Correspondence

Aura Viewing

--from Professor Arthur Ellison, 10 Foxgrove Avenue, Beckenham BR3 5BA.

I was interested to read this description of how to view the 'aura'. However, I cannot help but wonder how one can 'view' something which is not in physical space. Many years ago I did experiments with a score of psychics who could 'see' the aura and discovered that if they could not see (in the ordinary way) the physical body of the subject then they could not tell where the physical body was in physical space by their observations of the aura. The results showed very clearly that when psychics are using both physical sight and clairvoyance at the same time the physical body and the 'astral body' are unconsciously put on the same centre line. At the same time I was able to explain the pseudo aura which one observes with a Kilner screen[1] as an optical illusion. I checked my views with the University of London Institute of Ophthalmology which, they confirmed, made scientific sense.

It seems to me that, though I have not carried out the procedures described in these present instructions on aura viewing they are, in view of the above, highly likely to produce optical illusions and would be glad to have the evidence that they are not. That evidence would be by blind tests (preferably double blind) i.e., neither the viewer nor the experimenter would know whether or not the aura was there to be 'seen'. Twenty or thirty such blind tests would be greatly illuminating. If indeed one can truly see the aura, thereby showing it to be in physical space, this would be of the greatest importance and the experiment should be done as quickly as possible and the result published. (If the result is to show that it is not so then the result is equally important and again should be published and the claims corrected.)

I append a reference[2] to a description of what was in the peer reviewed SPR paper wherein I described the earlier experiments. The book description has diagrams. I cannot help but wonder whether the originator of the present method has read this earlier work.

May I also add that many non-scientists have described feeling between the hands what is variously described as a 'ball of etheric matter' or 'energy'. They ask that the hands be put about six inches apart and then moved in and out while they say 'Can you feel the springiness of the energy'. This pseudo-experiment I heard described at a conference only a few days ago. Any first year psychology student - or any tyro hypnotist - should have no problem in describing what is really happening here - and it has nothing to do with 'energy' or the aura and a lot to do with suggestion.

Yet another example of such suggestion involves 'dowsing' the edge of the 'aura' or 'feeling' it with the hands. The true explanation is so simple yet generations of psychics and 'healers', who do not usually have a scientific training, continue to be misled by it. I first read it as a schoolboy in an early theosophical book. A similar 'experiment' involves viewing the outstretched hands with the fingers held towards each other in a dim light and - sometimes - using the 'will' to increase the flow of 'etheric material' between opposite fingers. The greyish streaks 'seen' are just another optical illusion, the results of the eye's action in flicking to and fro between the fingers together with the persistence of vision.

References

1. ELLISON, A.J., *The Reality of the Paranormal*, 1988 Harrap, London p. 100.

2. ibid. pp. 97-99.

Madness in the Method

--from Dr TeRi O'Brien, Bindalcah, PO Box 301, Kangaroo Ground, Victoria 3097 Australia

I want to agree with Mary Midgley's analysis and to congratulate you on publishing it as an editorial, but I also wish to extend the analysis. I want to pick up her statement that 'many biologists still tend to see mechanism as the only truly scientific thought pattern...'. In biology, as I think probably in everything else, there are two aspects to the study of processes; structure and function. Structure can be itself the result of a previous function in the way that the dead wood of tree expresses the outcomes of a series of processes that built it, or in the ways that that part of the earth that is usually regarded as inanimate, viz. rocks, reflect crystallized as the structure of their minerals, a statement about the conditions and processes that were present when they gelled. But in the biology of things that are actually alive, we meet structure in action, in which the processes that power the living state arise from a complex set of interactive structures that range from molecules to organisms and even to ecosystems. In such a network, our understanding of the way some part of the net is behaving is often dependent upon the scale at which we ask the question. And the answers that are obtained at one level of scale can be very misleading if the network is not examined at a lot of levels of scale.

For example, fern spores are known to need a combination of water, salts red light and blue light to germinate, all of which have been done to death in one or two laboratory situations. But this has almost nothing to do with the fact that sexually-reproducing ferns are rare in the Australian forests of today, but common on old bomb sites. In the Australian forest, billions of spores rain on the ground but a lot, perhaps the majority, are eaten by springtails which become food for lyre birds. Most of us are happy that most ferns give rise to lyre birds, and once you know that, one is no longer mystified about the abundance of fern reproduction on bomb sites. No amount of looking at the scale of the light reactions will answer the simple question about paucity of fern reproduction on the floor of Australian forests versus richness on English bomb sites' floor. This fact, the effects of scale, need to be taught in the field and here we are selling our Science students down the river.

For departments world wide have almost universally succumbed to the pressure to reduce the costs of teaching by limiting field study. I was shocked to discover graduate students working on the genetics of corn at molecular level who knew absolutely nothing about pioneering genetic work on corn 50 years ago and who could tell you nothing about the origins of this extraordinary grass. How can students be expected to develop an instinct for the scale of biological phenomena if they spend all their lives ignorant of the larger scales at which biology expresses itself? Among the hype at present about the release of herbicide-resistant soya beans I have yet to see anyone raise the importance of aphids as agents of transformation. Hundreds of tons of plant DNA can be moved each year by the world's aphid population as they feed on the sap of the phloem that contains degenerate nuclei. We know and accept that aphids spread a host of viruses through their feeding activities. Of course they will move plant DNA; they will have been doing it for millions of years. But who will enlighten the soya gene peddlers about the risks if no one does any field study of aphids any more and most of the gene peddlers wouldn't know what it was they were looking at if they

saw one! Of course the herbicide-resistance genes will get moved into weed populations eventually. This is an ethos issue in my view. The lure of money, the exigencies of cutbacks, has put an intolerable burden on the heads of departments considering how to deal with their shrinking budgets. The new ethos that only the small scale matters in biology will prove to be a disaster every bit as bad as the facts that Mary Midgley stresses. We are already living with the consequences of nearly twenty years of this ethos and have generated a very poorly equipped lot of biologists to understand grander scales at which Life expresses on our earth. No wonder they like the old thought patterns of mechanistic determinism!

Participation at Network Meetings

--from Nicholas Spicer, 286 Kew Road, Kew Gardens TW9 3DU

People go to conferences to confer. Nobody joins the SMN as a spectator sport. Those who can afford to attend meetings would like their fellow participants to hear their ideas. Not only casually, at lunch, but attentively and rigorously, in the group. At every meeting I go to, except the informal local groups, someone's thoughts or reflections are excluded. This is a wasted resource - and the most valuable resource we have, our members' minds and experience.

The audience (lit. 'hearers'!) have voices. Let me instead call them participants. Last year there was a May Dialogue on Participation. Where was the participation? A few questions. A forest of hands, beggars holding out their tin cups for small change of attention. There is never enough. At any meeting, there is not enough to go round. Remember, the participants are the important ones, the reason for every meeting. Imagine, if a speaker or a chairman failed to arrive at a meeting, how would the participants cope? If the participants failed to arrive at a meeting, imagine what the speaker or chairman would do.

At the May Dialogue this year, about heresy, Peter Fenwick remarked that, if you step outside your field, you will talk nonsense. There is a truth behind that comment, of course. We should have as many fields as possible; they must be as broad as possible. But even if our education is only in one field, is it so narrow that we cannot attend to someone who is interested in another? Have we not the kindness, the breadth of knowledge, and the capacity to set prejudice and opinion on one side while we listen?

I believe that speakers, panels and chairmen are part of the old paradigm of science, of experts and control. Like so much of the old paradigm, it has served us well and will continue to be effective. Yet the new paradigm will not go in old paradigm bottles.

This is what the *yi jing* calls The Power of The Small. It is about the power and responsibility of us as individuals. It is, I know well, a standard attitude of the new paradigm and much spoken of - mostly from platforms! So why do I have this uncomfortable feeling of being the outsider, a heretic?

There is a shortage of resources in the world. We are fortunate that we hardly suffer from them at all. What about the resource of attention? Our society is very low in this resource. Information Technology is abundant. There are people everywhere with things to tell us. Where is our Attention Technology? We have no Attention Technology because we cannot simulate or digitize or mechanize attention; it needs people; it needs human consciousness.

We in the SMN are trying to refine our values. We propose spiritual practice and good scientific practice as values. Participation is a value, too. Attention to each other is a value. What is the resource by which we hear each other? Couldn't it be our Network? Could it be a fruit of our association with the Institute of Noetic Sciences? At Cambridge, Thomas Hurley reminded us of all the resources of which the world is running out. We are not running out of people.

Therefore, I am trying to imagine ways in which our members, our greatest resource, could pay attention to each other in a community - a group of equals - in the new paradigm. Research seems to show that up to 13-21 is an effective size. However, I believe that larger groups, for example, the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Group, could operate in this way, too.

I used to enjoy a radio programme which always ended: 'If you have been, thank you for listening.'

Energy and Information Talk

--from Professor Waltraud Wagner, Am Markt 3, D-34414 Warburg, Germany

I am very happy about Larry Dossey's article 'Energy Talk' (*Network* 63), because I feel it is really necessary to use the term 'energy' with consideration and to get a clear idea about energetic effects, for not understanding this has far-reaching implications. This I want to explain.

In Germany we have the expression *'Informations-therapie'* (information therapy), besides therapeutic methods, working with energy. To me it does not seem too difficult to understand the difference between energetic and informatory effects. Take a stringed instrument - a violin. With one hand the bow is drawn over the strings to give them the energy for vibration; with the other hand strings are pressed down to give the information for the sound-pattern. This does not demand much energy. These patterns, which may appear manifested as forms or in the intervals of sounds, or as combinations of colours, or invisible in patterns formed by electromagnetic waves including the infrared vibrations of chemical compounds, determine the quality of energies and the effects on our minds and bodies. In space and time they are indeed information in the very sense of the word. Energy and matter are only the carriers of this information, and very little energy or matter is needed, to transmit it. A few molecules become the 'germs', which determine the growth of large crystal. Information may cause and regulate the flow of energy, and have energetic effects, like a switch opens the way for the energy to light the light-bulb, but information is not energetic in character. Field patterns, discovered by dowsers, are not energetic but informative, though they determine the quality of energies flowing through these fields.

But in homoeopathy more becomes obvious about the characteristics of information, because information has increasing effect with decreasing material or energetic carriers; and even when these carriers disappear completely the information remains and increases their effectiveness. This, of course, raises questions which cannot be answered by materialistic science.

The reason why many people cling to the term 'energetic' instead of looking for an appropriate expression seems to me rooted in emotional associations. Even these

associations contain a grave mistake, because it is usually accepted that the effects are increasing with intensity and concentration: 'the more, the better'. Much 'energy', or 'very energetic' is desirable.

But what I think happens is that the information carried by energy is lost when it becomes energetic. Sounds cannot be discerned when music or speaking becomes too loud. It may even be said that below a certain level energy exhibits the characteristics of information, and as said before, this is much more effective than energy. This situation can be observed with the effects of electromagnetic fields. The strength of these fields is of less danger than the vibration-patterns they carry and these become effective at low intensities. Important are the accuracy of these patterns, the precision of lines or points, the coherence of waves, and the repetition promotes reception of information. A remarkable example is that of the so-called 'Biophotons' researched by F.A. Popp and others, which carry information and not energy. The characteristics of informational effects should be well known in this time of their broad technical use. To set a highest permissible limit to intensities of energetic fields or the concentrations of a chemical compounds may cause adverse effects at very low intensities. For instance a certain level of noise conceals insulting words; with too much light pictures fade. It may well be that the high intensity of electromagnetic fields in our towns is a shelter against worse effects. (I do not want to say that these fields are good, but they might cause more damage with their patterns than with their energy.)

This can be said about informations carried by matter or energy. I do not think that information does necessarily need a physical carrier, but exists beyond time and space. The characteristics of information lie in patterns, and patterns maybe small or big - the pattern itself remains the same. At the Network German language meeting in January 1997 one speaker, Andreas Goppold, introduced the expression *enerchäa*, which he had discovered as an old Greek expression, lost in modern dictionaries. *Enerchäa* or *en-archäa* means 'in the origin' and to me that sounds a very appropriate way to characterize information on the non-physical level. The expression *enerchäa* has been lost along with the understanding of its meaning. I find it hard to understand how something can be not bound in space and time but present at any place and time. Instead of 'informational', which today is associated with computers, it might be sensible, to use the word 'morphic', and of course 'informational fields' are identical with morphic fields, the syllable 'morph-' having the same root as 'form'.

This is not a quarrel about words but about understanding their meaning. If we really understand what happens, we will be more careful with the expressions we use.

There would be more to write about Dossey's article, but I'll finish here by saying that the definition of many more expressions, used today arbitrarily, would be very useful in solving many questions of today's science.