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## Psychoanalysis and Magic: Then and Now

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## Psychoanalysis and Magic: Then and Now

*This article considers the long-standing and complex association between psychoanalysis and the paranormal. Beginning with a brief discussion of the early history of the psychoanalytic movement, it then takes up the subject of magic and the paranormal in relation to the earliest practitioners of psychoanalysis, including Freud. Although magic, symbol, and superstition are generally considered to be primitive forms of thinking, contemporary psychoanalysis is full of them. Indeed, psychoanalysis itself is a form of magic, as Freud himself admitted. The author suggests that the tools of psychoanalysis can reveal some fascinating aspects of the modern human condition by showing how deeply we rely on primitive impulses. The final section examines how the connections between psychoanalysis and the paranormal have been extended and developed over time, with particular emphasis on the work of the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and paranormal investigator Jule Eisenbud.*

“If I had to live my life over again, I should devote myself to psychical research, rather than psychoanalysis.”

—Sigmund Freud, letter to Hereward Carrington, 1921

### 1

The rapid spread of spiritualism in Europe and America in the 1850s and 1860s quickly led to the rise of rationalist circles devoted to exploring the unexplained phenomena apparently produced by trances and séances. In Britain, one of these circles became the Society for Psychical Research, which was established in 1882 when a number of spiritualists and Cambridge scholars grew determined to place their belief in psychic phenomena upon a sound, unprejudiced footing

grounded in the “scientific method.” A new model of the unconscious mind emerged in the many publications of this society’s members (see Koutstaal 1992; Shamdasani 1993; and Noll 1997), who considered such phenomena as trance states, crystal gazing, and automatic writing to be perfectly valid psychological methods for studying what they referred to as the “subliminal self.” Indeed, Léon Chertok and Raymond de Saussure, in *The Therapeutic Revolution* (1979), draw a connection between the Victorian obsession with psychic phenomena and the “new science” of psychoanalysis—in particular, the Freudian concept of transference. The connection, according to Chertok and de Saussure, goes back to August 1885, when Freud first began studying hypnotism under the auspices of Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris. Freud’s interest in the subject reflected the widespread public fascination with mysterious states of mind, including somnambulism, magnetism, catalepsy, nervous illness, and the fragmentation of personality. His later speculations about the unconscious mind were deeply influenced by the work of Charcot, especially his use of hypnosis to relieve the various automatic phenomena induced by hysteria.

Throughout his life, Freud never lost this fascination with unconscious (but active) ideas, and, at least in his younger days, often acknowledged the connections between psychoanalysis and magic. The following passage, from his 1890 essay “Psychical (or Mental) Treatment” (written when he was thirty-four), provides a neat summary of his position at this time:

A layman will no doubt find it hard to understand how pathological disorders of the body and mind can be eliminated by “mere” words. He will feel that he is being asked to believe in magic. And he will not be so very wrong, for the words which we use in our everyday speech are nothing other than watered down magic. But we shall have to follow a roundabout path in order to explain how science sets about restoring to words at least a part of their former magical power. (285)

Quite clearly, anyone who expresses a belief in magic lays him- or herself open to accusations of credulity, but Freud was

careful to emphasize that he was not in the least bit superstitious. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), he wrote: "I believe in external (real) chance, it is true, but not in internal (psychical) accidental events. With superstitious persons it is the other way round" (257).

By 1918, Freud was no longer writing full-blown case studies, and his work, though interesting in other ways, never resumed the intriguing, mysterious tone it achieves in his earlier works such as *Studies in Hysteria* (Breuer and Freud 1895), where he and Breuer seem more like alchemists or Svengalis than a pair of respectable physicians. One might even say that, before the publication of *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud was more mesmerist than medic. According to Peter J. Swales (1986), Freud was known as *der Zauberer* ("the Magician") by the children of Anna von Lieben, a rich patient whom he treated at home in the 1880s. Not quite a "proper doctor," he was, claims Swales, generally received at the back door of his patients' homes, rather than the front. It does not seem surprising, then, that in his early work, Freud cast himself as a magician of the word.

In his later years, in fact, Freud expressed regret that he had not devoted himself more seriously to paranormal investigation. Ernest Jones, in his biography (1957, 392), quotes the passage from a letter Freud wrote in 1921 to the British spiritualist and psychic researcher Hereward Carrington, which I have taken as the epigraph to this paper. This avowal, with its "rather than" construction, suggests that, as Freud grew older and his work became increasingly well respected, he began to realize that the two fields of study—psychoanalysis and psychical research—were mutually exclusive, a position that solidified later in his career, when he expressed ambivalence about whether or not to continue his investigations into thought-transference.

When Freud first began his research, the field of psychiatry was rapidly disentangling itself from the realm of the spiritual. His main concern was that, if people began to associate psychoanalysis with the occult and supernatural, its reputation might be seriously endangered. His doubts were fostered and encouraged by Jones, who was openly embarrassed by Freud's interest in the occult and who persuaded him to forge closer affiliations between his "new science" and medicine, connections which, Jones felt, would considerably enhance the re-

spectability and prestige of psychoanalysis. “We are physicians, and wish to remain physicians,” Freud told Otto Gross at the 1908 Salzburg psychoanalytic conference when Gross spoke on “the cultural perspectives of science” (qtd. in Schwentker 1987, 488). Not long after this, however, psychoanalytic authors began publishing articles on European culture as a whole—its myths, fairy tales, literature, opera, and so on, attracting the attention of many readers and thinkers in fields far beyond that of science.

For his own part, Freud was anxious that his ideas about thought-transference might be misunderstood and possibly appropriated by spiritualists and mystics eager to prove that the universe contains more than material forms. Consequently, during the writing of *Totem and Taboo* (1913), he clashed famously with Jung, struggling to resist the seductive mysticism of his close friend and colleague’s work. When *Totem and Taboo* was finally published, Jung was dismayed to discover that Freud came down stoutly in favor of a material, mechanistic theory of scientific rationalism. In his autobiographical work *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961), Jung observed that Freud’s fear of the occult sometimes verged on the histrionic (84), and it does not seem outlandish to speculate that, for Freud, supernatural manifestations resonated with a particular significance. In defense, Freud began to rationalize spiritual belief as a form of primitive thinking typical of children and psychotics, which, in *Totem and Taboo*, he refers to as “animism.” According to Freud, “primitive races . . . people the world with innumerable spiritual beings both benevolent and malignant; and these spirits and demons they regard as the causes of natural phenomena” (1913, 76).

Although, in public, Freud worked hard to keep the boundaries of psychoanalysis distinct from those of the occult, in private, as Jones describes in his biography, Freud exhibited “an exquisite oscillation between skepticism and credulity” (1957, 375) on the subject. Not only did he express constant anxiety about the assimilation of psychoanalysis into the realm of science, he often expressed his belief that the occult was inextricable from psychoanalysis, which, he believed, in order to be effective, had to embrace those manifestations of thought and emotion that are normally excluded from rational, scien-

tific study. And while he remained ambivalent and conflicted about the more otherworldly reaches of occult belief, he always considered thought-transference to be the most respectable element in occultism, and the main “kernel of truth in the field” (1922, 136). In fact, he believed the phenomenon would soon be incorporated into the realm of scientific fact. In “A Note on the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis” (1912), published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, he wrote that, as far as he was concerned, future evidence from analysts would soon “put an end to any remaining doubts on the reality of thought-transference” (266).

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw a resurgence of interest in the subject of the paranormal in the field of psychoanalysis, with numerous publications by Jule Eisenbud, Jan Ehrenwald, Nandor Fodor, and other notable scholar-practitioners. Today, psychoanalytic thinkers with an interest in such topics generally gravitate toward the field of transpersonal psychology, which deals with areas beyond rational ego-functioning, such as consciousness studies, near-death experiences, spiritual inquiry, body-mind relationships, and personal transformation. In transpersonal therapy or analysis, mystical experiences are often regarded as a form of “regression in the service of the ego,” to use the term attributable to Ernst Kris (1952). Such experiences are generally believed to provide meaningful moments in the process of a human life. In other words, the transpersonal school entertains the possibility that at least some kinds of mystical experiences may be genuinely numinous.

In transpersonal therapy, patients generally work on developing their self-awareness beyond the limits of the body and the personal realm of experience. In earlier days, this kind of therapy was sometimes enhanced by the use of LSD and other psychedelics, but today’s practitioners generally limit themselves to less controversial methods, such as breathwork or re-birthing. The field is currently gaining renewed public acceptance, although the exact nature and boundaries of transpersonal psychology are still being debated among academics.

Back in the realm of mainstream psychoanalysis, interest in thought-transference, unconscious communication, and even the paranormal continues to hover around current work on Ferenczi and Freud’s papers on telepathy, as well as, more

generally, in the work of such figures as the late Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer (2007) and the Jungian analyst Nathan Field (1991; 2006). While the place of these subjects within mainstream psychoanalytic thought remains ambiguous, I want to suggest that magical thinking has always been the motor driving psychoanalytic practice—an opinion with which many in the field would not, I suspect, be very eager to agree.

## 2

As June Bernstein (2002) reminds us, the word “magic” originally meant “of the magi”—the wise men of the Persians reputed to be skilled in enchantment. Definitions of magic include “any mysterious and overpowering quality that produces unaccountable or baffling effects,” “the gratification of desires otherwise unobtainable,” and “that which takes us beyond the ordinary action of cause and effect which we regard as natural” (235). With this tripartite definition in mind, it seems clear that psychoanalysis is full of magical elements, especially in relation to the vicissitudes of the transference. The analytic encounter, with its deliberate quiet, low lighting, and use of the couch as a liminal space, specifically encourages the evocation of magic. Although Freud increasingly seemed to advocate the elimination of magic from psychoanalysis, plenty of magical elements remain in his theory and clinical practice. As Joel Whitebook argues (2002, 1197), the ambition completely to exorcise “enchantment” from human experience was one of the more misguided excesses of the Enlightenment.

In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud explains that “the assumptions of magic are more fundamental and older than the doctrine of spirits, which forms the kernel of animism” (91). Magic, according to Freud, is “the technique of animism” that “reveals in the clearest and most unmistakable way an intention to impose the laws governing mental life upon real things” (91). Recent research suggests that otherwise rational people often act as though they believe they possess magical powers (though they may rationally deny it), a phenomenon that may be traceable to basic cognitive errors involving the perception of causal relationships. This kind of magical thinking occurs

particularly in times of uncertainty or stress and serves our need for control, especially our need to perceive ourselves as able to navigate a clear path through overwhelming situations. Support for this explanation comes from studies showing that people display signs of magical thinking when they are faced with a combination of uncertainty about an outcome and a desire for control over that outcome (e.g., Bleak and Frederick 1998; Friedland, Keinan, and Regev 1992; Keinan 1994; Matute 1994). Magical thinking has been documented among Germans at the period of high unemployment and political instability in between the wars (Padgett and Jorgensen 1982); police officers with jobs that put them in dangerous situations (Corrigan, Pattison, and Lester 1980); HIV-infected men with no agency over their health (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, and Gruenewald 2000), and lottery players who possess “illusions of control” regarding their ability to influence chance wagers (Langer 1975). Even when people recognize that control over life events may be impossible to achieve, magical beliefs may arise out of a motivation to find “meaning” in that which they cannot control (Pepitone and Saffiotti 1997). It is well known, too, that magical thinking has equally magical results. Patients with metastasized cancer mysteriously go into remission and make miraculous recoveries. Experiments with placebos show that people have the power within them to produce all the effects of drugs, both benefits and side effects.

### 3

Freud always insisted that occult phenomena obeyed the same principles that underlie the psychodynamics of dreams, neurotic symptoms, and primary process thinking in general, characterized by the absence of “adult,” ego-generated logic and order and a lack of attention to such factors as time, money, and duty. Clearly, these hallmarks of adult reality have no place in the magical world of the unconscious. As Freud acknowledged in his work on dreams, primary process thinking is timeless. In our dreams, split seconds last for an eternity, years pass in seconds, and chronologies are scrambled or reversed. This is the realm of myth, fairytales, and folklore, in which everyone is

immortal. As Edmund Bergler and Géza Róheim (1946) put it, “Time perception is an artifact built in the unconscious ego after the partial mastering of blows against the ‘autarchic fiction.’ Therefore time and duty are associated. In every endeavor in which childlike omnipotence is fantasied, normal perception of time is disturbed” (197). The inability to react or respond in an “adult,” ego-directed way to time (and money) is also, of course, a classic hallmark of mental illness.

Not unsurprisingly, time and money are key subjects in the psychoanalytic encounter, where they take on a symbolic weight very different from that which they bear in “reality.” This fact suggests that psychoanalysis takes place, at least in part, in the realm of magical thinking. Here, in this liminal world without shape or form, the ordinary proximity between two minds is narrowed and distorted, and mysterious transmissions can occur. Secrets make their way from one mind to another, sometimes without the use of words. On the couch, patients behave in magical ways, bringing the past alive in the present and merging with absent others. Psychoanalysts, too, act like magicians by offering themselves as contemporary objects to which the “ghosts” of the patient’s past can attach themselves, thereby initiating the process of transference. The appearance of these ghosts in the analytic session allows both analysts and patients to become familiar with them, and even to become, as Auden (1939) put it, “enthusiastic over the night . . . for the sense of wonder it alone has to offer” (see also McDougall 1985, 276). Regular exposure to the magic of the analytic session serves to disempower these ghosts of the past so that eventually, as Hans Loewald explains, they can be “laid to rest as ancestors” (1960, 10). Their power is then available to be “taken over and transformed into the new intensity of present life, of the secondary process and contemporary objects” (248–49; see also McDougall 1985, 285–86).

Freud (1919) felt that people feared psychoanalysis because there was something uncanny about it. What they really feared, he speculated, was the area of their minds over which they have no control: the unconscious. Patients are reluctant to use the couch, explained Freud, because they fear giving up ordinary social reality and turning themselves over to the power of another way of being. The analyst creates the conditions (low

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lights, couch, quiet), for the emergence of magic (or at least, of magical thinking). From this perspective, psychoanalysis can be regarded, like magic, as a ritual to produce astonishment, a way to catalyze the phantasm.

#### 4

In explaining how psychoanalysis “works,” analysts often appeal to “experience,” arguing that one can truly understand the effect of the process only by undergoing it, with the aid of an experienced analyst. This reliance on a specialist elite, initiated into occult knowledge, who proceed according to an essentially intuitive method, inspired much criticism in the early days of psychoanalysis.

Like most magic, that of psychoanalysis assumes the visible world is merely the outward manifestation of invisible forces and energies. It takes for granted the idea that life in the everyday world is actually contingent on the operations of a secret, “inner” reality not accessible to the senses; it also assumes that only very rare individuals can master this hidden knowledge. Such mastery is a source of great power, since to understand the workings of the secret forces implies the ability to change them.

To become an adept, in psychoanalysis as in magic, the neophyte must first learn to dissociate him- or herself from the “natural attitude” of laymen; only then can he or she begin a lengthy training, under close supervision by a designated sage who has special sight into the obscure dimension. Over many years and at great cost, the neophyte learns esoteric skills in dealing with invisible forces (transference, projection, and so on), becoming acquainted with a world not known to the senses (including “common sense”), far beyond the range of “ordinary” knowledge. Both magic and psychoanalysis encompass a bewildering variety of groups, branches, and systems of belief, each with its own history, masters, and particular rituals; and each branch is dominated by a small, rarified group of elders, mostly male, whose private lives, outside of the particular space and time of their practice, largely remain a secret. Both are mysterious realms of thought that can be understood only

by the illuminated, whose practitioners in some way concern themselves with things that sociologist Marcello Truzzi (1971), in an essay on the dimensions and definitions of the occult, describes as anomalous to our generally accepted “cultural storehouse of truths” (639).

One of the reasons why there is so much resistance to acknowledging the role played by magical thinking in the analytic encounter is that, according to anthropologists, this is the most primitive mode of thought, which, in the course of human phylogeny, has been followed by religious thinking, and finally, by scientific and analytical thinking (Frazer 1890; Mauss 1950). Indirect evidence for this claim comes from studies showing that people who have paranormal beliefs are somewhat less inclined to critical thinking than others (Brugger and Graves 1997; Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj, and Heier 1996; Pacini and Epstein 1999); and this issue is explored in depth by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1913).

It would be wrong, however, to assume that development in cognition is a one-dimensional process, with magical thinking on the one end and analytical reasoning on the other. In fact, we all have many different modes of processing information, which, for the sake of convenience, may be divided into two kinds: the intuitive and the analytic. These rely on different areas in the brain, and have different rules of operation (Evans 2003; Sloman 1996; Stanovich and West 2000; Sun, Slusarz, and Terry 2005). Jonathan Evans’s research into dual-process thinking, for example, suggests the presence of “two minds in one brain” (2003, 458): the rational, problem-solving stream of consciousness that Evans describes as “System 2 thinking,” and, underlying this kind of thought, “a whole set of autonomous subsystems in System 1 that post only their final products into consciousness and compete directly for our inferences, decisions and actions” (458). This set of subsystems might be referred to in layman’s terms as intuitive thinking. Contrary to popular thought, critical thinking does not replace intuition as the mind matures; rather, as Evans suggests, both types of thinking continue to exist and develop throughout an individual’s life. Therefore, people can hold conflicting beliefs that are rational and verbally justifiable on the one hand (“every number has an equal chance of winning the lottery”), and

automatically resistant to logical arguments on the other (“my lucky number has a greater chance than any other”).

The coexistence of two cognitive systems in the human brain is consistent with the classic claim that believers of magic and religion conceive of two different realities, a natural and a mystical reality (Bronowski 1974; Lévy-Bruhl 1975; Tambiah 1990). The mystical reality is thought to “unveil” when a person experiences something interpreted as mystical (Lévy-Bruhl 1975). Nevertheless, anxiety about occultism within the scientific community is not altogether without basis. Popular assumptions about those who believe in psychic powers have been borne out, some feel, by empirical studies showing that those especially inclined to paranormal beliefs generally use more intuitive (i.e., noncritical) thinking in everyday life (Epstein et al. 1996; Wolfradt, Oubaid, Straube, Bischoff, and Mischo 1999). Furthermore, although differences between them are small, believers in the paranormal have been shown to be slightly less emotionally stable than skeptics (Wiseman and Watt 2004). However, the same is true for those who believe in religion—a category that includes plenty of scientists among its ranks.

## 5

Ever since the death of Freud—but especially over the last thirty years—a significant amount of intellectual energy has been expended in attempts to give an account of the relation between psychoanalysis and science. These discussions have been protracted and involved, and it is not my project to recite them at any length here. What needs to be established, however, is that the way we think about psychoanalytic treatment today has changed significantly from Freud’s model of the analyst as surgical, abstracted observer to what Robert Wallerstein describes as “a two-person psychology focused on the always subjective interactions of the transference internalized object relationships of the patient with the countertransference (or equally transference) internalized object relations of the analyst” (1998, 1021–22). Since 1923, the influence of Ferenczi and the entire tradition of object relations theory has provided an

alternative model to Freud's "surgical" example of a self rooted in biology and motivated by unconscious physiological drives. In other words, the analyst's subjectivity is no longer regarded as something that should be kept as objective as possible, but cultivated as a primary tool of knowledge through empathic identification with the patient. When the discipline is reformulated in this light, we need to reconsider whether psychoanalysis can still be seen, as Freud saw it, as a "natural science," or whether it should be seen as more of a social-behavioral science, or as no longer a science at all, but a historical, cultural, or philosophical discipline, as many influential scholars and clinicians have argued, including Gill (1994), Wolff (1996), Crews (1995), and Phillips (1997).

A full account of the many approaches to this problem is given in the final chapter of Peter Rudnytsky's *Reading Psychoanalysis* (2002). Here, Rudnytsky argues that, while this new formulation of psychoanalysis as a mode of therapy makes it a hermeneutic discipline (and thus not bound by the canons of natural science), psychoanalysis as an interpretive practice "should be based on a theoretical foundation where such restrictive canons are both necessary and appropriate" (202). Closing the divide between hermeneutic and scientific practices, he makes the case that psychoanalysis is not autonomous, isolated from the other sciences, both natural and human (227), but is sited at the crossroads between the two, marking the areas that both have in common, respecting both the claims of science as a theory, and the claims of the individual as a therapeutic practice (253).

A scholar who would clearly agree with this view of the analytic field was the physician, psychiatrist, and parapsychologist Jule Eisenbud (1908–1999). Eisenbud was a graduate of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Colorado Medical School. He was a charter member of the Parapsychological Association and wrote numerous articles on psychiatry and psychoanalysis based on his experiments with telepathy, but he came to prominence largely through his book *The World of Ted Serios* (1967). In this book, he described his work with Serios, a Chicago bellhop, who had the uncanny ability to produce "thoughtographs," dream-like images of his thoughts, on film.

Eisenbud's colleagues, however, found his work less exciting. A review of the Ted Serios book by Hans Eysenck in the *New York Times* concluded that "Dr. Eisenbud seems to have little notion of what experiments are and less liking for the rigors and methodological niceties of scientific research" (1967, 20).

Although he was interested in psychic phenomena as a young man, and recalls reading Freud's "Dreams and Occultism," from the *New Introductory Lectures* (1933), during his medical internship, Eisenbud (1987) initially remained ambivalent about the existence of the paranormal. It was not until he had "painfully worked through" his resistance to the material he began to encounter in his own analytic practice that he "was able to appreciate the penetrating insights into telepathy that Freud presented in his *New Introductory Lectures*" (10). He was also deeply impressed and strongly influenced by J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927), an influential book about precognitive dreams.

Upon setting up in private practice, Eisenbud discovered that, almost from the beginning, his patients began to provide him with "striking examples of dreams and associations to which the telepathy hypothesis was reasonably applicable." He writes: "It was as if psychoanalysis, exciting and demanding enough as it was, had suddenly become multidimensional . . . [and] opened up a vast subterranean landscape that I had never dreamed existed" (1987, 11).

Eisenbud suggests that most analysts unconsciously develop a rigid reaction-formation against their more primitive tendencies: "The so-called occult is no threat to us when we can view it with the comfortable assurance that it has no reality beyond that of the dramatic device. When it brushes by us in life itself, we have another problem on our hands entirely" (1946, 84). Eisenbud convincingly argues that the psychoanalytic community is especially hardheaded and skeptical when it comes to the paranormal because most analysts rigidly isolate and dissociate individual events, repressing and defending whatever they cannot examine hypercritically. He proposes that the refusal of most psychoanalysts "to face certain facts full on, in all their implications" is "a defensive maneuver that allows business as usual to go on in the rest of one's life" (1967, 156), which is especially ironic given that, as Eisenbud suggests, these defenses

may be an integral part of the mechanism that gives rise to paranormal events in the first place (1946, 86).

Eisenbud often reiterated (e.g., 1967, ch. 15) his belief that everyone is capable of thought-transference, and we may, in fact, be using it unconsciously all the time. In other words, like Freud, he believed that thought-transference was not an isolated, dissociated form of perception, but part of the human personality, a current of life in tune with all the rest of our homeostatic needs. According to Eisenbud, this form of communication was just one of the many complex facets of the unconscious, and in his 1946 paper “Telepathy and the Problems of Psychoanalysis,” published in the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, he endeavored to explain its method:

The organism always acts with utmost economy of function, and the telepathic process can generally be observed to utilize whatever ordinary stepping stones lie to hand; but there comes a moment, just as when two electrodes approach that distance from each other at which the potential is able to snap the current across the intervening gap, when the spark occurs, and one can retrospectively observe that to achieve this spark, the patient, the analyst, or both—as influenced by some unseen force—have been pulled slightly (sometimes greatly) out of line with their expected individual orbits. (86)

Other analysts sympathetic to this position include Mintz (1983), Fodor (1951), and Pederson-Krag (1947). Where Eisenbud’s stance differs significantly from those of others working in the field, however, is in his firm conviction that paranormal events *have* long been proven to be scientifically valid: “the existence of telepathic functioning already rests on a foundation as firm as anything in the realm of empirical science” (1946, 83). Many, I imagine, would disagree with this statement, and likewise with his claim that “we do not today have to align ourselves with discredited crystal gazers and table-lifters; we are amply supported by researchers of the highest academic standing” (86). “All in all,” Eisenbud argues, “psychoanalysts may be assured that the study of so-called paranormal psychological phenomena can only strengthen that view of man and nature

which science in general and psychoanalysis in particular has revealed to us" (87). He finds it baffling that what he regards to be "the wide-ranging data" on thought-transference and other paranormal procedures (within the field of parapsychology) are totally excluded from the domain from which psychoanalysis draws its case studies, theories, and evidence, and he believes the psychoanalytic prejudice against "paranormal" phenomena would be considerably undermined if analysts looked at the nonanalytic literature on the subject, especially at the data provided in standard works in field of parapsychology.

Eisenbud is referring here to the Rhine experiments, summarized in the book *Extra-Sensory Perception after Sixty Years* (Rhine 1966). In the late 1930s, psychologist J. B. Rhine, along with his colleague William McDougall, conducted an extensive series of experiments in parapsychology at Duke University. By 1940, Rhine and his team had accumulated a series of thirty-three experiments, involving almost a million trials, with protocols that rigorously excluded possible sensory clues. Twenty-seven of the thirty-three studies produced statistically significant results. Furthermore, positive results were not restricted only to Rhine's lab. In the five years following Rhine's first publication of his results, thirty-three independent replication experiments were conducted at different laboratories. Sixty-one percent of these were statistically significant, where a total of five percent would have been expected by chance alone.

Even today, scholars such as Susan Lazar (2001) complain that a skeptical attitude persists toward psychic phenomena "despite robust evidence demonstrating the reality of nonlocal phenomena such as telepathy and the impact of mind from a distance" (114). Yet it is crucial to remember that, according to mainstream scientific thought, no such "robust evidence" exists. The Rhine experiments, although evaluated by the most rigorous statistical methods, used enormous numbers of subjects and huge numbers of guesses, and, as a result, have always been considered suspicious and controversial by the scientific establishment. More recently, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences published a 1988 report on the subject, concluding there is "no scientific justification from research conducted over a period of 130 years for the existence of parapsychological phenomena" (Druckman and Swets 1988, 22). In 1991, in a survey of opinion

among scientists in the National Academy of Sciences, ninety-six per cent described themselves as “skeptical” of ESP (McConnell and Clark 1991). Finally, a recent study using neuroimaging is believed to “provide the strongest evidence yet obtained that paranormal mental phenomena do not exist” (Moulton and Kosslyn 2008, 182). It seems fair to say, then, that the scientific community has rejected all claims of psychic phenomena, since, according to the accepted criteria, no compelling evidence of such phenomena has yet been found.

## 7

Psychoanalytic practice is devoted to the exploration of the individual, in a certain place and for a certain amount of time, which means that truly repeatable experiments are inherently impossible, since no two individuals are alike. It defies the ethos of psychoanalytic practice to provide an objective measurement of its “results” (or even a subjective measurement, for that matter). The unconscious cannot even truly be described, since language is alien to the primary process, just as it often is to dreams, and the imagination in general. Indeed, any endeavor that is deeply reliant on symbolic thinking cannot, by definition, be strictly scientific—or even, for that matter, strictly rational.

“One of the most remarkable facts in the history of the psychoanalytic movement,” wrote Jule Eisenbud in 1946, “is the indifference with which Freud’s publications on the subject of telepathy were received.” Eisenbud considered this neglect to be particularly significant in the light of “the obsessive, exegetical tendencies” (85) of the early Freudians. In an essay written almost forty years later, he was still acutely conscious of “the curious irony” that “the two disciplines which have most to do with unconscious factors in human affairs, parapsychology and psychoanalysis, have so little regard for each other, and play so little part in each other’s thinking” (1983, 11). It can be safely said that, even today, most practitioners dislike analogies between psychoanalysis and the occult, which they are likely to find emotionally threatening or disturbing. In the preface to his monograph *Telepathy and Medical Psychology* (1947), Jan

Ehrenwald remarks that, when he embarked on research into the paranormal, he was admonished “that whoever wants to expound his views on matters of psychical research would be best advised first to state his credentials” (5). Things appear to have changed very little today, if they have changed at all.

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