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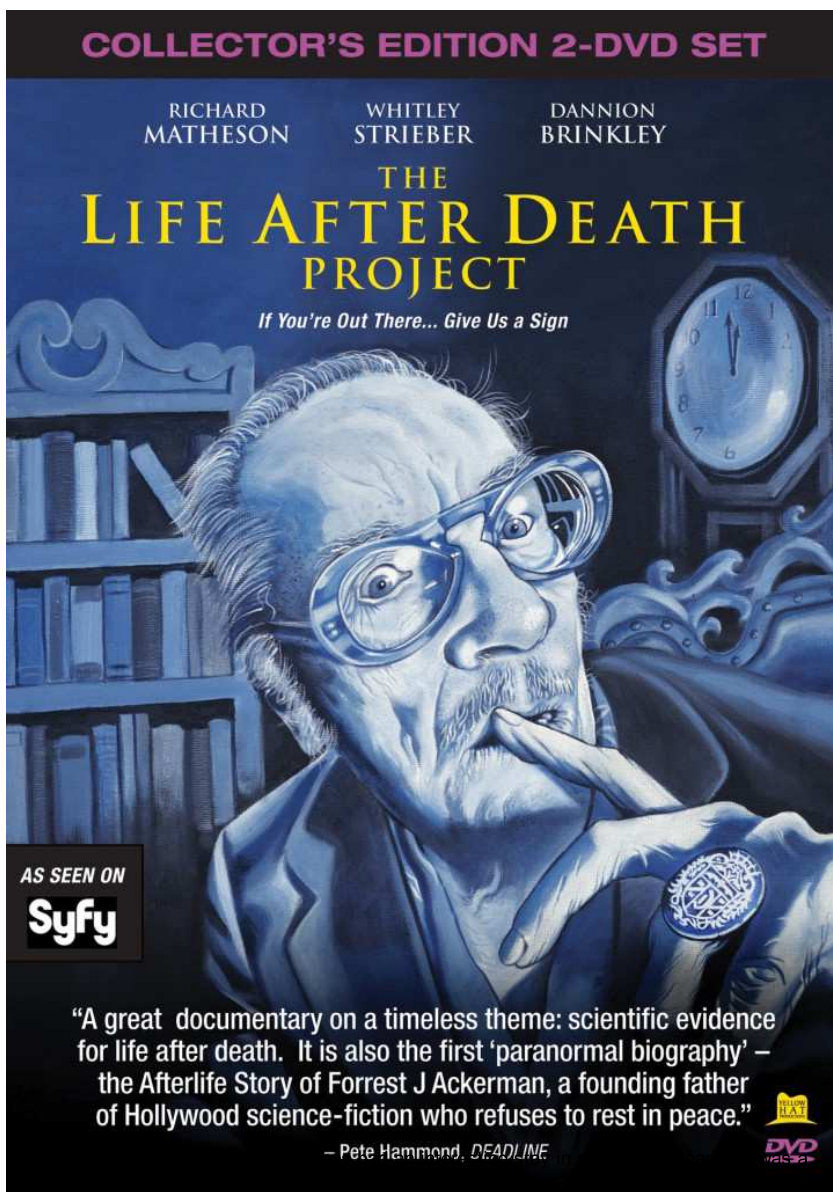
 

## The Life After Death Project DVD Review: An Academic Approach to the Afterlife

By [Mark Buckingham](#) on July 8, 2013 10:13 PM | [1 Comments](#)

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unfortunate Syfy original movies. It's based almost entirely on anecdotal recollections – no spooks or spectres caught on camera here. I spun it up, hoping for the best, and found myself dozing off about 20 minutes in. However, these are all unfair criticisms and biases. If a viewer goes in with a truly open mind, what separately look like a bunch of utter flukes start to add up and overlap in ways that are difficult to ignore.

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In the last ten minutes of the documentary, Gary E. Schwartz, PhD outlines what we've just seen, and it all falls into four categories. First up we have "physical phenomena." This manifests itself in the form of papers falling off a shelf or chair repeatedly, ink blots destroying words on a page mysteriously and in ways forensic science can't explain, or entire racks of slides disappearing from a sealed box. Second, we get "synchronicities" – unusual occurrences or pairings of events that are highly improbable, like finding similar jokes or puns in literature from before and after a subject's death or challenging a spirit or consciousness to do something like produce a spider bite. Third comes "apparent communication through mediums." This would be where multiple psychics or mediums from very different backgrounds with no information on the spirit with whom they are communicating yet producing similar readings with specific details. Finally we come to "specially implemented sensitive technology." This can range from special equipment meant to detect changes in electromagnetic fields, light waves, air vibrations, subtle things that a person might not notice, but sensors can detect. It might also manifest itself in the form of audio or visual recording interference in a video camera. Taken separately, these could all be shrugged off as coincidental, but after taking in almost two hours of witness accounts and seeing all the data line up, I admit, I'm less skeptical than I was before watching it.

The film is front-loaded with a good deal of dialogue without any clear idea of where it's going. This is part of why I dozed off (also, I stayed up too late the night before). The early setup seems focused on larger life-after-death investigations, then spends what seems like an inordinate amount of time focusing specifically on Forrest J Ackerman, famous science fiction movie maker, atheist, and prankster. He swore that although he didn't believe in an afterlife, if he did find something after he died, he'd make sure to let people know. This large chunk of the story is meant to encompass his alleged many attempts to reach out from beyond the grave and poke us in the ribs one more time.

There are some portions geared toward the general phenomenon of life after death, such as the account of Dannion Brinkley, a man who was struck by lightning and was declared clinically dead for around 20 minutes before returning to life. His accounts of what happened and what he experienced while temporarily deceased features some pretty granular details, including flying around crystal cities and eavesdropping on specific conversations happening in the room at the morgue among the people who had identified the body. The second disc of the DVD set is another hour and forty-one minutes of personal accounts of experiences with supernatural phenomena and life-after-death experiences by an assortment of people from all walks of life – doctors and mediums, family members and complete strangers among them.

One of the most intriguing bits is when Schwartz says that spiritual communication is inevitable, the way things are going – we simply don't yet have the means and technology to make it practical. Compare it to telling a man standing in Los Angeles in 1900 that in less than 100 years, he would be able to have a conversation wirelessly with someone on the entire other side of the world, in real time. It would blow his mind. He'd think it impossible. Guess what – we did it. Schwartz proposes the same sort of breakthrough is coming for communicating with the consciousnesses of the dearly departed.

When the supernatural becomes part of normal, explainable, everyday life, it becomes natural, a part of quantum physics and subject to greater study and interaction. As a lover of science and the pursuit of knowledge, that idea fascinates me. *The Life After Death Project* got me thinking about things like this. As they say in the documentary, "To disprove the notion that all crows are black, you need only find a single white one." Kudos to Paul Davids and Syfy for putting together something that builds up slowly and dares viewers to try to stay skeptics.

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