

Examining Macro-Psychokinetic Experiments

M. WILLIAMS AND R. LANG

ABSTRACT: This paper deals with a method of creating macro-PK results in a replicable format. The methodology is referred to as "table-tilting", though in older literature it may also be called "table-moving". We present the information in two parts: the first part deals with a brief history of the phenomena, whilst the second part deals with our own experiments. Rather than simply give our opinion on some of the original experiments, we will give the verbatim accounts presented in the various literature of the time.

INTRODUCTION

Some of the earliest table-tilting experiments were conducted in the mid-1800s in America and Europe. Often, the results were looked upon with amusement and with a sense of fun.

It was in the summer of 1865 that I first witnessed any of the phenomena of what is called spiritualism, in the house of a friend—a sceptic, a man of science, and a lawyer, with none but members of his own family present. Sitting at a good-sized round table, with our hands placed upon it, after a short time slight movements would commence—not often "turnings" or "tiltings", but a gentle intermittent movement, like steps, which after a time would bring the table quite across the room. Slight but distinct tapping sounds were also heard. The following notes made at the time were intended to describe exactly what took place:—"July 22nd, 1865—Sat with friend, his wife, and two daughters at a large loo table, by daylight. In about half-an-hour some faint motions were perceived, and some faint taps heard. They gradually increased; the taps became very distinct, and the table moved considerably, obliging us to shift our chairs. Then a curious vibratory motion of the table commenced, almost like a shivering of a live animal. I could feel it up to my elbows. These phenomena were repeated for two hours. On trying afterwards, we found the table could not be voluntarily moved in the same manner without a great exertion of force, and we could discover no possible way of

producing the taps when our hands were upon the table. (Morris, 1975, p. 132)

MODERN TABLE-TILTING EXPERIMENTS

Kenneth Batcheldor's experiments with table-tilting helped to lay much of the groundwork for our own experiments, discussed later in this paper. Batcheldor's group achieved knockings, table movements and eventually, they claim, complete table levitation by their eleventh sitting—all conducted in complete darkness.

No spiritistic assumptions are made, however, and the phenomena—such as rapping noises and the levitation of tables—insofar as they may be paranormal are interpreted in terms of the PK abilities of the sitters....Modern parapsychologists, following the example of Rhine, have tended to avoid this kind of procedure because of the difficulty of controlling against fraud and other sources of error. (Batcheldor, 1984, pp. 105-106)

We found no physical condition to be related to positive results. The influence of physical factors appears to me to be an indirect one, depending on how they affect the psychological state of the sitters. Very heavy targets, for instance, are probably more difficult to influence only because they are perceived as presenting more difficulty...Occasionally, some physical factor appeared to be linked with success for a time, but then the relationship collapsed during subsequent trials. (Batcheldor, 1984, p. 107)

One of the earliest impressions was that belief was an important factor. Conversely, doubt, even slight doubt was unfavourable. (Batcheldor, 1984, p. 108)

A further refinement of the belief concept was that a deliberately adopted attitude of belief, if such a thing is possible, appeared to be ineffective. It was no use sitting down and thinking, "I believe this table can levitate". An adept or yogi might achieve success after long training in meditation, but for the average person, something evidently has to happen to *create* belief. (Batcheldor, 1984, p. 109)

This raises the question of how the first PK event in a group ever comes about. If success is required in order to create the necessary quality of belief to give rise to further success, how can success

occur in the first place? The answer I came up with was that the first event is probably a false event, but one that is mistaken for a real PK event. (Batcheldor, 1984, p. 109)

In science, naturally occurring effects that are liable to be mistaken for the effect under observation are termed artifacts, so this is an appropriate name for the events we are now considering. In the present context, an artifact is simply a normal event that is, or tends to be, mistaken for a paranormal event.

Since the perception of apparent success (or the belief that one has succeeded)—even though false—will have precisely the same impact as a genuine success, artifacts can create the necessary belief state for real success to occur....

Quite early in the series of sittings, I noticed that ostensible paranormal events “grew” as it were, out of these normal events. For example, creaks that at first seemed to me to be due to thermal expansion or to stresses in the wood of the table gradually became far too loud and frequent to depend on either of these causes. Small movements of the table that were probably due to involuntary muscular action gave way to larger movements, and eventually to movements that could no longer be attributed to accidental muscular action—unless fraudulent of course—namely, levitations of a good height and movements without hand contact. (Batcheldor, 1984, pp. 110-111)

THE PHILIP EXPERIMENT

In Canada in the 1970s a group was formed which attempted to create a visible “collective hallucination”. They did this by trying different forms of visualisation after first fleshing out a “history” of the personage they had created. It should be noted that no apparition of any kind appeared to the group.

They then read about the work of Batcheldor and decided to try a different approach, singing songs, telling jokes and generally relaxing, rather than doing meditation-type techniques.

One evening, during the third or fourth new session, the group felt a vibration within the table top, like a knock or rap. (Owens with Sparrow, 1976, p. 26)

As the sitting proceeded other raps came, as if someone had struck the table a light blow. These knocks or raps became louder and

louder until there was no doubt that they were heard by everyone in the group. (Owens with Sparrow, 1976, p. 26)

While this speculation was going on aloud about the cause of the table rappings, Dorothy exclaimed, "I wonder if by chance Philip is doing this." Immediately there came a very loud rap from the table top—so Philip had come, though in a different form from that which we had expected. The group quickly established a code: one rap for yes, and two for no. (Owens with Sparrow, 1976, p. 27)

Briefly, the Philip group were able to direct Philip to affect lights, tap under the table, tap on walls and move the table vigorously around the room. During later sessions Philip produced, upon request, raps in the adjoining walls, which were plastered. The Philip group also found that if the table flipped over, the tap noises started coming through from the top of the table, which was now the underside.

MESON ARCHIVES: SYDNEY

We started our own "Philip Experiment" in May 2001. Seven of us gathered in a warehouse in Sydney, intent on creating our very own "ghost".

A false historical character called Skippy Cartman, a 16-year-old girl from an Outback station callously murdered by a lover, was created and duly killed off so that we could try and contact the "dead spirit". We felt it important to include obviously incorrect historical information to ensure whatever we "called up" was indeed something of our own making, and not some mischievous spirit, as some more spiritually-minded participants felt might be the case.

After meeting once a fortnight for approximately five months we came to the conclusion that, since we had achieved no results, we should try another tack. We had, after all, grown tired of sitting around a table singing lousy songs and asking for a response from an uncooperative table. So we decided to once again "kill" Skippy and start afresh by repeating some of Batcheldor's ideas for the creation of PK phenomena. The method was simple—first, we would rub the legs and top of the table. Then we would sit around a small light card table, with fingers lightly resting on the edges, and wait, whilst staring at the center of the table.

Using the Batcheldor method the sequence of events was roughly the following: On the first night, after many failures, we managed to hear some light taps on the base of the table after about half an hour. Then, on the second night, the taps started louder and came after about fifteen

minutes. Over successive nights we managed to observe, hear and eventually video tape the following events:

- * Taps/scratches from the base of the table
- * Creaking of the table
- * The table lifting one, two and three legs into the air
- * Rotation of the table on one leg (the best result being a 720 degree rotation)
- * The table “walking” around on the concrete floor (in slow bursts, up to 2 metres at a time)

The taps and scratch noises remain fairly soft, prompting people to ask, “Could the sounds be just the weight of the participants’ hands?” Certainly, and on occasion, some of them are! But the vast numbers are felt and heard coming from the underside of the table. The Philip group found that if the table flipped over, the tap noises started coming through from the top of the table, which was now the underside.

The creaking noises appear to be the table “twisting” in on itself, trying to work out how to move before shuffling slightly, lifting its legs and twirling around. On occasion the tabletop itself appears to tighten and take on similar qualities to that of a drumskin, with the slightest taps setting up a fine vibration across various corners of the table.

To date, we have never found a correlation between the tapping sounds and any questions posed to the table/“ghost”, as the Philip group did.

Future areas of research include attempting to get the table to levitate into the air—on video!—and trying to get the table to move/tap/levitate without any hand contact whatsoever.

The group is also interested in the possible testing of some form of strain gauge and greater use of contact microphones on the table surface. (Williams & Lang, 2001/2002, Various)

CONCLUSION

The main arguments against our claimed results are based around fraud and delusion. It is difficult to ascribe fraud when taps occur under each person's hands, whilst all hands are resting lightly on top of the table. A mysterious rod under the table is highly unlikely, and would have to be manipulated (unseen) by a person's foot. For the table to rotate around on one leg is difficult to explain as well, since the person has to raise the table, with hands on top, and then move it around. Also, if someone were manipulating a corner, we would all have to be cheating, since it has rotated under the hands/corners of everyone.

Many intellectually constrained philosophers may resort to the old hoary trick of “If I can think of how something could be faked, ergo it was”. The trouble is, this would be applicable to most scientific experiments. *Reductio ad absurdum*.

The idea that we are deluded individuals suffering under some form of *folie à deux* is interesting as well. The problem with this is that we have videoed some of the results using several video cameras at once. Independent television producers have filmed sessions and disinterested persons who have accidentally walked in on sessions have watched the phenomena occurring. *Folie à video* perhaps!

The sustaining of a negative belief system towards our results could well be explained by the work of Leon Festinger’s *A theory of cognitive dissonance*, published in 1957. Festinger reasoned that there were relationships among cognitions or “pieces of knowledge”, which could be about an attitude, an emotion, a behaviour or a value. Our claims create cognitive dissonance, which must be eradicated by adopting a contrary cognition.

We are also well aware of the “ideomotor effect”, the term being coined by William Carpenter in 1882. This refers to involuntary and unconscious motor behaviour that could lead some to mis-interpret hand pressure/movements as paranormal responses. But we do not believe this explains our results.

Some of the results we have been achieving challenge a few belief systems, most notably that of the Spiritualist mindset that attributes many of the séance-type effects achieved in table-tilting to spirits of the dead. Some of the phenomena they translate as evidence of the deceased are, we believe, largely PK effects caused by living people. But, having said that, we would also like to point out that the most interesting and profound paranormal results that we can find in the literature are based on spiritualist beliefs and methodology: these are the Neihardt and the Scole Groups. Both groups registered events, objects, apports and video/film artifacts that make the Batcheldor, Philip and Sydney groups’ results look pale in comparison. They both appear to be dealing with something beyond mere PK. What that may be is another question—and most definitely another paper.

From a sociological perspective, we also find it interesting that virtually all of the people who express any kind of interest in the paranormal seem to show no interest in trying to replicate the table-tilting phenomena. At one point we were regularly placing reports of our progress on paranormal chat groups to stimulate discussion and raise awareness about the phenomena, but unfortunately participants were more absorbed in discussing urban myth, fantasy and strange dreams than PK phenomena.

We are certain that other groups in the last 100 years have tried these very same sorts of experiments (with results) within Australia. But if they have, we cannot find any literature that mentions them. On a global scale, the table-tilting phenomenon also appears to be quite rare and getting one's hands on any reasonable literature has proven to be an equally challenging task.

On a final note, we realise that people with an academic background instigated the original Phillip and Batcheldor Groups. But we find the lack of contemporary experiments by academics who purport to be interested in the area of macro-PK phenomena, truly puzzling. A great deal of their time seems to be spent trawling over old data and literature and ideas, yet virtually none is devoted to initiating the kinds of experiments and research that have historically yielded some strange and fascinating results.

There is no doubt in our minds that table-tilting phenomena fall into an area with some scientific parameters, since it is replicable and measurable. Many people forget that by throwing around terms like "PK" we come no closer to knowing how the phenomena are actually occurring. It is merely an acronym. The type of experiment described in this article may bring us closer to a true understanding of macro-PK.

REFERENCES

- Batcheldor, K. J. (1984). Contributions to the theory of PK induction from sitter-group work. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 78, 105-122.
- Morris, L. (1975) Perspectives in psychical research. New York: Arno Press.
- Owen, I. M., with Sparrow, M. (1976). Conjurung up Philip: An adventure in psychokinesis. New York: Harper & Row.
- Williams, M., & Lang, R. (2002). Private notes and video recordings from the Meson Archives, Sydney, Australia.

M. Williams & R. Lang
19 Edenholme St.
West Pymble 2073
Email: ozezstrange@hotmail.com