

spontaneously (the precognition case), or b) in emergency conditions (the plane-crash-avoidance case). Whether true accounts or not, the validity of these events cannot be tested in controlled experiments. Alex, even with his commitment to science, recognized the limitations of formal testing. He claimed that he could summon something deep within himself to "read" people and foresee events. He maintained that these powers were always there when he needed them, except in test conditions where the need is artificial. Karlis Osis, in the interview I conducted with him, made exactly the same point: that Alex could not always exhibit his powers in controlled settings because they were more suited for non-laboratory situations.

Alex is on record as seeing reality in both deterministic and holistic terms. No one, he believed, dies before the right time, and no power can change the natural order of events. Like the Stoics, Alex regarded the universe as governed by a deterministic order that we can resist (and in doing so create our own misery), but never alter. He also believed in the existence of a collective consciousness, a kind of inherited mental stratum that is the public resource for psychic abilities. He urged his students to connect to this universal "mind" and allow one's psychic gifts to be nourished by it. Alex rejected most dualities, especially those distinguishing individuals from each other. He favored the synthesis of self with others and with the world. Where many spiritual perspectives settle for differences -- mind-body, self-world, self-other -- Alex recognized the possibility of a seamless web of spiritual connections.

Many psychic practices routinely accept some version of dualism. In extreme form, this is the doctrine that an independent self exists within the body of every human, and that this self is the source of the individual's

identity. The doctrine is compelling in many ways. It explains widespread beliefs and feelings that persons are more than just material bodies. In religions the doctrine leads easily to a belief in spiritual life after physical death. To the healer the possibility that we are composed of mind and body explains health as a harmonious arrangement of the two. For the psychic, however, dualism offers the ultimate payoff: the prospect of parallel experiences, where the essential person, the one true person, can escape the body and roam across worlds that exceed conventional realities.

The divisions of the self that explain out-of-body experiences were part of Alex's orientation to psychic events. In the Osis/McCormick experiment cited earlier, Alex was in a small room across a hall from the room where the targets were located. He recalled a partitioning of himself into what he later labeled Alex I and Alex II. Alex I remained in the room where the experimenters placed him. The instrument of the remote viewing was Alex II, who was free to present himself in the box and see the targets. But Alex II moved in the ethereal or alternative reality presupposed in holistic views of the universe. It is this dimension of reality that Alex explored as the most impressive venue for psychic powers. Alex examined psychic realms with scientific techniques. But he was also (according to Alan Vaughan) a mystic by temperament and religious training.

Were Alex's psychic powers genuine?

If we accept the thought that psychic powers exceed the limitations of controlled experiments, then the question itself must be opened to a wider understanding of evidence. Non-formal evidence for psychic powers begins with testimony from witnesses. I asked the individuals I interviewed whether they believed that Alex's powers were genuine. The answers clustered near the

affirmative side of a scale, and almost never went past uncertainty to a point of denial. The eyewitness testimony of individuals who participated in Alex's seminars are always positive. But even those who work with objective agendas, approaching psychic matters with a healthy immunization of skepticism, are inclined to admit that something was going on with Alex that could not be explained away with materialistic accounts of human experience. Karlis Osis, for example, spent the good part of his career setting up controls to isolate and test the variables of psi and other psychic powers. He regarded Alex as the real thing, and the best subject for OBEs that he had ever worked with or seen. He had no reservations about the reality of Alex's powers, and after a number of years of testing pronounced Alex as "gifted with psychic powers."

Scott Jones, a career academic and intelligence consultant for the U.S. Government, used Alex in the remote viewing experiments for Army intelligence, the C.I.A., and the Secret Service. Jones was always careful to warn his superiors *not* to rely on any single source, including the psychic remote viewings, as the only basis for deciding on the use of scarce government assets. But he was impressed with Alex's abilities to discern states of affairs inaccessible to ordinary inspections. (Jones reported that he very much wanted, but did not have the opportunity, to correlate the remote viewing experiments with the physical and emotional states of the psychics, since Alex would respond with increased energy levels when he was on to something.)

David Johnson, a close friend who had no particular agenda in the psychic world at the time and who was critical of Alex in other ways, was convinced that Alex's psychic gifts were genuine.

These examples represent the general responses of those interviewed. (See the interview data for a more complete look at the opinions.) They

constitute the eyewitness testimony that is the best and only evidence for experiences outside the domain of controlled experiments. Yet I think that this evidence obscures some promising opportunities and uncertainties in any evaluation of Alex's psychic powers. Alan Vaughan had no reservations in attesting to the genuine nature of Alex's psychic gifts. But he cited a telling experiment in the interview. (It is an event described by Alex in Beyond Coincidence.) Alex conducted sessions with volunteers to see lights on a wall. These lights were the "after images" of illuminated objects that naturally follow when lights in a room are turned off. But Alex thought he could make the images move, which (according to Alan) he did in one case of a sailboat "seen" on the wall. But then Alan reports that he asked Alex to stop trying to influence the volunteers and see what would happen. The result was that no one saw the movement when Alex withdrew his influence. Alan believes that Alex's powers in these experiments was to generate a field of consciousness that affected what people saw. The power was over the person, not over the physical objects.

This experiment demonstrates again the problems of causal chains: what is the independent variable bringing about an effect in a psychic event? In this case Alex's mental powers may have been the decisive cause in producing the event. Powers that can influence perceptions and beliefs are considerable powers, not to be denigrated in any way. But they attest to the difficulty of identifying exactly what variables dominate in Alex's obvious array of gifts. He may have been an extraordinary teacher and healer exactly because he could create fields of consciousness within which individuals would see and believe in ways they could not in the absence of this influence. Most people would wish for such powers. But they do suggest different understandings of Alex's

psychic powers than those offered by the respondents. They also indicate the ambiguities in settling on a satisfactory definition of what we mean by genuine psychic powers.

How did Alex use his powers?

Magic, according to The American Heritage Dictionary, is "the art that purports to control or forecast natural events, effects, or forces by invoking the supernatural." Both ESP ("forecast") and PK ("control") fall comfortably under this definition of magic, which is an art present in the earliest human experiences. Paleolithic cave drawings portray magic ceremonies in the hunt. The Ionians of Ancient Greece regarded nature as animated by spirits that could be controlled by spells, divinations, incantations of various sorts. Magic and religion were closely aligned in early human communities. The pre-Christian worlds of Egypt, Greece and Rome were dense with magicians who claimed access to the divine, not to be confused with the moral, and were prepared to provide supernatural powers for a fee. All fundamental theory seeks the codes that can explain experience and provide instruments to control events. The earliest forms of these codes were framed by the magician's invocation of hidden secrets that unlock privileged powers.

Alex exercised a kind of realistic magic, taking a place in that parade of individuals who attempt a non-technological dominion over the environment. One of the simple truths in the human sciences is that we seem destined to attempt dominion over the natural environment. What is curious and more complex is that this destiny seems to fly in the face of original biological failure. Studies of cognitive development indicate that an infant acquires identity as she discovers the resistance of the world to simple wants and intentions. It is arguable that if thoughts truly did have natural kinetic



powers the separation of self and surroundings would not be entirely successful. The differences between thought and act, wish and doing, are commonplace in the modern world. Secular cultures are noted for accepting the truth that simply thinking it so does not make it so. Many of the dazzling machines of Western technology are instruments to extend and translate the non-kinetic nature of thought into practical control over the natural world. Pre-technological civilizations do not have such toys. But they do have magic, and its union with religion, to pursue the primordial dreams of mastery over the natural world. The code presented by magic fulfills the desire to control nature by realizing thoughts through intentions and speech acts. Alex was extending this older belief system while trying to test its efficacy through the controlled experiments of science.

The tensions between science and magic parallel some of the conflicts that the respondents cite in Alex's work. Science became magic's adversary in the modern era. Science is the practice of observation, of explaining relationships among variables drawn initially from the visible worlds of human experience. Modern science originates in the spiritual quest for a deeper code that can explain nature. The great scientists who discovered and created the substantial texts of mathematics and astronomy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were continuing religious inquiries into the laws and principles of fundamental matters. But science shifted the inquiry from intuitive insights and divine texts to observation and empirical laws.

The supernatural in secular societies today was natural in the Greek culture of the ancient world, even when reason was allowed to control inquiries into nature. The sharp dualisms between mind and matter that inform modern science would not dominate Western sensibilities until the thought

experiments that Descartes introduced in the 17th century. Science in the twentieth century is objective in a hard physical sense. The scientific method, in its modern incarnation, assumes that the natural world is matter, not mind, and distinct from the observer. This method of inquiry is the essential form of reasoning used today to *deny* the existence of supernatural realities. Contemporary science, with the use of instruments unavailable and perhaps unimaginable at earlier times in history, has described and explained an objective world free of the spiritual qualities animating nature in early Greek culture. The explanatory code discloses a physical reality.

It is this more materialistic version of science, with its revised understandings of the physical world, that subverted the prospects of a realistic magic. Nature in (roughly) the sixteenth century was redefined with empirical laws that could be discovered and organized by human reason. The secret to sovereignty over the natural world seemed to be in using and eventually controlling this empirical code, not in the magician's prowess. Even the revival of the occult in the West during the nineteenth century did not escape the scientist's skeptical gaze. Every ritual and claim of magic realism - seances, spells, extrasensory perception, and more - are scrutinized today by the powers of modern science. As these powers of observation and testing have entered the professions the assertions of magic have been increasingly marginalized. The organization of the medical profession in the nineteenth century, for example, led to the expulsion of the apothecary (and all supernatural practices) from the ranks of licensed physicians.

The reconciliation of magic and science that Alex attempted provides an assessment of his gifts grounded in both of these traditions. The supernatural powers that promise a mental dominance over nature have always

been dualistic: white and black, good and evil, high and low. The simple powers of the magician, like those of the scientist today, may be morally neutral. But the goals of each practice cannot be. The shaman and modern physician who try to restore health and defeat death are seeking to better the human subject. The sorcerer who casts a spell to paralyze or kill an adversary proposes an evil result from his craft, as does the physician who builds gas chambers for genocide and the scientist who sells technology to terrorists. It was white magic that overlapped with religion in early human communities. In the origins of Christianity, for example, miracle cures were combined with a moral theology to draw followers. The miracle of the loaves and fishes is a familiar intervention to allocate more of the scarce resources of the natural world to believers. Black magic followed a different and underground path. It has represented an assemblage of powers that promise returns indifferent to the parameters of religion or morality, and often hostile to our better impulses. Its parallel today is science for bad ends.

Here the judgment is easy. Alex is squarely in the tradition of white magic and good science. Every respondent was able to tell stories of Alex's good works. These good works extend from acts of simple kindnesses (such as Rhea White's brief tale of Alex opening the door to the ASPR on the day that she had left her keys at home) to the honoring of commitments to friends and family (including the many stories of Alex as the good uncle in the family and the homage paid to Alex by friends such as Scott Jones who remember his loyalty in times of conflict) to extended assistance to those in need (like the help Alex provided to the patients whom Dr. Schwinge treated) to the extension of unqualified support and encouragement to everyone he met (in seminars, college courses, controlled experiments, personal and professional



relations). I think it fair to say that Alex was a good person who did good things.

His psychic efforts were also aimed at good ends. These efforts include assistance to local, state and federal authorities in securing reasonable goals and solving what appeared to be intractable problems; *much* helpful advice to those who sought his help on personal and professional problems; acts of healing and therapy, and mental rejuvenation for many who were at dead ends in their lives. These purposes are moral even when compensated, and Alex seemed to do good things on many occasions for nothing except to do them. So far as I can tell, everyone who came into his orbit received some benefit (and that is an observation that can be made about few lives). The magic that Alex wielded was white magic at the highest levels.

The only generalizable complaint that I heard about Alex in the interviews was that he spread himself too thin: he tried to do too much for too many people. We should all hear such complaints about our lives.

\*I have used material in this section from an interview that I conducted with Alex Tanous on December 7, 1989. That interview was of course not a part of this research project, but I have found it helpful in organizing these closing observations on the research to revisit the thoughts that Alex shared with me. The tape and transcription of my interview with Alex are part of the resources in the Foundation Library.

*Part Two: Field Research*

*list of conversations, contacts and interviews*  
*(asterisk indicates that the conversation was not taped)*

Andy Bambrick  
Dr. Elaine Schwinge  
Karen Tanous  
Karlis Osis  
Scott Jones (2)  
Arthur Fine  
David Johnson  
Don Galloway (in England)\*  
Patrice Kean (one taped, others informal)  
Colette Malenfant  
Colette Long  
Nolan Tanous  
Thomas Tanous  
Richard Broughton\*  
Loretta Devau (brief)  
Joanne MaMahon\*  
Alan Vaughan  
Rhea White (brief)  
Ingo Swann\* (interview, but not taped at Swann's request)  
Michael Grosso  
Daniel Benor\*  
Joyce Goodrich\*

Alex, I have found, was not on personal terms with many individuals who work in the fields of parapsychology and psychic experiences. Both Don Galloway (a well-known psychic who lives and works in England) and Richard Broughton (a research scientist at the Institute for Parapsychology in Durham, N.C -- the continuation of the Rhine Laboratory) told me that they never met Alex. Both of these individuals have used Alex's experimental data in their work, however. Broughton, for example, cites the work Alex did in ghost investigations and the Osis/McCormick experiment in his book, Parapsychology: The Controversial Science. Galloway also reported to me that he has kept his extensive correspondence with Alex. I asked him if he would provide a copy of this correspondence for the Foundation and he said he would consider this. (I followed up this conversation with a letter -- enclosed -- and will call Galloway again when he returns from a trip he was beginning just about the time we talked.) Daniel Benor, known for holistic healing, reported to me that he never met Alex (though knew of him). Also, some individuals in the field (alas) knew Alex only in passing. Rhea White, for example, is head of the Exceptional Human Experience Network. She was the librarian at the ASPR from 1965 to 1980, which covers the years when Alex was doing many of the OBE experiments with Osis. She remembers Alex from those times, but can offer only pleasant and anecdotal memories from her contact with him (see the interview annotation and tape). Similarly, Joyce Goodrich met Alex at the ASPR in when she was visiting on her own healing projects. She recalls Alex in good and generous terms, but, except for pleasantries, did not talk to him (see annotations).

I also spoke with individuals (in London) at the Society for Psychical Research, the Psychic Reference Board, and Psychic World Publishing. No one

case of Ms. Levin, also to a business office, in Ohio). Ms. Lemin is not at these numbers, and no one with whom I spoke (including heads of personnel at business numbers and the local newspaper, the *News Herald*) can trace her.

Mark Murphy returned my call but has no memory of the experience, or of Alex. He told me that he had a fiancée at the time who was interested in psychic matters, and she may have induced him to sign some such statement. He recalls Ruth Lemin and thinks she may have moved to Florida some time ago.

at these organizations seems to have any information on Alex, though Steven Harris at the Psychic Reference Board found newspaper clippings on Alex and agreed to send copies to me (they have arrived and are attached). I have also spoken with Janet Thomas at the Edgar Cayce Foundation, Joann McMahon at the Parapsychology Foundation (in NYC), and other individuals (in addition to Patrice Kean) at the ASPR. Ms. Thomas told me that there is no record that Alex ever visited the Edgar Cayce Foundation (which does not mean that the testimony of others, such as Scott Jones, that he was there is false -- the records could be incomplete). In addition, I tried to track the individuals Alex listed in the Prologue to his unpublished book, Contact: Didier Terracina, MD (Columbia Presbyterian Hospital), Ted Wolfe (New York Medical Center -- I tried both the Cornell and NYU branches), Carl Kirsh, MD (Energy Research Group), and Wilbur Franklin and Sherry Speeth at Kent State. Only Wilbur Franklin was on any directory. He was a physicist at Kent State who died in April 1978. Franklin achieved his doctorate, by the way, at -- surprise, surprise -- Syracuse University, in 1964 (which predates even my long history at the University). The other individuals were not known in the listed institutions. The conversation with Joanne McMahon, however, was very helpful. It occurred (it was not taped) at the Parapsychology Foundation on August 5, 1997, and occupied most of the afternoon. Ms. McMahon assisted me in identifying individuals and articles that can help us understand Alex's standing in psychic fields.

In my last visit (August 6, 1997) to the ASPR I explored the boxes of records on the top floor. In one box I found signed statements by Mark Murphy and Ruth Lemin that they had seen Alex's body double on November 14, 1973. I have called the phone numbers on the statements (to their homes and, in the

case of Ms. Levin, also to a business office, in Ohio). Ms. Lemin is not at these numbers, and no one with whom I spoke (including heads of personnel at business numbers and the local newspaper, the *News Herald*) can trace her. Mark Murphy returned my call but has no memory of the experience, or of Alex. He told me that he had a fiancée at the time who was interested in psychic matters, and she may have induced him to sign some such statement. He recalls Ruth Lemin and thinks she may have moved to Florida some time ago.

There are other individuals I have not found (yet), of whom the most important is (of course) Elsworth DeMerchant. I also have a list of individuals who did not return my phone calls and/or answer my letters, or did not answer the phone, and/or indicated when I tried to contact them that they were not interested in cooperating in the research project in any way that would be productive. Donna McCormick heads this list. As I have said before, she is one of the critical figures in the experiments that Osis did with Alex, and would have been able to make important contributions to the research. I am still prepared to interview her if she changes her mind. Also included on this negative list are Andree Bernier and (of lesser importance) Bethel Shirley.

*promissory notes: likely future interviews*

Andrea Tanous

Stanley Krippner



*promissory notes: possible future interviews*

Katherine Fair Donnelly

Jane Roberts

Vera Feldman

Janet Mitchell

Jule Eisenbud

Nancy Myer (nee Czetl)

Elsworth DeMerchant