

Drop in Communicators

- Stephen Braude -

1. Introduction [\[top\]](#)

ALTHOUGH MANY survival cases are impressive, some are particularly useful in helping us get a feel for the issues. Accordingly, we begin with a type of case that illustrates clearly not only the challenges facing super-psi explanations, but also the reasons why those explanations are difficult to dismiss. First, however, we should survey quickly some general features of mediumship.

Mediumship, like humor, comes in different styles. One way to distinguish the varieties of mediumship is with respect to the medium's degree of altered state or "trance." Some mediums relay messages from (or describe) communicators without significantly modifying their normal waking state. They claim that their mediumistic activities are as routine, clear, and natural as reporting statements of (or describing) people standing next to them. Other mediums experience a light trance, in which they are slightly "spacy" or distracted but are nevertheless able to go about their usual business (e.g., washing dishes in the kitchen). Still other mediums experience a much deeper alteration of consciousness, similar (at least on the surface) to what occurs in cases of multiple personality (or dissociative identity) disorder (MPD/DID). Like multiples, these mediums "lose time," and their normal waking state is replaced by another state of consciousness (that of the ostensible communicator). Usually, the medium has no knowledge of what transpired during the communication and apparent possession of her body.

In addition to these variations in the mediumistic *state*, we can also discern variations in the mediumistic *process*. Some mediums seem almost to be taking dictation, as if they were listening to someone and then simply repeating or interpreting what they were told. For example, the medium might say, "Your Uncle Harry is speaking to me now, and he wants you to know that..." Other mediums, rather than "hearing" communicators, experience mental images which they then describe or interpret. For example, the medium might say, "I see an older, bearded man, fairly short, and wearing a dark suit of the kind worn in the late 1800s. The suit is torn, and the man is pointing to a large bruise on his forehead. I feel as if he has had an accident involving heavy machinery."

But the most dramatic cases are those in which mediums seem to be physically controlled by a communicator. Some relinquish command only of parts of their bodies, as in automatic writing or drawing. Others apparently have their entire body possessed or controlled by a so-called *trance-personality* (or persona), who speaks in a different voice from that of the medium and whose behavior (in the best cases) resembles that of a formerly living person. In the most evidential cases, these similarities extend to subtle verbal mannerisms, voice quality, and characteristic facial expressions. Although trance personalities often supplant a medium's waking consciousness, others leave the medium moderately functional. For example, some mediums can do housework and even write letters while communicators speak or write through them. But not all heavy-trance mediums deliver their messages through trance-personalities. For example, Mrs. Piper would sometimes swoon and drop her head onto pillows arranged in front of her on the table, after which she would produce automatic writing. The sitters then had to move the paper to prevent her words from running off or piling up.

Mediumship can also be a group experience - for example, when sitters gather around a ouija or planchette board, or when they assemble around a séance table for table-tilting. In the case of ouija board communications, the pointer spells out messages one letter at a time (sometimes at a very rapid pace) as it moves around the board. When the planchette is used, sitters lightly touch a pointer attached to a pencil, which writes messages on an underlying piece of paper. And in the case of table-tilting, sitters rest their hands on top of a table. Messages can then be spelled out according to a simple code, or the table can indicate "yes" or "no" to questions posed by the sitters. Generally speaking, participants in these forms of group mediumship feel that some power other than their own moves the objects beneath their fingers. And as with other forms of mediumship, the most interesting cases are when the received messages convey information known normally to no one present at the séance.

Of course, in some instances it seems clear that the material originated from the deep strata of a sitter's mind. The following example from Gauld is too good not to be repeated.

I was once a sitter in a circle which received pungent communications from Goering and Goebbels and other deceased Nazi leaders. They favoured us with such interesting pieces of information as that Hitler was alive and well and operating a petrol pump in the town of Clifton, Arkansas, and that Martin Bormann was in Gothenburg disguised as a priest by the name of Father Odo. They favoured us also with various apologies for Nazism. After several sessions it

became apparent that this little band of unrepentant sinners only communicated when the finger of one particular person was on the glass. Very reluctantly he admitted that many years before he had gone through a phase of admiration for certain features of Hitler's Germany, and he had joined an extreme right-wing political organization. Now he repudiated, even abhorred, his former paltering with Nazism. None the less these views were clearly still alive in him somewhere, and slipped out when his conscious censorship was circumvented by the ouija board. I am absolutely certain that he was not deliberately manipulating the glass - his embarrassment was too great, and he refused to participate further. (Gauld, 1982, pp. 26-27)

Granted, the material here was initially implausible and relatively easy to trace to a sitter's mind. And Gauld assures me that nobody at the time took these communications to be evidence of survival. Still, the case illustrates nicely how unconscious needs and interests of the living can manifest in mediumistic contexts. Clearly, what we need to consider is whether similar unconscious processes are at work when the ostensible communications are less obviously bogus.

Mediums often work through so-called *controls* or *control-personalities*. These are recurrent and self-consistent characters who act as interpreters or intermediaries (or masters-of-ceremony) between sitters and communicators. Typically, they also look after the medium's interests, but some controls belligerently assert their own self-interest (e.g., by throwing tantrums and refusing to cooperate with sitters unless appeased). Most controls are flagrantly artificial personalities, often claiming to be from locales that would be exotic to the medium, and often claiming to be and acting like children. Eileen Garrett's control, Uvani, claimed to be the spirit of a deceased Arab. Mrs. Garrett would speak in a low, masculine tone, and Uvani would usually introduce himself by saying "It is I, Uvani. I bring you greetings, friends." Mrs. Leonard's principal control, Fedra, was childlike and unpredictable, but often charming. During Fedra's periods of control, Mrs. Leonard was very animated, gesturing frequently and broadly, and she spoke in a childlike, girlish voice, in a foreign accent and with unusual pronunciation of many words. But Uvani and Fedra were merely colorful. Other controls are more comical and bizarre. Often, controls of English mediums have claimed to be Native Americans, Black Africans, Arabs, or Chinese, and their opinions, behavior, and diction had the "stilted and stylized" appearance of a caricature or cinematic stereotype (Gauld, 1982, p. 115). Moreover, some controls exhibit extreme ethnological confusions. One, claiming to be a Black African child, asked C. D. Broad for the *key to his wigwam*. Another, who claimed to be a Native American chief, requested the sitters to encourage him by singing "Swanee River" (Broad, 1962, p. 254).

Control personalities provide ammunition for those opposed to survivalist interpretations of mediumship. Given their obvious artificiality, there can be little doubt that the medium constructed them subconsciously. In fact, as Gauld observed in connection with Mrs. Piper,

Even the most life-like and realistic controls, such as GP, show signs of being impersonations (not deliberate ones). They break down at just the point where Mrs. Piper's own stock of knowledge runs out, viz. when they are required to talk coherently of science, philosophy and literature (which the living GP could readily have done). (Gauld, 1982, p. 114)

Some of Mrs. Piper's controls offered a familiar but unsatisfactory explanation of these deficiencies. They claimed to be confused and disoriented by coming into the medium's "light." But, as Gauld recognized,

The confusion which obliterates the controls' grasp of science and philosophy does not prevent them from spouting reams of pompous nonsense upon religious and philosophical topics and presenting it as the profoundest truth...; so that we have to attribute to them not just confusion but downright tale-spinning, which was certainly not a habit of the purported communicators in life, nor yet of the normal Mrs. Piper. (Gauld, 1982, p. 115)

Gauld continues,

Similar tale-spinning tendencies are manifested in the way in which controls cover up their mistakes. Controls will, generally speaking, not admit their blunders. They will rationalize, explain away, concoct any excuse, however tenuous and childish. All other considerations seem subordinated to an overwhelming urge to keep the drama flowing without pause or hiccup. (Gauld, 1982, p. 115)

Granted, some controls are compellingly lifelike. But as Gauld also notes, it doesn't help that the most convincing communicators adamantly vouch for the authenticity of the least plausible controls. That makes it seem as if "the

authenticity of the former is inextricably and disadvantageously tied up with the authenticity of the latter" (p. 115). So it doesn't require much of a leap to suspect that realistic communicators are likewise creative constructs, possibly based on information the medium acquired psychically.

I should add that the communicators themselves are also sometimes clearly fictional, although seldom as extravagantly contrived as the controls who apparently transmit their messages. For example, in 1909 Stanley Hall deceived Mrs. Piper's Hodgson control by asking for, and then receiving, messages from a niece, Bessie Beals, who never existed. When confronted by Hall, the Hodgson-control could only offer lame explanations. The interesting exchange between investigator and spirit-control was as follows (Tanner, 1910, p. 254; Sidgwick, 1915, pp. 177-178) (The expression "Hodgson-p" refers, not to Hodgson himself, who was dead, but to the mediumistic Hodgson-*persona*).

Dr. Hall: Well, what do you say to this, Hodgson. I asked you to call Bessie Beals, and there is no such person. How do you explain that?

Hodgson-p: Bessie Beals is here, and not the -

(Note by Miss Tanner)

[At this point we laughed and I made some remark to the effect that that was just what we had said Hodgson would do, and the hand continued thus,]

Hodgson-p: I know a Bessie Beals. Her mother asked about her before. Mother asked about her before.

Dr. Hall: I don't know about that, Hodgson. Bessie Beals is a pure fiction.

Hodgson-p: I refer to a lady who asked me the same thing and the same name.

Dr. Hall: Guess you are wrong about that, Hodgson.

Hodgson-p: Yes, I am mistaken in her. I am mistaken. Her name was not Bessie, but Jessie Beals.

Mrs. Sidgwick's comment on this exchange was understated, to say the least. She wrote, "We can only say about this explanation that it is not plausible" (Sidgwick, 1915, p. 178). Nevertheless, it's difficult to know what, exactly, was going on. For example, we may need to account for the role played by the investigators' skeptically contemptuous and deceptive attitude. It's possible, if not likely, that the results Tanner and Hall obtained with Mrs. Piper represent a kind of experimenter effect found throughout the history of parapsychology and elsewhere in the behavioral sciences. In fact, these investigators seemed clearly to have a chilling effect on Mrs. Piper's mediumistic abilities. In the next chapter I'll return to that episode and discuss other sorts of outside influences on mediumistic performance.

Of course, not all mediumistic communicators are dramatically ludicrous or otherwise easily dismissed. One reason mediumship is interesting is that some cases provide compelling evidence suggesting survival, and very clear evidence that *something* paranormal was going on. Obviously, then, the crucial issue is whether this residue of mediumistic phenomena favors a survivalist explanation even more than a super-psi explanation.

2. Outline of the Issues [\[top\]](#)

In the previous chapter I noted that subjects in good mediumistic and reincarnation cases demonstrate anomalous sorts of knowledge - either in the form of information (knowledge-that) or as embodied in skills and capacities (knowledge-how). In many of the mediumistic cases, this knowledge is supplied by what Ian Stevenson has termed "drop-in" communicators. As the name suggests, drop-in communicators arrive uninvited, and often neither medium nor sitters know who they are. Of course, in the most intriguing cases, drop-ins make statements about themselves which are later verified and which nobody present at the séance knew to be true. And occasionally, the drop-in's behavior (as expressed through the medium) resembles that of the communicator when alive.

Although drop-in communications are fairly common in mediumistic settings, only a small number seem to have been verified (e.g., Gauld, 1971, 1993; Gibbes, 1937; Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975a; Myers, 1903, vol. 2, pp.

471-477; Stevenson, 1970, 1973; Tyrrell, 1939; Zorab, 1940). Presumably, that's because verifying a drop-in case is a complex and laborious business. Typically, it demands careful note taking at the outset, and then the painstaking processes of conducting detailed interviews, and locating and inspecting public records. Probably, most sitters at casual séances would rather avoid such a time-consuming investigation. Moreover, sitters may be more interested in apparent personal communications from deceased friends and relatives, and of course they may be convinced already about the reality of survival. So they would probably find it either irrelevant or unnecessary to gather careful evidence of survival.

As Gauld noted, good drop-in cases discourage super-psi explanations for two main reasons (Gauld, 1982, pp. 58ff). The first concerns the identity and apparent purpose of the communicator. We need to explain why the medium (or someone else present at the sitting) would use ESP to obtain information about an individual who was unknown to those present at the séance. Generally speaking, those attending séances are interested primarily in "contacting" individuals they knew. Why, then, would a medium apparently waste time providing information about a total stranger, one whose story can't be verified without further (and probably tedious) investigation? If the medium is using psi or normal sleuthing to obtain information about purported communicators, why not just gather information about those likely to be targeted by the sitters? We also need to explain why the communicator supplies information of no apparent interest to the sitters but of understandably serious concern to the communicator. (A good example is the case of Runki's leg, which we examine below.) By contrast, the survival hypothesis seems appealingly straightforward. To put it simply, the séance provides a forum for communication which the drop-in exploits for urgent personal reasons (e.g., to console a grieving relative or to take care of important unfinished business).

The second obstacle facing super-psi explanations concerns the obscurity and diffuseness of the information provided by the drop-in. According to the super-psi version of events, sitters at the séance use ESP to obtain this information themselves. However, in the best cases that information is hidden and also seemingly irrelevant to any living person's concerns. So in addition to considering why a living person would have been motivated to dig up that obscure information, advocates of super-psi must explain how the medium or sitters were able to *locate* it in the first place. Since the information was apparently personally meaningless, what pointed them in the right direction? Moreover, although in most cases the information would need to come from only a single source (e.g., a written record, or one living person's memory), in others it would have to be assembled from separate and equally obscure sources (e.g., different written records and memories). To many, that attributes an implausible degree of accurate psychic functioning to those at the séance. By contrast, on the survival hypothesis the necessary information may all be reasonably and conveniently attributed to a single, conspicuous source: the drop-in communicator.

Certainly, we can agree with Gauld that the first of these problems is substantial. At least on the surface, the psychodynamics of drop-in cases are most prominent and straightforward from the communicator's point of view. The second problem, however, may be overrated. One reason (noted in chapter 1) is that we presently have no grounds for imposing any limits on the scope or refinement of psychic functioning. But another problem concerns the notion of *obscure information*. Ordinarily, we understand (roughly at least) what it means to say that some information is obscure. But that conception of obscurity applies only to *normal* methods of acquiring information. For example, we consider information to be obscure when it's outside our perceptual field or otherwise difficult to access physically (e.g., if it's behind layers of security or other barriers, or if it's remote geographically and not accessible electronically). By contrast, we don't understand how any physically or perceptually remote information might be acquired by ESP, whether it's the carefully sealed picture on the table before us or an object thousands of miles away. But then we're in no position to insist that normally obscure information is also psychically obscure. And in fact, most targets identified by ESP satisfy our ordinary criteria of obscurity. So right from the start, it's implausible to insist that normal forms of obscurity are barriers to the operation of ESP. Similarly, we're in no position to insist that the diffuseness of information is a barrier to successful ESP. As far as we know, psychically accessing multiple sources of normally obscure information is no more imposing than accessing one.

Furthermore, as we evaluate the possibility of super psi, we should be careful not to assume that super psi is merely a collection of really good psi, of the kind we apparently see in limited forms in some lab experiments. When we do that, it's all too easy to think that psychic functioning involves an *effort* of some kind, so that if one psi performance is difficult, several ought to be out of the question. Instead (as I noted in the last chapter), we need to consider the super-psi hypothesis in all its intimidating richness. In fact, we need to look beyond multiple-process forms of super psi and consider seriously a kind of *magic wand* hypothesis. According to that hypothesis, (a) psi agency requires nothing more than an efficacious need or wish (under favorable conditions), and (b) given such an efficacious need or wish, virtually *anything at all* can happen. But in that case, we needn't suppose that fine-grained ESP requires complex search procedures - for example, of the sort used in looking up references in a library, acquiring information over the internet, or foraging for clues in a police investigation. And we needn't suppose that refined PK demands constant ESP monitoring of the results of one's activities - for example, as

steering a car and brain surgery require sensory feedback. It may be enough merely to wish for something to happen, and then it does. Task complexity may simply not be an issue(1).

(1) I'm aware of the intense and deep resistance this conjecture arouses in most people, and I realize that it usually survives even a painstaking appraisal of the issues and examination of the relevant evidence (e.g., of the kind provided in Braude, 1997). But although that resistance is understandable emotionally, it may be indefensible intellectually. Like so much else in this area, this issue is much more interesting and complex than it might seem initially. Still, I don't expect the reader to take this on faith, and we can't review all the relevant material here. So I simply urge readers to keep an open mind on the subject and tentatively accept the possibility of unlimited psychic functioning, if only as a thought experiment, just to see where it leads in the context of this discussion.

I also noted in the last chapter that from this perspective, successful psychic functioning would resemble placebo effects or success in biofeedback studies, where subjects produce remarkable physiological changes without conscious effort and without knowing how they accomplished the task. In fact, several converging lines of parapsychological research suggest an intriguing parallel with biofeedback studies. In both cases it appears that subjects do best under conditions of *passive volition* - that is, when (instead of actively trying to succeed) they simply wish, want, or expect, a result to occur (e.g., Palmer, 1978, pp. 90-92; Schmeidler, 1994, pp. 175-176)(2) Furthermore, it's not just in connection with the super-psi hypothesis that the apparent irrelevance of task complexity is an issue. Conventional experiments with random number generators also suggest that task complexity has little if any effect on the success of psi tasks (e.g., Braude, 2002; Schmidt, 1975, 1976.) So it's hardly unprecedented to suggest, in this context, that successful psychic functioning may be insensitive to task complexity, or at least more so than is commonly supposed.

(2) For information on placebos and biofeedback, see, e.g., Basmajian, 1963, 1972; Frank & Frank, 1991; Rossi & Cheek, 1988; White, Tursky, & Schwartz, 1985).

The first problem, that of explaining the identity and apparent purpose of the communicator, raises more vexing (if less bizarre) issues. In fact, the survival hypothesis has obvious advantages when it comes to explaining why the medium "connects with" one unknown deceased person rather than another. Whereas advocates of super psi need to explain why a living person *selects* an unknown deceased person out of an unlimited pool, survivalists tell an apparently simple story. The communicator self-selects (Gauld, 1982, p. 61). Indeed, as Stevenson once remarked, "Some 'drop-in' communicators have explained their presence very well" (Stevenson, 1970, p. 63). But according to Gauld, on the super-psi hypothesis "we seem reduced...to supposing that selection of communicator depends upon the random operation of wholly unknown factors" (p. 59). Stevenson concurs, and his way of stating the point brings its weakness squarely into the open. He writes,

Since the [super-psi] theory assumes that discarnate personalities do *not* exist, it has to attribute motive for a particular mediumistic communication or apparitional experience to the subject. But evidence of such a motive is not always available, and we should not assume that one exists in the absence of such evidence. (Stevenson, 1984, p. 159)

The proper reply to this has two parts: First, we shouldn't assume that the evidence of motive is *absent* unless we look for it; and second, hardly anyone looks for it, except in the casual or relatively superficial way mentioned in the last chapter. If the motives in question exist, they're unlikely to reveal themselves to the sorts of investigations Stevenson and others conduct. Without an extensive and penetrating examination into the lives of clearly relevant (and perhaps even seemingly peripheral) personnel, we have no basis for rejecting explanations in terms of motivated super psi.

Some might feel that this criticism is unfair. First, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. That is, sometimes sitters' motives seem quite clear, and additional competent questioning turns up nothing worth pursuing (the sitter group described by Gauld, 1971, 1993, may well belong in that category). Moreover, our goals and interests are often unconscious and difficult to discern, and in actual case investigations we may have no real prospect of ferreting out subjects' deepest needs and concerns. That's especially true for older cases, where we can no longer interrogate medium and sitters.

Now I grant that some cases seem psychologically straightforward. And I grant that in many (if not most) cases we may never get a handle on the potentially relevant underlying psychodynamics, no matter how hard we try. Still, that's no reason for not trying, even in cases that seem clear. And often we don't have to probe very far to glimpse some of the significant psychological activity simmering beneath the surface. Indeed, a few case studies reveal clearly how much we stand to learn from psychological detective work, and they show why even sensitive questioning of the sitters may not reveal relevant dispositions and behavioral patterns.

3. The Cagliostro Case

Possibly the best example is Eisenbud's intriguing and brilliant analysis of Mrs. Chenoweth's Cagliostro persona (Eisenbud, 1992, chapter 14). The case is complex and deserves to be read in its entirety. As in all the best cases, it's the details that count, and no summary can do justice to the subtlety and shrewdness of Eisenbud's review. Unfortunately, however, we have no choice but to summarize.

James Hyslop was Professor of logic and ethics at Columbia University from 1889 to 1902 and also one of the founders of the American Society for Psychical Research. A staunch advocate of the survival hypothesis, Hyslop wrote extensively on psychical research and conducted many detailed investigations of mediums. In 1914, he held a series of sittings with one of his favorite mediums, Mrs. Minnie M. Soule, whose pseudonym was "Mrs. Chenoweth." Another sitter was Doris Fischer, the subject of W. F. Prince's monumental study of multiple personality (Prince, 1915/16). Hyslop, too, had a professional interest in Doris, because he suspected that multiple personality was a disguised form of mediumship (Hyslop, 1917).

Over the series of sittings, several trance personalities manifested through Mrs. Chenoweth. One of the most interesting was a drop-in who claimed to be Count Alessandro Cagliostro, the notorious eighteenth-century mystic, healer, and (as some have alleged) con artist. The behavior of this trance personality was vivid and flamboyantly salacious, but nevertheless rather one-dimensional. Cagliostro came through as a vigorous defender of sexual freedom, including that of women, and as a severe critic of Christianity. In fact, the Cagliostro persona behaved like "a reckless blasphemer who wouldn't have lasted forty-eight hours in the Church-dominated Europe of the time" (Eisenbud, p. 230). More important, however, the behavior of the Cagliostro persona was probably quite different from that of the actual Cagliostro.

The real Cagliostro was arrested in Rome in 1789 and brought to trial by the Holy Inquisition. Charged with freemasonry, heresy, and promulgating magic and superstition, he was condemned to death, although that sentence was later reduced to life imprisonment. But Mrs. Chenoweth's Cagliostro-persona gave no indication of that history. Nor did it match the personality of Cagliostro emerging from available biographies. Instead, it corresponded more closely to a very different portrayal of the Count, one that apparently originated with the Vatican. Eisenbud claimed that the Vatican's description of Cagliostro remained buried in its archives and that the Cagliostro-persona's behavior matched none of the accounts of Cagliostro's life published up to the time of the sittings. According to Eisenbud, it wasn't until 1972 that an account of Cagliostro appeared which presented the Vatican's version of the trial, and that account wasn't translated into English until 1974.

So this case presents a surprising puzzle. The Cagliostro trance persona failed to match the picture of Cagliostro painted by all the reliable sources available, not only at the time of the sittings, but until the present time as well. Outside of the Vatican's version of the facts, not even critical accounts of Cagliostro accused him of being lascivious or religiously cynical. Indeed, there is reason to think that Cagliostro's trial was rigged and that it was simply expedient for the Vatican to charge him with blasphemy and rampaging licentiousness.

It seems clear, then, that Mrs. Chenoweth's trance impersonation presented no evidence for the survival of Cagliostro. But in that case, what was the function, psychodynamically speaking, of the Cagliostro-persona? Why should a colorful but historically inaccurate trance personality emerge who was so flagrantly sexual and religiously cynical? Whose needs might that have satisfied? Eisenbud recognized that these were the appropriate questions to ask, and he offered intriguing reasons for thinking that the Cagliostro-persona had a great deal to do with, among other things, the sitters' sexual repressions and religious upbringing. Here, of course, is where details count most; but we'll have to settle for a tasteful selection.

For example, Hyslop, who "apparently devoted much of his life to spiritual and moral development" (Eisenbud, pp. 233-234), predictably found the Count to be a deplorable figure. So it seems particularly interesting and significant that Hyslop - by his own admission - repeatedly encountered nonspiritual, immoral, and "sensuous" characters in sittings he conducted. As Eisenbud nicely put it, "Hyslop seemed to find himself locked into some sort of epic Manichean struggle against the forces of evil" (p. 234). And as Eisenbud also recognized, in those days few took seriously as a "psychological possibility" that there might be "an internal dynamic connection between the spiritually inclined professor and the low 'sensuous' characters who kept turning up at the séances he attended" (p. 234). In fact, in those days few appreciated the possibility of experimenter effects in case investigations. But as many now recognize, investigators can't be viewed simply as passive outside observers and note takers, playing no role in the production of the phenomena. Of course, this problem is especially serious in the behavioral sciences, where there are many opportunities for subtle and uncontrollable forms of experimenter influence and subject-experimenter interactions. But in that case, experimenter effects, both normal and paranormal, are presumably as likely in the study of mediums as in more conventional laboratory tests.

But Hyslop wasn't the only séance participant who may have had a deep investment in the Cagliostro-persona. Doris (like Hyslop) was a model of moral propriety. In fact, she seemed almost to be a caricature of naive virtue. According to W. F. Prince, "A purer, more guileless soul it was never the writer's good fortune to know." Prince also notes that Doris had a "notable lack of sex-instinct." Now it apparently never occurred to Prince (or, for that matter, Hyslop) that Doris's lack of sexuality may have indicated an inhibition of powerful sexual desires. And as I noted above, in 1914 few considered seriously the possibility of experimenter-influence, and in particular the possibility that persons other than the medium might play an active role in shaping the material presented by a medium.

Furthermore, Mrs. Chenoweth betrayed a surprisingly intense attachment to the Count when it looked as if other communicators might banish him from the scene. (To appreciate the powerful emotions behind her words, I suggest reading her comments aloud.) Crying to the other ostensible communicators who tried to exorcise him, Mrs. Chenoweth said, "You give him back [Pause] You give him back...Give the Count back to me." Hyslop asked who wanted the Count, and Mrs. Chenoweth replied, "We all do. We are lost. We are lost, we are lost, we are lost [Pause] Oh, Devils, to take him away from us. [Distress and crying]...I won't stand it [Pause] I don't want your old God. I want the Count."

For these and other reasons, Eisenbud proposes that the Cagliostro-persona might have been a composite "dream figure omnibus for the repressed unconscious hankerings of all the principals at the sittings" (pp. 237-238). And considering some of the startlingly close correspondences between the trance personality and the behavior attributed to Cagliostro by the Church, it appears as if one or more of Mrs. Chenoweth, Hyslop, and Doris Fischer psychically raided an extremely obscure portrayal of Count Cagliostro to provide some material for the sitting.

Alan Gauld, whose mastery of both contemporary and historical sources is nothing short of breathtaking, has expressed some doubt about Eisenbud's conjectures. He informs me that the Vatican view of Cagliostro was initially published, at least in part, in a book printed in Rome in 1790. That book was then translated into French the following year. According to Gauld, the book "appears to contain quite enough about [Cagliostro's] licentiousness and heresy to have supplied the source for much subsequent scuttlebut about him" (personal communication, May 15, 1999). Gauld adds that "in addition to historical works about Cagliostro...he appeared in quite a lot of novels and plays, some by well-known authors (including one who had known him, Catherine II of Russia). (He was also a communicator through at least one other medium!) So the scope for medium or sitters to have heard all kinds of things about him, good and bad, was very large even at that date."

Now Gauld may be right. There may have been several sources, besides the apparently spurious and obscure Vatican version, from which members of Mrs. Chenoweth's circle could have constructed the Cagliostro persona. And it may be that no psi was required to provide the relevant information. But for present purposes, it doesn't matter particularly whether Eisenbud's psychoanalytic conjectures are correct. And it doesn't even matter whether the correspondences between the Cagliostro-persona and the Vatican account are accidental, attributable to a familiar pool of information, or arranged through psychic sleuthing. What matters is the level at which Eisenbud attempted to evaluate the data.

In psi research, it's always something of a mystery how best to trace the putative psychic causal lines. The value of Eisenbud's speculations is the match he seems to have uncovered between (on the one hand) the sitters' "unconscious hankerings" and life issues and (on the other) the character of the vivid but one-dimensional trance persona. The Cagliostro-persona offers nothing convincing in the way of evidence of survival, and it may well be historically inaccurate even if Gauld's concerns are justified. But it was at least as dramatically satisfying as most mediumistic trance-personalities, and for that reason it's precisely the kind of mediumistic performance that makes a strong prima facie case for survival. So despite Gauld's reservations, Eisenbud's essay illustrates the level of psychological probing required for illuminating survival research. By understanding how compelling, but non-evidential, mediumistic evidence is produced, we can be more alert for the operation of similar processes in more evidential cases. Still, Eisenbud's proposals do make good sense of the evidence, including peculiar and otherwise unexplained bits of behavior on the part of the sitters. So even if we reject Eisenbud's view concerning the origin of the trance-persona's characteristics, it's still plausible that the Cagliostro-persona makes most sense as a dramatic creation by one or more of the sitters(3).

(3) In fact, a contemporary case lends indirect support to Eisenbud's conjecture. In the early 1970s, members of the Toronto Society for Psychical Research received ostensible spirit messages (primarily through table rapping) from a communicator they invented ("Philip"), and in whose fictitious history and personality they immersed themselves in preparation for the séances. Sitter-group members realized that the raps in the table seemed to be, as one

member put it, "psychokinesis by committee" (Owen & Sparrow, 1976). Although the invention of Philip was an overt project, the sittings nevertheless support the view that something similar could occur surreptitiously.

I suppose some might think that psychological archeology is especially critical in cases such as this, which are emotionally and dramatically potent but also non-evidential. However, I'd argue that they matter most in cases that are apparently evidential, where it's all too easy to overlook underlying and relatively pedestrian human concerns. After all, both evidential and non-evidential cases may be emotionally charged, and participants may care deeply about the form and content of the phenomena. The Cagliostro case seems to demonstrate both a high level of dramatic creativity and possibly also a kind of psychic collaboration among some of the sitters. But with that sort of evidence staring us in the face, it's both presumptuous and naive to rule out super-psi conjectures in cases where no comparable depth-psychological study has been conducted. Regrettably, however, by comparison to Eisenbud's standard of analysis, most other case investigations are unacceptably superficial.

4. Runki's Leg: The Case

As I noted earlier, there are several related respects in which drop-in communicators are particularly intriguing, and in virtue of which super-psi explanations may seem less plausible than survivalist alternatives. First, the communicators are unknown to the sitters at the time of the sitting. Therefore (and second), it's hard to see why that particular communicator came to be dramatized or represented during the séance. What pointed the medium's (or sitters') psi in that direction? And third, in the best cases the communicator's motive for communicating seems both greater and clearer than any living person's motive to receive those communications. That is, the communicator in these cases has a much clearer agenda than any we might reasonably attribute to medium, sitter, or anyone else. So a viable super-psi explanation of a good drop-in case faces several challenges. Naturally, it must account for the verifiable information provided in the sittings and (if necessary) the accurate dramatic representation of the previous personality's behavior. But more important, it must also explain away the drop-in's apparent motivations. And for the super-psi explanation to be *preferable* to the straightforward survivalist explanation, it must specify which living person(s) had needs, even stronger than those of the drop-in, for the séance to unfold as it did. That's a tall order.

Probably the best drop-in case of all time comes from Iceland, a nation with a rich and distinguished tradition of mysticism, spiritism, and mediumship. The medium in this case, Hafsteinn Bjornsson (1914-1977), is arguably Iceland's most famous medium (his main competitor would be the physical medium Indridi Indridsson). Hafsteinn's psychic abilities first surfaced in childhood, and apparently they remained strong thereafter. He began holding regular séances in 1937, and although he didn't earn a living from these activities, he did accept fees for his services. Hafsteinn was a trance medium, and communicators as well as regular controls spoke through him. (For additional information on Hafsteinn, see Haraldsson, Pratt, & Kristjansson, 1978; Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1974; 1975a; 1975b.)

The case we're now considering began in the autumn of 1937, during a series of séances held at the home of E. H. Kvaran in Reykjavik. A drop-in appeared at one of the séances, and when asked to give his name, he responded by identifying himself with a stereotypically Icelandic male name intended clearly to be fictitious. He then added, "What the hell does it matter to you what my name is?" One of the sitters asked what he wanted, and the drop-in replied, "I am looking for my leg. I want to have my leg." His leg, he then said, was in the sea.

For the next year this communicator continued to appear at the séances in Kvaran's home, continuing to ask for his leg and still withholding his identity. In the autumn of 1938 the séances moved to the home of Lilja Kristjansdottir (with a few changes in personnel), and again the communicator manifested, still demanding his leg and still refusing to give his name. On January 1, 1939, a new sitter joined the circle. He was Ludvik Gudmundsson, a fish merchant and owner of a fish processing factory in Sandgerdi, a village about thirty-six miles from Reykjavik. Although Ludvik and his wife owned a house in Sandgerdi, they lived in Reykjavik. Apparently, Ludvik was introduced to the sittings through a relative and one of the recent additions to the circle, Niels Carlsson. Ludvik had never met Hafsteinn, and the medium apparently knew nothing about Ludvik or his family.

When Ludvik joined the circle, the drop-in said he was glad to meet him. Ludvik didn't know what to make of this, and he asked the communicator to reveal his identity. Although the communicator continued to refuse, he mentioned that Ludvik knew about his missing leg, which he said was in Ludvik's house in Sandgerdi.

The drop-in's behavior during this period differed considerably from that of Hafsteinn. Unlike the medium, he was brusque and rude, and in addition to demanding coffee and alcohol, he often asked for snuff (which Hafsteinn

never used). Frequently, he would go through the motions of lifting his hand to his (i.e., the medium's) nose and sniffing. Moreover, whereas Hafsteinn drank only one or two glasses of wine a year, the communicator's demand for alcohol corresponds to his later intimation (and some independent evidence) that, in life, he had been a heavy drinker.

After additional sittings in which the drop-in continued to conceal his identity, Ludvik and Niels presented an ultimatum. They said they would do nothing to help him so long as he refused to say who he was. Apparently, that annoyed the drop-in, who then made no appearance for a while. Finally, he returned, probably during the late winter or early spring of 1939 (for some reason the date of that event was not recorded), and he did so by abruptly and aggressively ousting another communicator from the scene. The drop-in then told the following story.

He said that his name was Runolfur Runolfsson (nickname, Runki) and that he was fifty-two years old when he died. Runki lived with his wife at Kolga or Klappakot, near Sandgerdi, and he had been walking home, drunk, from Keflavik (about six miles from Sandgerdi) in the latter part of the day. When he reached Sandgerdi he stopped at a friend's house and had some more to drink. When he was ready to continue his journey home, his friends protested. Because Runki was inebriated and because the weather was so bad, they said Runki shouldn't leave unless someone went along with him. But that offer of a designated walker angered Runki, who said he wouldn't go at all if he couldn't go alone. So, since Runki's house was only about fifteen minutes' walk away, he left by himself. (Evidently, Runki's friends were ready for him to leave.) At one point, wet and tired, Runki sat on a rock near the sea for a rest, and for another drink from the flask he carried with him. He then fell asleep, was carried away by the tide, and drowned. Runki said this happened in October 1879. The following January, his body washed ashore, and dogs and ravens then tore it to pieces. The remnants of Runki's body were recovered and buried in the graveyard in Utskalar, about four miles from Sandgerdi and six miles from Keflavik. But a thigh bone was missing from Runki's remains. It was carried out again to sea, and later washed onshore at Sandgerdi. Then, after being passed around for a while, it ended up in Ludvik's house. Runki also mentioned that he had been very tall, but it's not clear from the records whether he mentioned that detail at this sitting or at an earlier time.

Runki claimed that his story could be confirmed by checking the church book at Utskalar Church. So the sitters located the church book and found the record of someone named Runolfur Runolfsson, whose date of death and age at the time of death matched the story told by the drop-in. Runki's claim about his height was confirmed by Runki's grandson, who said his grandfather had been more than six feet tall. In the meantime, Ludvik asked elderly residents of Sandgerdi if they knew anything about an unclaimed leg bone in the vicinity. Some recalled vaguely that during the early 1920s a thigh bone (femur) had been "going around" and that it had been washed up by the sea. But they didn't know whose bone it was or what had become of it. However, one person said he seemed to remember that a bone, not associated with any particular person, had been placed in the wall of Ludvik's house by a carpenter who had built one of the inner walls downstairs. After an unsuccessful search in one of Ludvik's walls, an employee of the fish factory helped identify the correct wall. At one point he had lived in a room in Ludvik's house, and he said he knew of the carpenter placing a femur between two walls. Ludvik tore down the wall he indicated and found what was clearly the femur of a tall person. So, a bone that seemed to be Runki's was found more than forty years after Runki's death and approximately three years after Runki's first appearance.

I imagine that many readers will be puzzled by the manner in which the residents of Sandgerdi handled the unclaimed femur. But according to Haraldsson (a native of Iceland), in that culture and community "it would be considered disrespectful, if not sacrilegious...simply to throw a bone away. At the same time, it would be infeasible to bury a bone in the consecrated ground of a cemetery without knowing the identity of its owner" (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975b, p. 40, n.13).

Examination of records from Utskalar parish and elsewhere confirmed various details of Runki's story (see Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975b for specifics). One of the most interesting documents is the following, from the Utskalar clergyman's record book.

On October 16, 1879, Runolfur Runolfsson, living in Klappakot, was missing on account of some accidental or unnatural occurrence on his way home from Keflavik during a storm with rain near his farm, in the middle of the night. He is believed to have been carried along by the storm down to the beach south of the farm boundary at Flankastadir from where the sea carried him away, because his bones were found dismembered much later and his clothes were also washed up separated [i.e., apart from his bones]. (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975b, p. 42)

The clergyman also noted that Runki's remains were buried on January 8, 1880, and that Runki was fifty-two years old when he died.

A second record of Runki's death, also written by the clergyman at Utskalar, appeared later in a book, *Annals of Sudurnes*. This book was unpublished and virtually unknown at the time of the sittings. The manuscript was held in Reykjavik's National Library and was finally published in 1953. Both accounts claim that Runki's body was dismembered, and neither states that a leg bone was missing from the remains recovered near the shore and buried the following January. But the account in *Annals* differs in some respects from that found in the church record book. For example, it notes that Runki had been drinking alcohol around the time of his death. Moreover, the *Annals* account fails to mention Runki's last name, or the fact that his remains were buried at Utskalar. So if the mediumistic communication was derived psychically (or normally) from existing accounts, it couldn't have come from just one of those written by the clergyman. Runki's grandson also couldn't have been the sole source of the confirmed information. Although he knew that his grandfather had been tall, he had never known his grandfather and apparently was ignorant about the bone and other relevant facts of the case.

Unfortunately, the femur found in Ludvik's house was never conclusively linked with Runki. However, several considerations lend credibility to that connection. We know that Runki's body was described as "dismembered," and although no one claimed that bones were missing from the remains found onshore, the femur was clearly the bone of a tall person. Moreover, it's rare for bones to be washed ashore in that part of Iceland (or anywhere in Iceland, as far as I know). So it's plausible to associate recovered bones with the few people known to have died along the coast. Haraldsson and Stevenson were prepared to have Runki's body disinterred, and they even obtained the consent of his grandchildren. But the graves in Utskalar are unmarked, crowded together, and perhaps also layered atop each other at the same plot of ground. So there seemed no way of determining where to look.

After recovering the bone from his wall, Ludvik had a coffin built for it. He kept the bone for a year and then had it buried during a ceremony conducted at Utskalar. Those present at the ceremony believed they were burying Runki's final remains. The clergyman eulogized Runki, the choir sang, and afterwards the clergyman held a reception with refreshments at his home. That reception was attended by several of Hafsteinn's regular sitters. At the next séance held by Hafsteinn, Runki came and expressed gratitude for the proper disposal of his leg. He claimed he had been present at the ceremony and reception, and he described those events in detail. Although Runki didn't disappear after his business was settled, as many drop-ins do, he did mellow and continued to serve as Hafsteinn's principal control.

5. Runki's Leg: Theoretical Considerations and Nagging Concerns [\[top\]](#)

Haraldsson and Stevenson investigated this case carefully and considered whether Hafsteinn might have obtained the relevant information by normal means, either by visiting the National Archives in Reykjavik where the Utskalar parish records were kept, or the National Library where the *Annals* were located. It turns out that Hafsteinn had visited the National Archives during the sittings, but about six months after Runki had provided the account of his demise. Originally, Hafsteinn claimed not to have visited the Archives at all, but after Haraldsson told him that his signature had been found in the guest book for November 24, 1939, he recalled that he had gone there to examine the records which sitters told him they had verified. Haraldsson and Stevenson also determined that the guest book at the National Archives is not an entirely reliable record of visitors, and that some visitors' signatures are never recorded. Still, for reasons Haraldsson and Stevenson discuss in detail, I'm inclined to agree either (a) that we should interpret Hafsteinn's initial testimony as an honest memory lapse for an event that took place thirty-two years before he was interrogated, or (b) that Hafsteinn suppressed the information of his visit out of fear that his trip to the Archives would look suspicious. Besides, the documents in the National Archives and Library don't deal with the matter of the leg found in Ludvik's home. So at best they cover only part of what makes the case so interesting.

Of course, no case is ideal. There are always vast numbers of details to examine, and omissions may loom larger in the clarity of hindsight. So presumably there will inevitably be annoying respects in which even the best cases could be stronger. Not surprisingly, then, some puzzling features of this case merit attention. Some cast doubt on the survivalist interpretation of the evidence, and others simply deepen the mystery of the case.

First, when Runki gave details about his life, he said he was fifty-two years old when he died. But if the church records are correct, Runki was in fact about two months shy of fifty-one at the time. Curiously, though, the Utskalar parish notebook entry also says that Runki was fifty-two when he died. Haraldsson and Stevenson mention this discrepancy in a footnote, and they offer a reasonable (but not compelling) explanation. They suggest that the clergyman who made the note might have meant to say that, at the time Runki's remains were recovered and Runki's death was confirmed (in January 1880), Runki was in his fifty-second year. However, this detail may be more revealing than Haraldsson and Stevenson realized. Consider: If Runki wasn't actually communicating, and if someone at the séance had, either normally or paranormally, scoured existing records for information, this is the sort of error we could expect to see. To figure out Runki's actual age at the time of death,

one would have to locate the appropriate records and do some calculating. But to identify Runki as fifty-two years old at his death, one would only have to read it off the false or misleading record in the parish notebook.

Now let's play devil's advocate and be as sympathetic as we can to the survivalist. From that point of view, we have to concede that Runki might have been confused (both before and after bodily death), either from the ravages of alcoholism or from the possible strain of communicating mediumistically. Even if it opens the door for reckless survivalist speculation, we must admit that, if postmortem communication is possible, we have no idea how difficult or easy it might be. For example, we don't know what sort of toll it might take on mental acuity, whether we might remain stuck with the cognitive impairments we had at death, or how "noisy" the mediumistic channel might be. And certainly there's no reason to assume that survival increases (or even preserves) the clarity and accuracy of our memories. After all, the banality and fallibility of most ostensible communications is notorious. So for all we know, the error communicated about Runki's age when he died may be a typical (if not predictable) lapse and therefore no grounds for suspicion, especially if there are no other lingering doubts about the evidence.

But there are some additional nagging concerns. Originally, Runki said his leg was in the sea. Only after Ludvik joined the circle did Runki say it was in Ludvik's house and not the sea. How do we make sense of that shift in position? Survivalists have several explanatory options, none of which strike me as compelling or attractive, but none of which we can conclusively rule out. First, survivalists might argue that, before Ludvik joined the circle, nobody at the séance would have been in a position to help Runki find his leg. So perhaps Runki was merely seizing the opportunity to vent his frustration over his missing leg. Then, after Ludvik joined the group, that might have helped Runki focus on the location of his leg, or perhaps it finally gave him reason to direct the sitters to Ludvik's house. However, I don't see why Ludvik's absence from the sitter group would have prevented or discouraged Runki from directing the sitters to the appropriate house in Sandgerdi. Survivalists might also argue (again) that Runki was confused, or that in the struggle to communicate he might not have conveyed clearly that his leg had been in the sea. As we've noted, we have no reason to insist that mediumistic communications are easy or noise free.

On the other hand, suppose that living persons were (normally or paranormally) assembling the Runki story as the case progressed. In that case, Ludvik's arrival and the existence of somebody's (not necessarily Runki's) femur in his house, made it viable *at that time* to construct a more compelling case. It's possible, but highly unlikely, that once Ludvik had been invited to join the circle, the medium did some quick research and incorporated into the séance the information about the hidden femur. But considering the obscurity of that information and the lengths to which Ludvik had to go in order to learn about and locate the leg, I think we can rule this out. But, on the super-psi hypothesis, the information could have been acquired psychically, once Ludvik joined the circle.

Moreover, although this is not the only case in which a crucial sitter joins the circle after the drop-in's first appearance(4), it certainly seems to be a striking bit of serendipity that Ludvik arrived on the scene. How is that to be explained on either the survivalist or super-psi reading of the case? As just a piece of good luck, or as a sequence of events orchestrated somehow in order to make the case more convincing? And if the latter, who would have been able to pull it off? Let's grant, plausibly (but at least for the sake of argument), that the medium is innocent of any normal shenanigans in determining the sequence of events. And in fact, there's no evidence of any conspiracy involving medium or sitters, and no basis for sustaining a general suspicion about Hafsteinn's integrity. So could we plausibly regard Runki as the director behind the scenes? I don't pretend to know how to answer these questions. I consider them simply to be lingering puzzles about the case.

(4) In the drop-in case of Edward Druce (Gauld, 1971, pp. 301-302), sitter R. W. (who knew Druce) joined the circle after Druce's initial appearance.

We might also wonder why Runki disappeared for several months after Ludvik and Niels presented their ultimatum. Haraldsson and Stevenson claimed that Runki seemed annoyed, but since they mention no other behavioral signs of annoyance, that conjecture seems charitable at best. We need to be both fair-minded and circumspect with matters of this sort, and it's not outrageous to interpret Runki's disappearance with more suspicion. Since the details of Runki's story were provided only after Runki returned from his hiatus, we might wonder, reasonably, whether that period was needed for some normal or paranormal information gathering. But before we get carried away with skeptical musings, we should also remember that Hafsteinn's confirmed visit to the National Archives was six months *after* Runki told his story, and (as I noted) that account tells only part of the story. So although I see no solid reasons for worrying about Runki's absence during this period, the case would be even more convincing if that absence had not occurred.

Finally, why didn't the communicator help identify Runki's unmarked grave? It would have been a powerful addition to the evidence to have found those remains missing a femur of the appropriate size. Haraldsson and Stevenson's observations about the configuration of unmarked graves, although legitimate, do little to allay concerns. After all, if Runki could identify where his missing leg was located, why couldn't he also direct

investigators to the rest of his bones? Or (to put a super-psi spin on this), if Hafsteinn could paranormally locate the leg, why not also the site of Runki's other remains? There may well be reasonable answers to these questions, although I don't know what they are. And although I don't consider our inability to answer them reason to dismiss an otherwise very provocative case, they remain sources of concern, and they illustrate again how far from ideal this case is.

But despite its weaknesses, the case of Runki's leg illustrates clearly how drop-in communications lend support to the survival hypothesis. Haraldsson and Stevenson nicely summarize the issues concerning the correct information provided during the séances.

It does not seem feasible to attribute all of this information to any single person or any single written source. And this would be true, we believe, whether the medium acquired the information normally or by extrasensory perception. We think, therefore, that some process of integration of details derived from different persons or other sources must be supposed in the interpretation of the case. It may be simplest to explain this integration as due to Runki's survival after his physical death with retention of many memories and their subsequent communication through the mediumship of Hafsteinn. On the other hand, sensitives have been known to accomplish remarkable feats of deriving and integrating information without the participation of any purported discarnate personality. (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975b, p. 57)

So, as far as the case's behavioral details and underlying psychology are concerned, there's both good news and bad news for the survivalist. The bad news is that we have no idea what Runki's character was like, except for the evidence that he drank heavily. Therefore, we don't know what to make of Hafsteinn's Runki trance-persona. Besides, the Cagliostro case reminds us that vivid behavior different from that of the medium needn't be evidential. The good news is that the drop-in's motivations to communicate are much clearer and more straightforward than those we would need to ascribe to the sitters, and even to Hafsteinn, who at this early stage in his mediumistic career already had a solid reputation as a psychic. Even if he might have benefited somewhat from additional good publicity, he didn't need this case either to establish or cement his reputation. Furthermore, the drop-in's behavior, after the burial of the femur, adds credibility to the survivalist interpretation. Runki seemed satisfied that his bones were now all properly disposed of, and although it would have been appropriate for him (and typical behavior for a drop-in) to depart once his affairs were settled, his mellower and helpful participation at subsequent séances was no less appropriate(5).

(5) Colleagues and students have made very helpful comments and suggestions to me about this case. In particular, I'd like to thank Christian Perring and my student, Pratima Thotakura.

6. Concluding Remarks

Although the best cases are by no means coercive, the evidence for drop-ins, overall, seems to strengthen the case for survival. Granted, we can't conclusively rule out explanations in terms of motivated psi among the living. But as the challenges facing super-psi explanations mount, their antecedent plausibility decreases. Even if we grant that task complexity may be overrated as an obstacle to psi success, and even if we grant that what really motivates people may not be the concerns lying closest to the surface, drop-in cases make particularly good sense in terms of the ostensible communicator's expressed motives for communicating. As a result, survivalist interpretations of those cases seem more parsimonious than their super-psi alternatives. As we observed earlier, anti-survivalists need to explain *why a séance participant used ESP to gather information about a person known to nobody present*. They also need to explain why the communicator's needs or interests are so much more clear-cut than those we could reasonably attribute to medium or sitter, even after reasonable probing. And of course, whereas communicators supply information they would be likely to know, living persons would have to derive that information from different and often (normally) *obscure* sources.

Moreover, the very fact *that* there are drop-in cases seems to strengthen the case for survival. As Gauld correctly observes,

...if there were no verified cases of "drop in" communicators, the survivalist case would be considerably weakened. For if people do survive death with some at least of their former interests and affections, and if communication is a possibility, we should expect that not a few deceased persons would try to contact living persons for exactly the sorts of plausible-sounding reasons that "drop in" communicators quite often give. (Gauld, 1971, pp. 276-277).