

1. My discovery of Near-Death Experiences (NDEs)

Experiences related to death – near-death experiences (NDEs), after-death communications (ADCs) and deathbed visions – provide food for thought for a lifetime and beyond. At least, this is true for me. The adventure began more than thirty years ago with my discovery of NDEs.

My first encounter with NDEs took place in the eighties and it turned out to be decisive both for my convictions and for my activities. Like millions of other readers throughout the world, I discovered NDEs thanks to Raymond Moody's book *Life after Life* (1979). Immediately, I was aware that these NDE testimonies answered most of my existentialist questions but raised as many new ones. Those accounts which describe this other world, strangely alike ours yet sublimated, inclined me to think that taking them at face value would not do justice to this fascinating phenomenon. Indeed, the following years have taught me that the deeper you get into the study of NDEs, the more they unveil their complexity.

In the eighties, there were books of testimonies and already some scientific works on the subject, but I lacked a cross-disciplinary approach to deepen my reflection: what did a psychologist, a quantum physicist, a philosopher or a biologist think of NDEs? Since I didn't find such a book, I decided to write the book I wanted to read. **On the Other Side of Life** (Insight Books Plenum Press/Perseus, 1997), first published in German translation in 1996 and subsequently published in six languages, consists of interviews with professors from different disciplines, preceded by a detailed description of the phenomenology of NDEs and its consequences.

My encounters



Photo Ken et Evelyn

My encounter with Kenneth Ring - professor *emeritus* of psychology and worldwide renowned NDE researcher - was decisive in many ways. He welcomed me generously in his home close to the University of Connecticut, USA, where he taught and we taped the longest interview of his long academic career, as he emphasized with the humor that characterizes him. Indeed, an entire day of interviewing allowed us to make a complete survey of his numerous research studies and investigations and to crystallize his personal conclusions and inmost convictions. This interview was published in *On the Other Side of Life*. During this sunny summer day, a deep friendship was born which resisted time and distance, as well as an advantageous collaboration which culminated in the joint writing of *Lessons from the Light* (2000, Reprint 2006 Moment Point Press) published in ten languages.

2. « Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival »

I wrote a novel or, more simply, a story entitled *Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival* with the aim and with the desire to make the current knowledge of experiences related to death immediately accessible and profitable to those who are facing a major life crisis. Published in French in 2009 (Les Presses du Midi) *Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival* was published in ten languages.

The new perspectives NDEs open, the softer conception of death they suggest, the hope they locate beyond known limits, should be at the disposition – if they so wish – of the ill and the terminally ill, the bereaved and, more generally, of everybody who is sensitive to the finality of the human destiny.

Excerpt from the preface written by Kenneth Ring:

« On the surface, *Talking with Angel* is the story of a young girl, told in the first person, who has contracted a serious disease. We, the readers, are in the mind of the narrator, the young girl, and from the outset, we are gripped by the drama of her illness. We enter her mind stream, her thoughts and feelings, as her illness develops. It is as if we become her diary – she is writing, she is confiding her innermost thoughts, to us. She draws us into her illness and its vicissitudes, and thus it is that we find ourselves sharing her journey and become intimately connected with her – and with the people in her life. Ultimately, her anguish becomes our own – but so, too, are the things she learns during the course of her struggle to understand and come to terms with what has happened to her. And these insights, the knowledge that comes to her, we come to see are the most important thing. They are really what the book is about and what the book is designed to teach us.

At the beginning of the story, she is seemingly quite ordinary, but as her illness progresses, so does she – in her knowledge, in the depth of her character, and, ultimately, in the profound degree of spiritual wisdom she attains as she confronts the possibility of “the end of everything”. In short, this young girl goes through an accelerated course of personal and spiritual maturity so that by the time the book closes, she reminds of someone like Anne Frank and we realize that we have been privileged to read another young girl’s diary we will not soon forget.

This is essentially a book of wisdom teachings – specifically, teachings about death and the possibility that something profound transcends death and can cast its light back on the living so as to transform them. And, just as with Plato’s dialogues, so *Talking with Angel* is at bottom a mind-stretching philosophical undertaking dealing with one of the great perennial issues but from a completely new contemporary perspective.

Much of Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino’s life for over the past two decades has dealt with the phenomenon of the near-death experience, on which subject she is already recognized as an international authority. Her previous books and her many lectures have indeed gained for her a reputation as one of Europe’s leading figures in this field. So it is not surprising that it is the perspective of the near-death experience (NDE, for short) that informs this book – and

the life of the narrator (though in an unexpected way). But what Evelyn has done here is completely different from anything she has done before”.

3. My collaboration with INREES

My encounter with Stéphane Allix, founder and president of INREES (Research Institute on Extraordinary Experiences) dating back about fifteen years was also important for my work in the field of experiences related to death. We started collaborating from the inception of INREES in 2007.

INREES publishes the quarterly magazine *Inexploré*, organizes major conferences, runs an internet information space on extraordinary experiences, publishes books ... Between

Stéphane Allix



psychology, spirituality and science, INREES proposes to take a fresh look at the *extraordinary*. Because we are in a time when new fields of knowledge are emerging, INREES thus offers a serious framework to talk about science and spirituality, the latest research on consciousness, life, and death, and to bridge the visible world and the invisible world in a scientific and rigorous way. Without taboo, without prejudice, with rigor and openness. (www.inrees.com/La-mission-INREES).

My appreciation of INREES

In 2012, I wrote a short appreciation published on the site of INREES:

"The integrative and interdisciplinary approach of INREES is part of the holistic movement which is undoubtedly the only possible approach to understanding complex phenomena. If one assumes that all extraordinary experiences, which seem to manifest themselves with increasing urgency, originate in the same underlying reality, then they cannot be understood separately. Extraordinary experiences related to death (NDEs, deathbed visions, and after-death communications) open up fascinating horizons. INREES has the great merit of bringing all these manifestations together and analysing them in a global way with the ultimate goal of better understanding the mystery of the human condition. I am pleased to actively support INREES as a member of the Scientific Committee and an honorary member”.

4. « Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences »

Near-death experiences (NDEs), after-death communications (ADCs), deathbed visions, out-of-body experiences, lucid dreams, shamanic experiences, psycho-spiritual experiences, possession, extrasensory perceptions (ESP)... are they interpretations? Beliefs? Hallucinations? Reality? Extraordinary experiences place us in a frontier zone of the human mind, a space where it is easy to lose one's bearings. They provoke two forms of opposing reactions: rejection or fascination. A distance is nevertheless necessary in order not to lose oneself in our personal beliefs, those of our entourage or those of opportunistic groups. The

Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences, initiated by INREES, proposes for the first time this necessary distance to be taken. The book is aimed at health professionals, psychologists, psychotherapists, but also the general public, in fact at everybody who wants to know and understand what serious scientific research and the clinical study of these phenomena have allowed to discover. (*Manuel clinique des expériences extraordinaires*, edited by Stéphane Allix and Paul Bernstein, InterEditions/INREES, 2009, 411 pages).

My contribution to the Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences

I had the pleasure of writing three of the eleven chapters of the *Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences*:

- Chapter 3: Near-death experiences (NDEs)
- Chapter 4: Nearing-Death Awareness
- Chapter 5: After-death communications (ADCs)

5. Translation of « Hello from Heaven! »

Bill and Judy Guggenheim disclosed after-death communications first to North Americans and then to Europeans thanks to their bestseller *Hello from Heaven!* which was translated into 17 languages.

I had been in touch with Bill Guggenheim by email for many years when we finally met in person at the IANDS (International Association for Near-Death Studies) conference in Houston, USA, in 2006. Interested in the topic of spontaneous and direct after-death communications (ADCs), I volunteered to translate *Hello from Heaven!* into French and to write the introduction. The book was published in 2011 by Éditions Exergue under the title *Des Nouvelles de l’Au-delà*. When I started, I was not entirely aware of the time and effort that would be required to translate the 432 pages! However, I never regretted my decision because my translation work on the 353 testimonies presented in *Hello from Heaven!* led my activities on a new trajectory ...

6. « Quand les défunts viennent à nous »

The translation of *Hello from Heaven!* into French consolidated my pre-existing interest in these spontaneous and direct contacts or communications apparently initiated by the deceased. What are they about? Who lives this type of experiences? Under what circumstances do they occur? What do the deceased “say”? What do they communicate and for what purpose? What is the meaning and nature of these experiences? And how do people react? Are they surprised? Scared? Pleased? Stunned? Intrigued by the fact of living an event that seems completely inconceivable? And what is the impact of these experiences on the people who had them? On the process of mourning? And on their conception of a possible survival of consciousness after physical death?

All these questions intrigued me. I decided to study this phenomenon more in depth and to write a book.

When writing the *Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences*, these experiences were so little known in French-speaking countries that it was incumbent upon us to baptize this phenomenon. We could have called these experiences “Communications” or “Contacts with a deceased” by analogy with the Anglo-Saxon expression *After-Death Communication*, but we decided for a more subtle appellation – Vécu Subjectif de Contact avec un Défunt, or VSCD (subjective experience of a contact with a deceased) - by choosing to emphasize the *subjective* aspect of this experience.

Thus, I had an appellation of the phenomenon and testimonies. Indeed, when I published an article entitled *ADCs, hallucination or last communication?* In *Inexploré* - the magazine of INREES in 2013, I launched a call for testimonies which arrived numerous and which constitute the essence of *Quand les défunts viennent à nous*, supplemented by my analysis and by interviews with renowned scientists which allowed an in-depth reflection on the nature and consequences of ADCs, especially on the grieving process. In the last part of the book, I put ADCs in the wider context of other experiences related to death and draw a parallel with near-death experiences (NDEs), deathbed visions and communications with the deceased through the intermediary of mediums.

Foreword written by par Stéphane Allix:

“Evelyn Elsaesser is one of the most renowned experts in the world of experiences related to death, and more specifically those that are extensively described in this book.

As I began my investigative work on these extraordinary phenomena in the summer of 2003, the eminent American psychologist Kenneth Ring whom I had contacted had recommended that I join Evelyn Elsaesser in Switzerland. Indeed, both had just co-published a book devoted to near-death experiences, and Kenneth Ring was full of praise for Evelyn. I called her and I was instantly seduced by this researcher in the soul who knew how to combine great attention and a formidable listening capacity with a meticulous rigor.

Immediately a relationship of respect and friendship was established between Evelyn and me. So when I founded INREES a few years later, Evelyn naturally became one of its pillars and one of the active members of our scientific committee. In particular, she took an important part in the research we began to centralize the clinical knowledge available on near-death experiences, as well as all types of accounts related to contacts between the living and the dead. Evelyn then devoted herself with rare energy to the writing of three central chapters of the *Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences*, including the one dealing with the “Vécus subjectifs de contact avec un défunt, or VSCD” (after-death communications or ADCs), an appellation which was coined by us on this occasion.

These experiences of supposed contacts with the deceased are not anecdotal. They occur in tens of thousands around us. Those in mourning who have the feeling of establishing a contact or even a communication in different forms with their deceased loved ones are deeply moved and comforted, but also destabilized because this experience does not fit with

the predominant conception of reality. *Quand les défunts viennent à nous* gives us keys to better understand these experiences and integrate them into the process of mourning - thanks to the many testimonies of ADCs, the informed opinions of the scientists interviewed and the reflections of the author.

Evelyn devotes a chapter to a particular type of ADCs - these visions at the time of death, or deathbed visions, in which people on the threshold of death perceive deceased family members or friends who came "to accompany them into the other world", instantly releasing them from fear of death. These visions are reported to nurses, doctors, and health professionals who distinguish them very clearly from any known hallucinatory phenomena.

The originality and great merit of this book is to put after-death communications (ADCs) in a wider context, that of other experiences related to death - including near-death experiences and communications of the deceased reported by mediums – and to compare their modes of expression and the messages conveyed.

Countless people have experienced this type of experiences and yet do not dare to talk about them, not even to persons close to them. This is undoubtedly the first benefit of this indispensable work: to bring these widespread and important experiences out of shadow and denial. This is the incredible richness of Evelyn Elsaesser's synthetic work.

Quand les défunts viennent à nous is the fruit of a long-term undertaking and probably the most documented work existing to date. This book, which is both rigorous and very pleasant to read, makes it possible to recognize that life after death is a rational hypothesis”.

Usefulness of thematizing After-death communications (ADCs)

Direct and spontaneous after-death communications are very common but almost non-existent in the media discourse. It is estimated that between 25 and 50% of mourners have spontaneously experienced such contacts with a deceased family member or friend. Thus, it is probable that millions of Europeans have experienced ADCs and yet this phenomenon has hardly been documented in European countries. There is very clearly a discrepancy between the experience of many people and its taking into account by the media, and also by sociologists, because, at this frequency, it is a **major social reality**.

The lack of information on these experiences leads to two major difficulties for the mourners who experienced them (the recipients):

- The difficulty of integrating this experience in their conception of reality
- The difficulty of sharing this experience with others

The recipients are convinced of the reality of their ADC that they consider an authentic, happy and comforting experience. However, after reflection, some begin to doubt their perceptions and even their mental health. The dichotomy between their subjective certainty and the current representation of "reality" makes them think that they have experienced something that "is not possible," that "cannot happen." It is the dominant thought of Western materialistic societies, hermetically closed to spiritual experiences, which plunges

these people into disarray. Informing the public about the phenomenon of ADCs, whatever its ontological status, is essential.

The sharing of ADCs with others can also be very problematic for the recipients. Too often, they are confronted with scepticism, even rejection. Joy can quickly turn into distress if one seeks a validation of one's experience and if one wants at all costs convince one's interlocutor of the authenticity of the experience. Others might be afraid of ridicule and prefer to be silent, sometimes for many years.

How relieved they would be if their interlocutors were already aware of the phenomenon of ADCs and would respond to the experience with full knowledge of the phenomenon, without necessarily adhering to it. A shared knowledge of this very common, but paradoxically so little known, phenomenon would give a common language, while leaving everyone the freedom to apprehend it according to their own sensitivity.

The benefits of an "education" about the phenomena occurring or likely to occur around death are evident, not only at the moment of experiencing an ADC, or of being the interlocutor of a grieving person who had the experience, but also for our reflections on our own finitude.

7. Activities in various associations

I served for many years as coordinator of the Swiss section of the **Scientific and Medical Network (SMN)**, a British association promoting dialogue between science, medicine and spirituality. Its *Network Review* magazine features articles of great scientific value and includes several Nobel laureates among its contributors. (<https://explore.scimednet.org/>).

We founded **Swiss-IANDS** (International Association for Near-Death Studies) in 2014 with the aim of educating the professional community and the general public about the nature and consequences of NDEs and other experiences related to death, including after-death communications (ADCs), and deathbed visions. We carry out awareness campaigns, organize and take part in conferences, advise students on their work on experiences related to death (academic or maturity papers, etc.), respond to questions or requests for assistance sent to us by individuals, animate groups where persons can share their experiences, and participate to the extent of our availabilities in research studies. Swiss-IANDS is affiliated with the IANDS umbrella organization based in Durban, USA.

Moreover, I have been the **European coordinator of IANDS** for many years.

8. Conferences

For the last 30 years I have been giving lectures in Switzerland and abroad on experiences related to death, namely near-death experiences (NDEs), deathbed visions and spontaneous and direct after-death communications (ADCs). I present my lectures in French, English, German and Spanish.



Conférence à Hong Kong