

THE EARLY PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

BY JAMES C. CARPENTER

Charles ("Chuck") Honorton, the parapsychologist, was born in 1946 in Deer River, Minnesota. Did he begin his research career *in utero*, as the speed of his development suggests? Perhaps the floaty, altered state of consciousness there helped develop some prescient guesses about life after birth. Still, he could not yet have known about statistics, the published literature of parapsychology, the philosophy of science, and the politics of scientific controversy. He may not have rounded out his knowledge of these things until age 16 or so, when he first carried out a well-grounded, elaborate piece of research and interpreted it in a way that placed it sharply in the center of the issues swirling about the field. He was a rocket—speed and flare. While his peers were dawdling through high-school assignments, he was avidly corresponding with a famous scientist, envisioning remarkable vistas of discovery; while they were trying to find the way from college dormitory to cafeteria, he was organizing and running a scientific society, debating professors, and carrying out research in several settings; as they began to worry about choosing a major he was setting up shop for full-time research with a ferocious band of collaborators. The rest of his career developed apace. And now suddenly he is dead.

My topic is Honorton's professional contributions up to the moment that he left the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man at age 21. It is not for the work of this period that he will be remembered, although it was well done, and if we knew no more about the nature of psi than what he had discovered by then, we would still have some very good leads. His activities during this period suggest the dimensions his career would take: an omnivorous student of the field, a bold, persistent apologist for it with the larger world of mainstream science, a tireless contributor to its body of knowledge, and a molder of its strategies, methods, and questions.

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Can we account for the early development of Honorton's career in parapsychology, his intense focus and interest? If he ever speculated aloud about such matters, it was not to me. He was too committed to the present and future to look back a great deal. Still, we know that he was dealt a weak hand in the physical side of life, and perhaps wanted to optimize the mental. Born with serious orthopedic and cardiovascular problems, he had long bouts of forced inactivity as a child and surely longed for a mind with the power to soar beyond the prison of casts, pain, and boredom. I know that he expected to die young. Whatever he was to do would be done quickly.

J. B. Rhine, the founder of modern experimental parapsychology, had been corresponding with the boy for some time when he invited him to spend the summer of 1962 studying at the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory. This was before Honorton's junior year in high school. Rhine described him to his staff as a remarkable young man, whose intense interest should be encouraged. From the icy outposts of Minnesota, Honorton arrived at the sunny hub of the universe of parapsychology. He ate it up. He stayed in the library until all hours, buttonholed his elders relentlessly, and pondered the future destiny of this field with the Rhines. He absorbed statistics and methods at the side of Gaither Pratt with his calculator whirring and clacking, studied personality tests and theories with John Freeman and Winifred Nielsen, and delved into the powers of yoga and mystical experience with Wadih Saleh. He arrived already devoted to this group and their work, and became more so. He had no doubt that this field was incredibly important, was convinced that the existence of psi had been demonstrated, believed that experimental methods were the best approach to developing knowledge, thought that critics in mainstream science could be educated and converted, and could see no reason for doing anything else besides pursuing all of this as quickly as possible.

Surely Rhine would never find another disciple so precocious, so devoted to the master's methods, so aggressively intelligent in absorbing it all, so whole-hearted in his commitment to helping. Rhine, with his own fierce commitment to developing and defending his young field, welcomed the help. It was a remarkable relationship. Returning to Minnesota for Honorton was exile back to the snowy frontier. A few years later he would name his only child Joseph Rhine Honorton.

After his first summer at Duke, Honorton returned to high school and carried out a well-conceived, appropriately analyzed

study on a complex topic (Honorton, 1964). He had steeped himself in the research literature relating hypnosis to ESP performance, as well as the studies that attempted to discriminate psi-hitting from psi-missing subjects. He reasoned that the imperfect replicability of both lines of work could be improved by combining them. At this very beginning of his published work, he showed interest in an issue that would continue to preoccupy him: the distinction between methods that merely predict scoring direction and methods that enhance the strength of the psi effect that is shown. In a hunch that shaped his work until his death, he chose the state of the subject as the variable that might affect the latter. As a good bet for a discriminator of hitters and missers, he selected the Humphrey modification of an interest scale used earlier by Stuart. Somehow he acquired the skills of hypnotic induction and set out to use Casler's (1962) hypnosis protocol as the means of increasing the subjects' ability to perform the ESP task. His six subjects (fellow high-school students) completed 88 runs, half in the waking and half in the hypnotic state, with the order controlled. His hypothesis was confirmed in that the predicted hitters and missers produced a significant difference in scoring, but only in the hypnotic condition. He later replicated these results successfully (Honorton, 1966b) using more subjects and more sophisticated wrinkles to his methods, including elaborate controls about target randomness and security, a standardized assessment of depth of hypnotic state, and manipulation checks on the efficacy of his hypnotic suggestions. In these studies, he helped establish a fact which meta-analysis would later underscore (Schechter, 1984): that hypnosis is a powerful tool for enhancing the expression of ESP; and he added the important point that subject differences must also be taken into account.

Honorton returned to Durham for a second summer of study in 1963. He fell into the rhythm of laboratory life happily, picking up on the relationships with staff that he had formed before, assisting in many studies, full of questions and ideas. He especially loved to talk with Rhine, and spent long hours on the other side of Rhine's desk. The depth and breadth of his reading gave his questions an extraordinary pertinence, and Rhine responded by pouring forth his answers, hopes, and visions. That world-famous founder of parapsychology liked Honorton and took time with him. During these talks their two lives became linked down somewhere deep within the Psyche that they wished to study.

At the same time, other relationships were also forming that would have a lasting importance for Honorton. Before those sweaty

months had passed, he had bonded with a group of fellow-travelers, all only a few years older than he, and all almost as devoted to parapsychology. This unnamed, unofficial in-group was a remarkable phenomenon, a nucleus of zealots touched in the head by destiny. This young group (henceforth called YG) would grow a few in numbers and a hundredfold in commitment over the next few years. It had gathered around Rhine and was nourished by him. He flattered, scolded, anointed, and inspired them. He also gave some financial support to the destitute band (all graduate students in psychology at various universities, except for Honorton), held regular conferences in which they were urged to participate, and hosted them again each summer for further study. Beginning with this summer of 1963, and continuing over the next three, these happy fanatics worked seven days a week, discussed sometimes through the night, and conducted farcical and riotous "psychic healings" at parties. Every minute they coaxed the coming breakthroughs out of the cards and calculators. They seemed to own a piece of history unfolding. Each new study whispered the promise: a bit of the map of the Mind's New World. There was remarkably little competition and lots of love and fun. The research of each one of this group came to show a mutual contagion of ideas. When apart during the school months, the group published a newsletter for its own consumption. It was a many-headed beast, and Honorton was its heart.

In 1964 Honorton enrolled at the University of Minnesota. He was already largely self-educated in many areas, and full of the questions and mission of parapsychology. Perhaps he expected to find in the Psychology Department an academy of scholars committed to empirical truth and dedicated to pursuing profound questions about human nature. He got an icy reception. Dust-bowl empiricism reigned, with professors isolated from one another in little enclaves of research, each with a small coterie of loyal graduate students. Talking with students at all was apparently a rare phenomenon for most professors; speculative talk was bad form; and the unknown was of no interest whatsoever. Honorton was undaunted. He advertised, gave lectures, and quickly gathered about himself a collection of students with an interest in parapsychology. With them he formed the Minnesota Society for Psychical Research to promote discussion, research, and education in the field of parapsychology. This was the first of many influences Honorton would have upon the institutional structure of parapsychology. Not finding a faculty sponsor among psychologists, Honorton turned to a political scientist named Mulford Q. Sibley. Sibley was an anarchist who always

wore a red necktie as a symbol of his support for intellectual freedom and rebellion. He also had a long-standing interest in psychical research. He became an enthusiastic defender of Honorton and an ally in offering lectures, seminars, and debates on and off campus. Rhine himself arrived to inaugurate the founding of the organization in January, 1965, and gave a lecture, supported by the Psi Chi society, on the state of the field. Rhine was to make other trips as well for public discussion with other scholars, all arranged by Honorton and some filmed. Rhine so favored the organization that its rent off campus was paid by the Duke laboratory. Apparently Jack Darley, then chairman of Psychology at Minnesota, was very upset about this infestation and was about to attempt to squelch the organization, until dissuaded by Paul Meehl, another champion of free inquiry.

Friends at the time remember Honorton as intense, bubbly, serious, with a good sense of humor, and an impressive absence of flakiness, in spite of his preoccupation with this "fringe area." Many lectures, debates, and symposia were sponsored by his society at the university, in that community, and on other campuses. These were usually conducted largely by Honorton himself. Thus began a long career of education and debate. His professional opponents in these contests often mistook this short, chubby, friendly boy as an easy target. Perhaps Honorton was what clinicians term "counter-phobic" about authority. He leapt upon it and took it on, armed with an arsenal of facts, clear reasoning, and wit. He did very well in these exchanges. Less adversarial discussions were also held with participants that included the philosopher Herbert Feigl, the psychologist Gardner Murphy, Rhine, and others. The society lived up very well to its mission to inform and educate. It also did well with scientific discussion and research. The heart of the Society was its Research Committee, membership on which could be secured only by passing a difficult exam on experimental parapsychology, with at least an 80% score. This group held three official two-hour seminars each week for mutual education and discussion, and countless hours outside planning research, carrying out pilot studies and digesting results. Honorton was very dominant in all this. He insisted that the group keep a strictly experimental focus. Many pilot studies and some formal research were carried out by the Society before Honorton left Minnesota. In the first year alone, over 73,000 ESP trials were collected from over 500 subjects on topics as varied as emotional relatedness and ESP performance, the assessment of alleged psychic training techniques, the utility of a "PK pinball" machine,

and the effects of environmental variables such as temperature, humidity, and air pressure on performance. Besides the hypnosis replication, three other studies were developed to the point that Honorton at least briefly reported them. All of them illustrate how eager he was to seize upon promising work, past and current, and develop it. His research credo came largely from Rhine, but he gave it his own emphases and charged it with his own energy.

He published a statement of this credo in an essay in the newsletter of the YG. For the first time he took on a role he was to express many times later: the parapsychologist's parapsychologist, reproaching and prodding his colleagues to move their thinking and work in directions he thought best. Titled "A Question for Researchers: How Uncontrollable is Psi?" (Honorton, 1965a), this paper argued that to consider psi innately "elusive" is lazy and unproductive. Work in the field, he said, is too often piecemeal and not followed up systematically. Making a comparison to the mainstream research literature on hypnosis (which he already knew well), he argued that an ostensibly "elusive" phenomenon can come to be seen as quite sensible and lawful when research becomes programmatic and sustained and when operations and definitions become standardized. He cited the sheep-goat research as evidence that the same can be true in parapsychology.

An illustrative bad example pertinent to these ideas was provided by a paper by a psychologist named Sprinthall that was published in a mainstream psychology journal (Sprinthall, 1964). In a review written with Morris (Honorton & Morris, 1965), the paper was dissected with succinct precision, making it clear what foolishness can be produced by someone given enough ignorance of prior literature, disregard for standard definitions, and generally poor method. In such a chancey field, only very good work could be tolerated, and it should be programmatic.

Honorton applied his beliefs to his own early research at Minnesota. Anxiety was a hot topic among researchers in Rhine's laboratory during this period (e.g., Nielsen & Freeman, 1965; Rao, 1965). The Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale (MAS) was the main measure of anxiety used, and rather mixed results had been reported. Several of the YG took up the problem. Honorton (1965b), for his part, displayed a preference he would show with increasing conviction over the years. He wished to move away from findings that were purely empirical to ones that were empirically reliable but that also seemed to make sense. Reasoning from the theory of Spence, he predicted that the effect of anxiety upon ESP performance could

be mediated by the perceived complexity of the psi task. He carried out two experiments. In the first, 88 subjects carried out 352 ESP runs, half using the BT procedure, and half the DT method, while being told that the BT procedure was the more complex of the two. More anxious subjects were expected to score well on the "simple" task and below-chance on the "complex" one, and less anxious people were expected to do the opposite. All trends were in the right directions, but only the below-chance scoring of the more anxious group on the "complex" targets was independently significant. Another study used a similar design, except that the procedural contrast was between DT clairvoyance and precognition runs. Three groups of subjects were run, with one being told that the DT condition was the more complex, another that the precognition was more complex, and the third that they were equally complex. The results were not significant.

The next study was reported informally (Honorton, 1966c). It was carried out with students at Macalester College in St. Paul and showed Honorton's commitment to the strategy of combining research leads in hopes of securing more replicable effects. Each student at the college was solicited to take part in a 40-trial ESP test, using a self-testing booklet. In 20 trials subjects were asked to try to hit the targets, and in the other 20 to try to miss. The MAS and three versions of the sheep-goat question were used as predictors of performance, and cash prizes were offered. All targets were generated on an early random-event generator (the Taylor ESP Machine). In all, 234 subjects completed the task. Results were not significant.

The last study to come out of the Minnesota days did give significant results, but it was only informally reported (Honorton, 1966a). Some of the YG had been playing with the idea of pairing some ESP targets with emotionally arousing material (unknown to the subjects) to try to make the material more salient, and also to try to arouse unconscious defenses that might affect performance. Honorton (1966a), in a typically straight-ahead approach, simply hoped that greater emotional salience could strengthen the ESP performance. In this study, two subjects carried out a long-distance ESP experiment between Chicago and Minneapolis, guessing four decks of ESP cards on each of three nights. Two of the decks in each session were laced with an erotic word on a slip of paper. Although the subjects did not know of the target difference, performance was significantly higher in the "erotic" condition, as predicted. Although small, this is the sort of study (significant results, clearly related to a growing little body of similar findings) that ordinarily would have

been formally reported or at least followed up at Rhine's lab. The fact that both were discouraged by him was meaningful in itself, an ill omen.

One other little study bears mentioning here because of what it portends, even though it was never reported. I remember it only because I was involved and kept the data. During the summer of 1964, a half-dozen of the YG, under Honorton's direction, experimented with the "telepathic drawing" procedure of Carington (1940). In a pilot study, each member played the roles of sender and receiver, to see if any apparent ability emerged. One person showed very strong results as a receiver, and a small confirmatory series was carried out with her as the single subject. The results of this were also strongly positive, and statistically significant. Honorton went eagerly in to see Rhine the next morning to share the results and schedule discussion about the work at a laboratory meeting. He emerged with a grim and darkened look, a rare phenomenon for Honorton in those days. Rhine was not interested in research done with such old-fashioned methods, did not want the study discussed, and would have no further time spent on the matter in his laboratory. Honorton obeyed his orders, but in this and other similar events (such as the non-publication of results suggesting that psi has an interest in dirty words) seeds of rebellion were planted. In fact, when he returned to Minnesota, Honorton went on to continue work with the drawing technique, with encouraging results. He clearly maintained his own resolve to persist with what came to be called the "free-response" methods.

In the spring of 1966, Honorton had finished with the University of Minnesota (not graduated, but finished), and packed up, new wife in tow, to end his long seasonal commute and begin a lifetime future at the FRNM, now in its new, non-Duke location. Kennedy had been shot, but Camelot was alive and well in Durham.

He settled happily to work. The next two studies he reported were not particularly remarkable and are probably best taken as illustrating the sorts of things he elected not to pursue in his subsequent work. One problem being pondered by the FRNM staff at the time was the relation between ESP and memory. On the basis of some theoretical ideas of W. G. Roll, Honorton (1969b) carried out two studies in which subjects were required to memorize targets of one type, but not of another, and then were given an ESP test with both. Performance was expected to be better with the non-memorized targets. The results were significantly as expected in the pilot study, but not in the confirmation.

With J. Stump, Honorton (1969a) reported on a series of three studies carried out to follow up on one of Rhine's observations. In a restricted-calling situation (in which the subject is required to call exactly five each of the ESP symbols in each run), Rhine had noted the occurrence of significant psi-hitting in the last segment of the run, when the subject was having to tally prior calls and use only what was left. The new studies replicated the effect, and specified it further: it was found only in runs that were done before, and not after, a comparison free-calling condition. This work showed Honorton as a team player at FRNM, but this sort of research—driven by blind empiricism, not readily interpretable, and dependent on complex internal analyses of data—was the sort he would later eschew.

By contrast, the last study to come out of his FRNM years (Honorton, 1967a; Honorton, Carlson, & Tietze, 1968) was a good indicator of his future interests. By the mid-60s several thinkers, including Gardner Murphy (1963), had argued for the likelihood of a positive relationship between a subject's level of creativity and his/her ability in psi tests, and empirical confirmation had been found by Levine and Stowell (1963), and Schmeidler (1963, 1964). Honorton undertook a large-scale test of the hypothesis. Using state-of-the-art measures for creativity (the Ice Question Test of Burkhart and Bernheim and the Personal-Social Motivation Inventory of Torrance), he organized the testing of a total of 305 high-school and junior high-school students in five different schools. The students were tested in groups, each by a different experimenter. All subjects filled out the Torrance measure and those in two of the groups did the Ice Question Test as well. Each also carried out 4 to 10 precognition runs. The results were strongly significant and consistent across series: more creative people, in terms of both measures, did produce higher precognition scores. This was the sort of strong, intuitively cogent result that would appeal to Honorton later. Both creativity and psi ability require an "openness to experience," he reasoned. On such findings research programs can be built.

The last published piece of this period shows another side of Honorton that would blossom later: as the defender of the field to its most important critics. C. E. M. Hansel (1966) had published a book that was very critical of the field in general, including the Duke work. He started with the principle that psi effects are "a priori unlikely," hence any plausible counter-hypothesis, including that of experimenter incompetence or dishonesty, has to be pre-

ferred even when evidence for its validity cannot be had. Hansel did some arm-chair detective work, speculating on ways various reports could represent misunderstanding or fraud, and considered the matter settled. Honorton, in a review (1967b) of the book, engaged him with clarity, energy, and style. Citing the philosophers Feigl and Bridgman, he made clear that the "a priori unlikely" line of reasoning would rule out anything not currently established in science at any given moment and would bring all progress to a grinding halt if it were applied seriously. Even more pointedly, he went on to spell out instance after instance in which Hansel was highly prejudiced in his presentation, showing either gross lack of familiarity with the material he was purporting to assess, or a willful misrepresentation of it. The whole collection of selections, omissions, and distortions pointed to a man who believed that he could practice shoddy scholarship on an unpopular field with impunity. It is Hansel's own authority as a critic that was left exposed as implausible. This review shows a spirit that Honorton would display later. He wanted to press the debate between parapsychology and others in mainstream science, but also to insist that all parties be well informed and use high standards of reason and fairness.

What had Honorton learned from his professional and scientific activities by his twenty-first birthday? He had learned to favor cogent, meaningful research hypotheses and to avoid efforts to replicate uninterpretable results dependent upon internal analyses of data. He had also learned to avoid episodic new departures in research, stimulated only by "interesting ideas," and he preferred to focus upon previously successful work, often combining several of them to generate stronger predictions. He knew that the creativity of the subject was somehow an important ingredient in success. He knew that the procedure of hypnosis, and perhaps an accompanying altered state of mind, was a powerful facilitator of psi performance. He also knew, even though he had not announced it to the world, that the emotionality of targets is an important factor, and that methods of freely responding to complex targets had potential. Professionally, he had learned that he could influence many of his colleagues with his ideas and convictions, and that he could organize his own research facility. In regard to mainstream science, he had learned that persistence in pressing discussion can be productive if the work one represents is really good. He also knew that some critics are more fair and reasonable than others, and that debate should focus upon them and should be carried out with an insistence upon high standards of discourse.

Why is this the end of a chapter in Honorton's career, and not just part of a smoothly flowing stream? It is because he left FRNM abruptly in 1967, and many things changed for him. The eruption that expelled him is still an emotional matter for many of those who were connected with it. It is a vivid measure of the great esteem in which Honorton was held by those who knew him best that they rallied behind him when he was dismissed. He did not ask them to. This was the group that Rhine had groomed to carry his laboratory into the next generation. Some who had just joined FRNM left with Honorton, with nowhere to go. Others who were planning to go there when their doctorates were finished relinquished that option. It all took many years to heal, and many years before any of the YG (by then an OG) again took up employment at FRNM.

The particular event that led to the eruption was a quarrel between Honorton (together with some colleagues) and Rhine over the quality of another man's work. Whatever the facts in the situation were, I believe that in the longer view, they are incidental. The basic problem was control, and if an explosion had not ignited then, it surely would have done so not too much later. Honorton's career was already running headlong down a long, straight track with no spurs or detours, aiming straight for the repeatable ESP experiment with which to choke the words of acknowledgment out of the throat of reluctant Science. He already had strong ideas about how to do this, and his will was uncompromising. He was also young, with the kind of fierce idealizations that lead to fierce disappointments and stark alternatives. Rhine, for his part, was a dominant person who had always exercised great control over the research program of his laboratory and had no tolerance for what he construed as insubordination. He was an impeccable scientist, an inspirational figure, and an indomitable warrior for his field, but he could be a hard man to work for. Many very strong men, founders of movements, share a cluster of traits that flaw and humanize them. They can be overbearing and too stubborn, and then be vulnerable to the flattery of sycophants. They can also value too little the defiance of friends. Rhine had his share of such humanity. In any case, on one early fall day the conflict that had been simmering caught fire and burst. In a few hot minutes lines were drawn, and then Honorton, so recently come home to the center of the world, was cast out to its edges. What would he do with his devotion? Where would he take his energy, his burning questions? What next?

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