

PSYCHIC

Continued From Page G-2

legitimate discipline, and a number of other factors have added to its credibility.

● The same ecological anxiety, the same disaffection with materialistic world views that thrust Edgar Mitchell into psychic research occultized millions of Americans throughout the 1960s — in a sense, something happened to all of us on the way back from the moon.

● The dematerialization of contemporary physics, a science filled with such bizarre components as advance potential (waves of electrons perceived before they are generated), tunneling effects (electrons penetrating barriers diagnosed as impenetrable by laws of probability) and tachyons (particles traveling faster than light, which would imply the possibility of a backward flow of time), has meant that this branch of science no longer offers a secure rationale for the denial of any paranormal event.

● The focus of contemporary anthropology has had an equally important impact. It has emphasized cultural relativity, bearing the message that our Western concepts of space, time, causality, and mind-body relationships are cultural constructs of the most diaphanous transiency.

● Finally, the vast new interest in altered states of consciousness — bred on the drug experience and the Orientalization of the West — and a new generation of young scientists whose awareness of consciousness-altering have created a friendly environment for psychic research.

"Altered states" is a concept absolutely crucial to parapsychology, one in which modern research converges with folklore and religious tradition. Telepathy and clairvoyance are more readily transmitted in the twilight states of reverie, trance, hypnosis, dream and meditation. The reduction of sensory input in such conditions would create the same effect as the decline of daylight with setting of the sun—only then is the fainter light of stars visible.

The tools that have provided parapsychology with methods of measuring altered states have also offered an interface between technology and mysticism that is very relevant to psychic research. In repeated experiments at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kan., and at the Langley Porter Institute in San Francisco, Zen monks and yogis have been wired up for measurement of brain waves, blood pressure and other vital functions while in deep meditation.

When Swami Rama, a yogi being studied at the Menninger Clinic, suspended his heartbeat for 17 minutes under the full monitoring of Western hardware, some ancient barrier between science and the paranormal broke down.

TO REBUT THE CONTENTION that contemporary scientific thought is complete and absolute, parapsychologists argue that there are many well-established "facts" that remain as anomalous to our present paradigm as extrasensory perception. After decades of research, there is still no satisfactory neurophysiological explanation of memory. Nor do we yet have an appropriate model for the most elemental fact of life: the transformation of raw data impinging upon our senses into conscious experience. The

causal functions of these totally accepted phenomena remain as mysterious as those of acupuncture, which, although defying all known scientific laws, has gained much vaster acceptance in the past three years than parapsychology has in a decade of laboratory work.

Dr. Charles Tart of the University of California at Davis, whose work on altered states of consciousness has been of great influence, speaks for a majority of American parapsychologists when he says, "We won't be able to understand the physics of the paranormal until we understand infinitely more than we do now about the psychology of it." So some of the most esteemed work in the field has been contributed by psychologists like Tart and Dr. Rex Stanford of St. John's University, Queens, who has studied the complex relationship between ESP and the brain's alpha wave patterns; and by Dr. Gertrude Schmeidler of the City University of New York, who has done the most extensive study to date on the personality traits of persons with greater-than-average psychic talents. She describes them as impulsive, yet sensitive to internal processes, warmly open to adventure and change, and gifted with very good dream recall.

AFTER A DECADE of impressive research on the subjective conditions of ESP, parapsychologists' conjectures on its physical characteristics have not developed beyond the theories of that prominent rationalist Sigmund Freud, whose fascination with the paranormal was much suppressed by his biographer, Ernest Jones. (Freud once wrote, in a letter to Hereward Carrington, that if he had another life to live he would dedicate it to psychic research.)

He saw psychic phenomena as remainders of an archaic communication system that had been gradually displaced in the course of evolution by the more precise, hence efficacious, communication of language, and which can recur again in times of need and crisis — a theory that fits in well with a large corpus of work currently documenting the psychic faculties of lower mammals.

THE ASPECT OF CURRENT parapsychology that strikes me as the most fascinating is this: The wonders of technology, traditionally thought antithetical to all spiritualism, are now enabling psychic research to substantiate the conditions of paranormal events.

Similarly, a yogi's suspended heartbeat, when monitored at the Menninger Clinic by the sophisticated hardware of modern physiology, created some symbolic reconciliation between science and mysticism; and Edgar Mitchell, enabled by his spaceship to knock at the reaches of the expected void, was led to see it as a divine plenum.

The world of 1974 is full of equally rich and strange conjunctions between ancient opposites — mind and matter, East and West, science and mysticism — which our culture is desperately hungry to synthesize. And the brave new world of parapsychology, if it attracts many harder-headed intellects into its ranks, may make a contribution to that synthesis. If so, it could help the rest of science by checking one of the most unfortunate trends of our times — the growing schism between dehumanized technology and the cheap black magic of pop occultism.