invisible beings in the Poona . . . case, or cases in which objects have 'materialized' in mid-air or in which 'direct voices' have spoken fluently or direct writing been received, or in which objects have become 'animated' in characteristic ways. (p. 355)

Gauld and Cornell support their position with two remarkable cases from Sandfeldt and Poona. Sandfeldt is a village in Germany that was the scene of a violent RSPK outbreak in 1722. Poona is a town in India that was the

scene of RSPK in 1920 and 1923-1930. In Sandfeldt the five children of a farming family were closely involved, one perhaps being the RSPK agent. The Poona phenomena first centered on one boy and then on his younger brother. In Sandfeldt as well as Poona, the supposed spirits exhibited intelligence and also responded appropriately to the people who were present. Sometimes apport-type incidents took place that suggested intelligence. For instance, in Poona, the shoe polish belonging to the boy's home teacher had disappeared when she needed it. She asked that it be returned and it at once landed at her feet (Gauld & Cornell, 1979, p. 109).

The children in both cases described apparitions. In Sandfeldt the children said they saw ghostly animals and an apparition of a child or angel causing some of the incidents. In Poona the boy reported seeing his deceased brother, nurse and father, identifying who was responsible for which incidents.

The Sandfeldt farm was the scene of peculiar "arrangements" in empty rooms. At one time a servant of the man, who was investigating the phenomena on behalf of the owner, was in the kitchen with the children when they heard noises from the empty living room. When he looked in:

To his astonishment he found that objects in the room were gradually being arranged into a little scenario. Each time he looked, more objects had been added. . . . A cloth was spread on the floor, and on it were laid numerous dishes and various kinds of foodstuffs. The figures of two picnickers were made out of clothes ingeniously put together. (Gauld & Cornell, 1979, p. 110)

The two cases differ along cultural lines. The Sandfeldt incidents may have been shaped by German folk tales (p. 115), and the Poona occurrences may have reflected Indian beliefs.

You have to agree with Gauld and Cornell that simple RSPK energy is insufficient to account for cases like these. Nevertheless there were physical occurrences, which means that energy was expended. The question is, 'By whom?' Gauld and Cornell suggest that the intelligence belonged to discarnate entities (p. 359). This proposal comes with a disclaimer, "we are not attempting to decide whether or not the supposed discarnate entities are to be identified with surviving portions of formerly incarnate human beings" (p. 360). Without explicitly saying so, Gauld and Cornell seem to leave open the possibility that the agents produced person-like entities, which in turn performed the phenomena. None of my cases are as complex as Sandfeldt and Poona, but stories from Tibet, if they can be believed, tell of human-like figures created to perform various tasks.

Stevenson (1972) suggests that if RSPK could be terminated by exorcism, this would suggest spirit agency. The phenomena around one of the boys in Poona ceased after religious intercession. However, this was conducted after more than two months of activity when the phenomena in any case may have died down. In my survey of RSPK (Roll, 1977), the median duration was two months.

Exorcism was attempted in 30 cases. The phenomena ceased in four cases, but continued in 21 cases, sometimes intensifying during the religious intervention. It is uncertain if the four cases that ceased did so because of the ritual; in two of the four, the phenomena had gone on for 2 and 3 months so the RSPK may already have run its course; in the two others the duration of RSPK was not reported. In the Tina Resch case (Roll & Storey, 2004, ch. 6), which came after the survey, there were two attempts at exorcism. One was by the family's Lutheran minister, the other was by a Mormon elder brought in by one of their sons. During each exorcism, the couch on which the clergyman was seated scooted out from the wall. The Lutheran gave up when this happened, but the Mormon, being more persistent, repeated the ceremony when the same thing happened and he too gave up. I thought that the exhibit of strong RSPK during the exorcisms was due to the added mental stress on the girl because of the implication that she was possessed.

While exorcism seems to be ineffective, other courses of action may reduce or terminate the phenomena. In several cases in the survey, the incidents stopped after the family dismissed the servant or employee who was the centre of activity or, if a member of the family, after he or she was sent away to stay with relatives. Occasionally the whole family moved; at times the phenomena continued in the new location, but sometimes they ceased.

To determine whether a move actually tended to shorten RSPK, I examined the duration of the cases in relation to moves. In 31 cases where the ostensible agent or someone else moved and where duration was recorded, the median duration was 1.13 months, versus 2 months for all the cases, and the averages were 52.4 versus 115.6 days. The difference was significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed), and may suggest that the moves tended to shorten duration.

As shown by psychological tests, tense family relations may contribute to RSPK. A move by the central person or by other members of the household changes the social situation and may thereby attenuate tension and thereby RSPK.

In summary, there is little evidence that RSPK is due to spirits other than the corporeal spirit of the RSPK agent.

The Psychic Brain

Frederic Myers (1903, vol. I) identified psychic functions with the subliminal mind. In contrast, the supraliminal mind guides ordinary perception and behaviour. He spoke of a “subliminal uprush” as “an emergence into waking consciousness of ideas matured below the threshold” (p. 20). The sudden manifestation of the subliminal mind in supraliminal awareness includes creativity, telepathy, telestaesia (clairvoyance), and telekinesis (PK). It can now be seen that the subliminal mind is essentially the same as the mind of the right hemisphere, and that the supraliminal mind is the mind of the left hemisphere.

Myers (1885), as Broughton (1984) has noted, in fact saw a role for the right hemisphere in psychic functions and was the first to do so. Myers noticed that the automatic writing of trance mediums, which often showed psychic awareness, was characterised by word blindness, repetitiveness, and swearing, tendencies typical of people who had lost the use of their left hemisphere and were now relying on the right.

There is experimental evidence that ESP may be a function of the right brain. Braud and Braud (1975) found an advantage of borderline significance in free-response ESP trials after the subjects had listened to a tape intended to elicit right hemispheric mentation as compared to trials following a left mentation tape. They called the right hemisphere, “the psi conducive syndrome.”

In a study designed to determine if the left hemisphere interferes with ESP, Broughton (1976) compared conditions where the subjects were occupied with reading, a left hemispheric activity that may distract this hemisphere from blocking ESP, with trials without reading. The tests also addressed the laterality issue by having the subjects record their responses with either the left or right hand. There were tendencies for higher ESP scores when the left hemisphere was occupied with reading, and for greater divergence from chance when the left hand was used. After publication of his results, Broughton (1978) learned about the discovery that hemispheric differences are less pronounced for females than for males, which has been attributed to the fact that the corpus callosum has more connections in the female brain. A re-examination of his data showed that the interference effect was in fact only present for the male subjects. However, the interference effect and the sex difference did not show up in two later studies (Broughton, 1978).

Broughton (1977) pointed to the proclivity for ESP to take the form of visual images as indicating right hemispheric mentation. He referred to White (1964) who had found that most of the psychics in her survey relied on visual images, and Kelly et al. (1975) who had observed

that the ESP responses to cards by the psychic, Bill Delmore, were “encoded in the form of fleeting visual images.”

Broughton also noted that dreaming, which seems conducive to ESP, may be a function of the right hemisphere. He mentioned findings by Johnson (1968) and Honorton (1972) that people with frequent dream recall may have an ESP advantage over those who only occasionally remember their dreams. The indications that visual images, and therefore the right hemisphere, may be important for ESP is suggested also by the relative ease of obtaining experimental evidence of ESP in dreams (Van de Castle, 1977), in the ganzfeld (Honorton, 1977; Honorton & Harper, 1974), and in remote perception (Jahn & Dunne, 1987, pp. 151-173).

Ehrenwald (1979) noted that the drawings of patients with injuries to their left parieto-occipital region, including one of his own patients, were strikingly similar to drawings from telepathy experiments. He wrote:

The world of the patient suffering from optical agnosia closely resembles the telepathic or clairvoyant percipient’s impression of his target—psi phenomena, lacking as they do, the precise spatio-temporal ordering and organizing qualities of the dominant hemisphere, are processed in the right side of the brain. (p. 221)

He applied the same reasoning to PK, the motor counterpart of ESP. Ehrenwald had seen films of Nina Kulagina and other subjects performing macro-PK and was struck by the similarity of their efforts to the attempts by paralysed patients to move an affected limb:

Here, too, it appears that the PK subject is lacking the fine-tuned motor controls provided by the left hemisphere, to say nothing of the modulating effects of the cerebellum and its corticothalamic and subcortical feedback loops. (p. 221)

In contrast to this work, Maher (1986) did a study, which suggests that ESP may utilize either hemisphere depending on the task at hand. Her test focused on the apparent tendency for the right hemisphere to process emotional stimuli by presenting two types of tapes to the subjects under sensory and ESP conditions, a video tape designed to elicit emotion and a tape showing architectural views which presumably generated little emotion. The tapes were displayed repeatedly and in random order. Since the abundance of alpha in one hemisphere as compared to the other is negatively related to that hemisphere’s engagement in the task (less alpha; more task involvement), EEG recordings were used to determine which hemisphere was predominantly occupied with the task in question. For the

subjects who showed the most evidence of ESP, their alpha activity under sensory and ESP conditions was significantly correlated in the predicted direction. In other words, the subjects seemed to process sensory and ESP stimuli the same way, whether by the right or left hemisphere as determined by the nature of the material (see also Maher & Schmeidler, 1977; Maher et al., 1979). Except for Maher's work, the findings point to the right hemisphere as the hemisphere primarily responsible for ESP and PK.

If the right hemisphere is the psi-sensitive hemisphere, then conditions that facilitate right hemispheric dominance should increase the probability of ESP. The most conspicuous periods of right hemispheric dominance occur during REM dreams, and natural ESP is found most frequently in dreams. It may also be pointed out that the phenomenological themes of dreams, which emphasise displacement of the dreamer in space and time, the sense of a presence (the other or the stranger), and feelings of anxiety, reflect the functional characteristics of the right hemisphere. Conditions that facilitate right hemispheric dominance during waking, should also increase the likelihood of detecting ESP stimuli. These conditions, which would be associated with periods of relaxation, absence of thinking, and other indications of disengaged left hemispheric, including linguistic processing, have been associated with ESP of emotionally important events occurring to significant others.

Since ESP does not depend on the familiar senses, such as vision and hearing, it also does not result in a characteristic sensory experience. Vision results in visual images, hearing in auditory experiences, and so on for the other senses. But ESP has no experience to call its own. When ESP appears in consciousness, it comes in borrowed garb. The brain has a storehouse of used apparel in the hippocampus where ESP chooses whatever fits the occasion. When the ESP target is a visual scene, the response may be a visual image or it may be an auditory impression. Or ESP may take the form of a string of words or guesses. ESP is multi-modal. But there is little doubt that the evidence for ESP is best when it takes the form of visual images. "A picture is worth a thousand words," an additional factor that places ESP in the right hemisphere under most circumstances.

Evidence for Survival from Mediums and Rebirth Subjects

Several assumptions about personality have guided survival research: (1) Personality is inviolable and impenetrable; (2) it is non-biological and may survive bodily death; and (3) it is the seat of consciousness. Evidence for the existence of personality after death would therefore be evidence for the survival of the person's consciousness. Each of these assumptions needs to be examined.

1. Personality is inviolable and impenetrable: Stevenson (1977) argued eloquently against the assumption that personality is an entity separate from others: “Once considered about as well defined as an orange by its peel, human personalities now appear to be much more extensible and penetrable than they were thought to be” (p. 166). He referred to two types of evidence for this, the evidence for ESP and the evidence for survival after death. With respect to ESP, in telepathy images or thoughts from one personality, as it were, penetrates another personality, and in clairvoyance, personality extends to a remote physical object. In precognition and retrocognition, personality also extends in time. As we have noted, these observations are consistent with the view that ESP is a function of the right brain hemisphere.

Apparent mediumistic communications and rebirth memories also indicate that personality is extensible and penetrable, now from the body of a deceased person to the body of a living person. The medium momentarily seems to absorb the personality of a departed individual while the rebirth subject does the same but permanently.

When the argument that personality is extended and penetrable is applied to the evidence for survival after death, it turns out to be a two-edged sword. One edge undercuts the argument that personality is necessarily restricted to one body; the other edge turns out to be Occam’s razor. Occam’s razor is the scientific principle which requires that explanations of unknown phenomena first be sought in terms of known phenomena. Occam’s razor shaves theories to bare essentials.

Skeptics who seek to explain ESP in terms of sensory cues, chance coincidence or other familiar processes attempt to use Occam’s razor, but in this case the razor does not cut. ESP requires more than sensory cues, chance and the like to be understood.

Occam’s razor is more effective when it comes to the evidence for the survival of personality after death. In this context, the known phenomenon is the fact that people may use ESP to access physical objects (clairvoyance) or the minds of the living (telepathy); the unknown phenomenon is survival after death.

If we are to conclude that a medium or a rebirth subject incorporates the personality of someone deceased, we have to be certain that the information about the deceased could not have been derived by ESP from the minds of living survivors or from physical sources, such as obituaries. This has not been done.

On the contrary, an examination (Roll, 1982) of the evidence for survival shows that the data exhibit the same features as this-world ESP. For instance, a child who seems to remember a previous life, as a rule recalls a life that ended by accidents or violence and not from natural

causes. Similarly, spontaneous ESP is often about a crisis befalling a remote person though the crisis does not necessarily end in death. However, were new discoveries to be made about data suggestive of survival that are different from what is known about ESP, unaided ESP would not cover the evidence; it would no longer be the simpler theory.

The theory that ESP may explain the evidence for survival is sometimes called the super-ESP or super-psi theory, but there is nothing super about the idea—it is common scientific sense.

2. Personality may survive bodily death: This statement represents the core of the survival hypothesis as it is most frequently expressed and investigated. Among the various aspects of personality, the search for surviving memories has played a central role in determining whether deceased personalities continue after death. Stevenson's (1977) paper is a vivid account of the important role memory plays in establishing evidence for identity in studies of mediumistic communication and reincarnation. He leaves open the question where memories may exist: "Memories may exist in the brain and also in a 'somewhere else' that may endure after physical death" (p. 153).

The possibility that memories can be transferred by means other than learning, and may exist in places other than central nervous systems, has emerged in the biological sciences. We have been told that memory in planaria have been transferred to other planaria by cannibalism (Hartry & Keith-Lee, 1964) and that learning in rats to fear the dark has been transferred by injecting peptides from one animal to another (Ungar, Desiderio, & Parr, 1972).

The apparent connection between matter and memory has a parapsychological parallel in psychometry (not to be confused with the usage of this term as mental measurement). In psychometry, the subject apparently gains information about a past event by handling an object that was part of the event. Important studies of psychometry have been made by Barrington (2005), Osty (1923; Roll, 2005), Pagenstecher (1922), and Sidgwick (1915; Roll, 2004b). This type of ESP has also come up in card experiments (Roll, 1966; Ryzl, 1982).

According to Hans Driesch (1933), psychometry is evidence that physical objects other than brains can hold memories. Driesch was a German embryologist and President of the Society for Psychological Research. The possible relationship between physical objects and memory has often come up in survival studies. Mrs. Piper frequently obtained information about deceased persons by contact with their personal belongings although the objects provided no sensory information (James, 1909; Sidgwick, 1915). In the studies of "drop in" communicators by Gauld (1972), the unexpected

visitors usually had a geographic connection to the experimenters (Roll, 1982, pp. 178-180). This may also be a feature of Stevenson's reincarnation cases—the memories of the deceased sometimes reappeared in a child in the geographic or social surrounding of the departed (Roll, 1982, pp. 197-201; Stevenson, 1974). Memories are connected to the brains of their owners before death and may be connected to other physical objects after death.

3. Personality is the seat of consciousness: Nearly all research on survival assumes that if there is evidence after a person has died of the continued existence of the person's memories, this means that the consciousness of the person also continued. We know from ordinary living that complex tasks, such as driving a car may be performed while we think about other matters. In psychometry, memories even operate at a distance in time and space from their owner without awareness by this person that his/her memories may now be recalled by others. A similar process seems to have been at work in mediumistic communications where messages with veridical information were received from people who turned out to be neither dead nor evidently trying to communicate. Stevenson (1977) refers to a case from World War I, when L. P. Jacks, Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, had an anonymous session with the medium, Mrs. Leonard during which Jacks' son, who was at the front, apparently came to bring news of his death to his father. The medium gave an accurate description of the young man, and of the supposed circumstances of his death, as well as family names and initials. He then departed and the medium commented that he "was glad to come. He's alright, he says, getting on splendidly" (Salter, 1922, p. 143). As it turned out, this was also true not for the man's life in the next world but in this: The young man had not died. There are several such cases in the literature, such as the famous Gordon Davis communication (Soal, 1925), which involved another medium and investigator, and another young soldier who was feared dead.

The word personality comes from the Latin term, *persona*, meaning actor's mask. The mediumistic material is a lively reminder of the origin of the word and of the dramas, which can be produced by the familiar as well as the psychic reach of humans, but the dramas are mute as to whether there is consciousness behind the masks. Studies of persons who have experienced altered states of consciousness, such as terminal cancer patients undergoing LSD-supported therapy, suggest that there may be an inverse relation between vividness and "expansion" of consciousness on the one hand, and identification with the patient's memories and personality characteristics, on the other (Grof, 1972). The latter do not necessarily disappear, but may be experienced as part of a larger matrix, which includes other people and places. Experiences of individuals who have been declared

clinically dead and are then resuscitated are sometimes of this type (Moody, 1975; Osis, 1961). Occasionally there is evidence for ESP. For instance, the patient may report a conversation from a part of the hospital that is beyond their sensory range.

The possibility has come up from studies of psychometry that something like memories may persist in physical objects other than the brains where they were formed. Like brain memories, psychometric memories are often about recent, frequent and emotionally significant events.

Haunting apparitions, including bystander cases, where the apparition is seen near a person who knew the departed, as well as the more familiar apparitions seen in the homes of the departed, suggest that memory-like structures may persist after death, but not necessarily that the memories are animated by the consciousness that formed them.

CONCLUSION

The findings we have examined may be important not for what they show about life after death but for what they show about the world of the living. The world, it seems, is permeated by the memories of the departed and also by the memories of the living. If such memories may be remembered or perceived in ESP, this may suggest that they have an energetic charge that may affect people also in unknown ways. Our lives may have causal effects not only in familiar physical and social fashions, but also because they may affect others who enter our places or come in contact with our objects. Similarly, our lives may be impacted by those who have gone before. These possibilities lend credence to the idea of karma—that is, to the idea that our actions may affect others long after the actions and their physical aftermath have run their course. Memories may be infectious.

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