

Psi Experiences and the Ecology of Consciousness

Duane Elgin, April 2011

More than 30 years ago, my understanding of reality and sense of identity were gradually transformed by a number of psychic or psi experiments that extended over nearly three years and that took place at the think-tank SRI International located in northern California. I want to share two examples of these experiments, not because they demonstrate any unusual capacity on my part (I believe that *everyone* has psi or intuitive capacities) but because, despite their flaws and limitations, they reveal some of the character of how we participate in the field of consciousness. These two aspects of psi functioning are presented as specific examples of my own experience that I hope will help to ground others in their experiences of a living universe.

Receptive Psi

There are two primary ways of engaging the universe with our consciousness—*receiving* (the yin or feminine aspect) and *sending* (the yang or the masculine aspect). To illustrate the receiving aspect of our intuitive capacities, I'll describe below one of the “remote viewing” experiments conducted in 1974 as part of a study of psi phenomena for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.¹

To reiterate briefly: To conduct a remote viewing experiment, I was locked in a bare room with a pad of paper and a tape recorder. After half an hour, I was supposed to look for someone that I knew and then describe where they were (On the Bay? On a freeway? In a wetlands? In redwoods? In the room next door?). The following quote (and accompanying pictures on the following page) is taken from one of the experiments and was published in a report to NASA. It illustrates how intuitive knowing can be a mixture of both accuracy and ambiguity:

The experimenters (Russell Targ and Phyllis Cole) went to the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station across the bay from SRI, again chosen at random from a prepared list. Duane's description closely matched the target: "...a simple, heavy, solid building with a unique function" in "...relatively natural surroundings" (all correct—see Figures A and B). In his further description, Duane said (correctly) "They are standing at a metal railing looking out over a scene. They are up high enough that they can see some buildings down below." (See Figure C) He sensed some ambiguity of whether the experimenters were inside a building or not. "I have the sense they're outside, though, but they're near a building. There's a larger building-like structure. Feels like it has one function. One primary function. And although they're outside, they're relating to the building and its function." In fact the experimenters were on the open station platform waiting for a train. About 11:22 he said, "I have the impression that Russell is feeling a smooth metal surface. Sort of large plates, large metal plates. Somewhat rectangular." The timing and description are highly accurate. Figure D illustrates Mr. Targ looking at the large metal BART route map, just before the train's arrival. At exactly 11:25 Duane said "everything changed" and "I don't see them anymore." That is the precise time the target pair boarded the BART train and left the station.ⁱⁱ

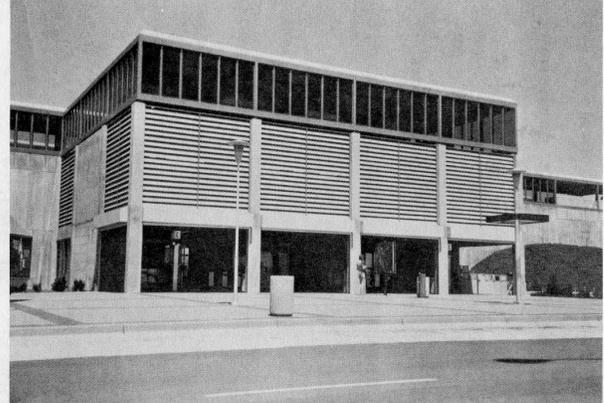
This experiment in the receptive side of intuition illustrates how we can receive impressions that are sketchy but that nonetheless have a measure of accuracy and connection with the everyday world. While we can trust these intuitions, I learned it is important to be cautious of intellectual interpretations of what they mean.

Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station at Union City, California

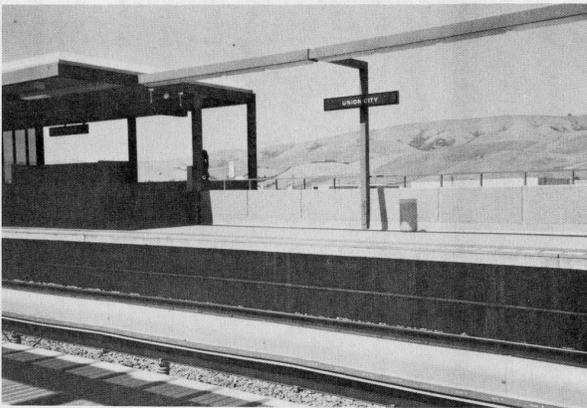
(used as a remote viewing target)



(a) SEEN FROM PARKING LOT



(b) CENTRAL PORTION OF BUILDING



(c) TRAIN PLATFORM ON UPPER LEVEL



(d) MR. TARG AT BART SYSTEM MAP

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Expressive Psi

While participating in experiments that were exploring the receptive side of consciousness, I had other opportunities, more informal, to explore the expressive or sending side of consciousness. These experiments were not as rigorously controlled and I would often be left alone for an hour or more with the experimental apparatus as I explored my connection via consciousness with it. I approached these experiments with a deep curiosity to learn about the expressive or sending side of our intuitive connection with the cosmos—often defined as psychokinesis.

In one series of experiments, the task was to turn the torsion pendulum of an “anniversary clock” that had four metal balls for weights (similar to that shown below but with the clock mechanism removed). The rotating pendulum was sitting at rest in a highly stable location and covered by a heavy glass dome to prevent any physical intrusions. The slightest motion of the pendulum was registered by a laser beam and recorded on a strip-chart recorder.



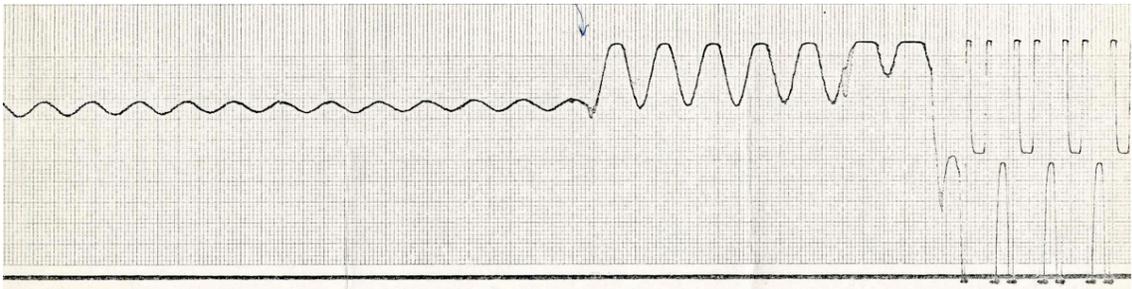
I began this experiment with the assumption of separation: I was on one side of the room, the instrument and the recording apparatus were on the other side and, somehow, I was to project mental energy from myself to the pendulum, sitting at rest, and make it move. After many days of effort and repeated failures with this “mind over matter” approach, I began to realize what many sages have been saying for several thousand years; namely, that the entire universe is an interdependent system that is co-arising with everything else at each moment and, in the co-arising process, we can participate directly with the world beyond our physical body.

To shift my approach from separation to co-arising connection, I began experiments with a half-hour or more meditation—and this awakened the experience of myself co-arising with the experimental apparatus. Although subtle, with concentration the pendulum became a felt presence within my direct experience. As the pendulum’s existence and my own became

intertwined in direct awareness, significant exchanges would occur that were far outside the noise level and random variation of the system.

Shown below is the output from a strip chart recorder that graphically illustrates one powerful interaction: After meditating with the pendulum apparatus for nearly an hour, we had come into deep rapport and the output from the strip chart recorder showed the pendulum becoming ever more quiet. Because I had to leave to go to a meeting, within the space of a few seconds, I coalesced the rotating field of energy that had been building around the pendulum during the past hour. Almost immediately the pendulum apparatus began to turn, slowly moving a half-inch in one direction and then back until, after thirty seconds or so, it was turning an inch or so in either direction. Then, abruptly, the four, suspended balls began shaking vigorously for about a half minute, rattling against the support posts, before stopping suddenly and coming to a complete rest. I was stunned by this level of response and by the unusual sequence of rotating, shaking, and coming to an abrupt halt.

Strip Chart of PK Experiment



Because this was an informal experiment, no other researchers were present to witness what occurred. However, within minutes, the researchers working on this project returned from lunch and I told them what had happened. They looked at the pendulum sitting completely at rest inside the glass dome and were very skeptical of my description of events. Then, to everyone's astonishment, as we stood looking at the apparatus, it abruptly began to move as I described: first starting to rotate, then shaking vigorously, and finally stopping abruptly. Over the next twenty minutes, with two researchers present, the fully covered

apparatus went through this cycle of rotating, shaking, and stopping two more times before the energy in the system was apparently dissipated.

For me, this was a visible and visceral confirmation that we can participate meaningfully in the ecology of consciousness. It was also a lesson in the ethics of psi. I experienced how our conscious intentions can reach deep into the workings of the cosmos and powerfully connect with the world. Here are the summary insights that I learned from these diverse experiments in what might be called “cosmic feedback training” taken from my book, *The Living Universe* (pages 50 - 52).

First, we all have an intuitive faculty and literal connection with the universe. An empathic connection with the cosmos is not restricted to a gifted few, it is an ordinary part of the functioning of the universe and is accessible to everyone.

Second, participating in these experiments demonstrated to me that our being does not stop at the edge of our skin but extends into and is inseparable from the universe. We are all connected with the deep ecology of the universe and each of us has the ability to extend our consciousness far beyond the range of our physical senses. I am reminded of the wisdom of George Washington Carver, a great educator and botanical researcher, who said that “If you love it enough, anything will talk with you.

Third, our intuitive connection with the cosmos is easy to overlook. Before I became involved in these experiments, I didn’t pay much attention to the small, intuitive twinges and feelings that would arise and then pass away. They seemed so subtle that I assumed they were simply part of my bodily experience. Only gradually did I come to appreciate the extent to which I was experiencing my participation in a larger field of aliveness.

Fourth, I learned that psi functioning is not about achieving dominance over something (mind over matter) but rather learning to participate with something in a dance of mutual exchange and transformation. This is a two-way process in which both parties are changed by the interaction. Every action seems to produce a reaction and this wisdom also applies within the ecology of consciousness. In terms of ethics, if we try to use our intuitive capacities to achieve a strategic advantage in situations, we are immediately separating ourselves from the dance of participation with life and, instead fostering existential isolation. I learned that if we do not want to upset the equilibrium of the universe and disrupt the fabric of our lives, we are wise to act in ways, and with intentions, that seek the well-being of the whole.

Fifth, at the same time these experiments were convincing me that consciousness is a field property of the universe, they also made me much more skeptical about the need for channeling, crystals, pendulums, pyramids, and other intermediaries to access our intuition. Validating consciousness as a basic property of the universe does not automatically validate all claims of paranormal phenomena. It is important to bring a critical and discerning science to this inquiry. We are just beginning to use the tools of science to cut away the superstition and find what is real and what is not. Our universe is a place of miracles, but it is not a place of magic. It is a miracle that anything exists at all. However, once the miracle of our universe exists, we find lawful dynamics at work throughout.

Sixth, scientific evidence of the existence of psychic functioning has been mounting for decades and is now so overwhelming that the burden of proof has shifted to those who would seek to dismiss its existence. It is time to move beyond the narrow, brain-based view of consciousness because it no longer explains important scientific evidence and it severely limits our thinking about the scope and depth of our connection with the universe.

Seventh, as interesting as psychic or intuitive functioning may be, the much more important insight is what it says about the nature of the universe — that it is connected with itself through the tissue of consciousness in non-local ways that transcend relativistic differences.

ⁱ Russell Targ, Phyllis Cole, and Harold Puthoff, *Development of Techniques to Enhance Man/Machine Communication*, Stanford Research Institute, Menlo Park, California, prepared for NASA, contract 953653 Under NAS7-100, June, 1974. Also see, R. Targ and H. Puthoff, *Mind-Reach: Scientists Look at Psychic Ability*, Delacorte Press/Eleanor Friede, 1977.

ⁱⁱ Targ, Cole, and Puthoff, *Ibid*, pp. 55-57.