

## PREDICTIONS OF THE MODEL OF PRAGMATIC INFORMATION ABOUT RSPK

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### ABSTRACT

The model of pragmatic information (MPI) is applied to RSPK phenomena and leads to several predictions. The first prediction is that RSPK phenomena show two clusters of phenomena, which can be considered as structural and functional anomalous RSPK-phenomena. RSPK-phenomena are considered as a kind of “external psychosomatic” reaction, expressing a hidden problem, which cannot be recognized by the persons concerned. The second prediction is that the development of RSPK cases contains four phases, which are called “surprise phase”, “displacement phase”, “decline phase”, and “suppression phase”. In the surprise phase the RSPK-activity starts rapidly with strong effects, but they are not attributed to the focus person. This happens in the displacement-phase where the phenomena usually change in an unpredictable way. In the decline-phase the “message of the poltergeist” is understood and the phenomena are expected, therefore the phenomena disappear. The final suppression phase can be understood as a kind of reaction of the society. These phases can be derived from a fundamental equation of the MPI, which describes the RSPK phenomena in complementary terms of “autonomy” and “reliability” (from the point of view of the RSPK-system) and of “novelty” and “confirmation” (from the point of view of the external observer). The dynamics of RSPK is described as the dynamics of pragmatic information within a hierarchically nested system, which is created by the persons involved (focus person, naïve and critical observers) and the reaction of the society. The third prediction is that observers can control the RSPK activity by their observation or documentation. This is the result of a kind of “uncertainty relation” of the MPI, which says that the effect-size of the phenomena is limited by the quality of their documentation. This also holds for so-called sitter-group experiments. In a single case it was possible to demonstrate that the system theoretical approach of the MPI leads to different predictions than the usual psychological interpretation of the elusiveness of PK-phenomena. The fourth prediction is that we have to expect two types of RSPK cases, which we called the active RSPK case and the passive, respectively.

### INTRODUCTION

Most observational theories assume that PK causes only a small violation of physical laws and thus shows only small effects. Therefore most theoretical parapsychologists do not take RSPK phenomena seriously.

In contrast to the usual observational theories (OT) the Model of Pragmatic Information (MPI) does not start at the description level of quantum theory but at a very general system theoretical level. It roughly says, that psi-phenomena are non-local correlations in psycho-physical systems instead of signals or forces. Such non-local correlations, however, limit the psi-effects due to the conditions of the psycho-physical system, which mainly described by the “meaning” of the situation i.e. pragmatic information (see Lucadou 1995a, Lucadou 1995b).

We have shown in a previous paper that the model of pragmatic information (MPI) at least does not limit the effect size of PK effects even though the model does not assume strong violations of physical laws and moreover assumes that PK is not a real force but a non local correlation. However, the effect size depends in this model on the “dimensionality” of the time order of the PK-events (Lucadou, 2000). This means that the structure and duration of an RSPK-case (its history) and the number of hierarchical levels, which are necessary to describe the organizationally closed system, determine the size of the emerging psi-effects. In an RSPK case, however, one cannot say much about this construct except that all RSPK cases have their own history and time development thus it can be assumed that the dimensionality will be rather high in comparison with PK experiments. In this paper, we will argue that the model of pragmatic information allows one to predict the temporal development of RSPK phenomena and to give instruction to

the persons involved in order to cope with the phenomena. In the practice of the “Parapsychological Counseling Office at Freiburg” this model has been applied in dozens of cases with success, however, a detailed statistical evaluation would be an aim of future research.

It is not the aim of this paper to give an overview of the relevant literature concerning RSPK-research, this can be found in (Lucadou, 1984) and more recently in (Horan & Lange, 2000) or with qualification in (Roll, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. However, it must be annotated that in the American literature of RSPK-research the system-theoretic approach to RSPK is nearly completely ignored, in spite of the fact that most of the relevant literature has been published in English speaking (refereed) journals (see for instance: Lucadou, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995a,b, 1998, Lucadou & Kornwachs 1980, 1983).

Here, we will first discuss the problem of elusiveness and the dynamics of RSPK-phenomena, before we develop the theoretical tools to describe it. In order to show that these theoretical tools are really able to allow predictions, which can be used to help persons involved in RSPK-cases, we will discuss a single case (of a sitter-group experiment) where the difference between our systemic approach to the usual psychological one becomes evident. Finally we describe two types of RSPK-Cases. From all this we can conclude, that the MPI is not only able to cover the whole range of psi-phenomena, but additionally describes their dynamics and their confusing elusiveness in a coherent way.

## ELUSIVENESS

Anyone who takes reports on spontaneous psychokinesis seriously can hardly consider these phenomena to be random fluctuations. The observed effects seem to be too massive and “evident”. Is it only chance if a bookcase of over 175 kilograms moves itself 30 centimeters, as was reported in the Rosenheim case? Or if stones as large as a hand fly through the air, as in a poltergeist case in Frankfurt?

Nonetheless, we should bear the following in mind: imagine that someone came up with a conventional color television at the time electromagnetism was discovered. Let us further imagine that someone asked how this apparatus worked and that he was given the answer that it could be explained by the effect discovered by Faraday. Probably Faraday himself would have found it a ridiculous answer, since he assumed that the electromagnetic effect he had discovered was far too weak to serve any future practical purpose.

These facts can serve as a foundation for a rule, nicely formulated by, among others, German parapsychologist Ulrich Timm (1981):

Reports on extremely strong or stable psi performances contradict general experience and very likely allow for the conclusion that at least part of these are based on conjuring, errors and fraud. We do not claim, however, that such exceptional psi results are in principle impossible. After all, a rule of experience only leads to conclusions as to how likely an effect is. These conclusions can, however, be wrong in specific cases. On the other hand, the rule of sticking to critical scientific rationality may be very useful in an area constantly threatening this rationality. (p. 207)

In practice, “Timm’s rule” has proven very successful. Many a time and oft the literature of parapsychology has reported spectacular cases of psi, but after thorough investigation only very few hard facts remain (see Parker, 2002). As such, these facts may still represent a very interesting scientific anomaly, but they prove to be far less spectacular than they seem at first glance. Poltergeist cases are the best example. Quite often these cases evoke the impression that they withdraw from investigation, the “elusiveness”. No matter how many unanswered questions and points of critique the Model of Pragmatic Information is confronted with, its adequacy is supported by the fact that it can, at least qualitatively, describe the strange elusiveness of the phenomena rather well. Let us now try to apply this model to poltergeist phenomena.

If an event is rare, it is by definition difficult to observe, for the simple reason that one cannot prepare to do so, a feature that seems to be quite pronounced in poltergeist cases. Hans Bender, the father of poltergeist research in Germany, wrote: “Efforts to photograph or film on-going poltergeist phenomena, or

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<sup>1</sup> It seems that W. G. Roll is “actively” ignoring the system-theoretical approach. He cites (e.g. in Horan & Lange 2000) nearly all relevant German literature, but with the remarkable exception of all relevant system-theoretical papers.

to record noises on audio tape are hampered by the problem that these phenomena seem to withdraw from critical observation. One can hardly escape the impression that the intelligent forces hoodwink the observer, by producing a materialization exactly at a spot which cannot be recorded or photographed." (Bender, 1952, p. 169)

Elsewhere, Bender (1974) describes a typical case:

We were told that firemen ... were posted as guards in the house of K. One of them had observed that at the very moment he turned his head, a pool of water appeared on the floor of the kitchen. (p. 139)

Many researchers have reported such observations, however, they seem to be underrepresented in literature. For instance, in the analysis of about 500 cases, Gauld & Cornell (1978) do not even mention the elusive character of RSPK-phenomena. On the other hand there exists not a single reliable photographic or video document of an "active" poltergeist (Parker, 2002). A plausible explanation for this inconsistency would be that, the elusiveness is not regarded as a property of the phenomena but as an insufficiency of the documentation, or an insufficiency of the possibilities of the researcher, or in general a psychological problem, which has nothing to do with the physical RSPK-phenomena. This view is typical for the physicalistic interpretation of psi, which starts from the assumption that the psychological and the physical part of psi can be separated <sup>2</sup>.

### THE DYNAMICS OF RSPK

Apart from the elusiveness of poltergeist phenomena, there is a series of other repeating patterns to be found in the literature on parapsychological phenomena (Huesmann & Schriever, 1989). Essentially, they refer to inexplicable noises, objects moving in strange patterns, objects disappearing out of and returning into closed rooms or containers, etc. Many of these events seem to be related in space and time to a youngster in his or her teens, the "poltergeist agent" or "focus person". The events also demonstrate specific time patterns. Generally, their onset is completely unexpected and they develop dramatically. As long as those involved believe that the events are due to external factors, like someone who is fooling them, impulses in electrical circuitry, leaking pipes, etc., the phenomena become stronger and grow into a real demonstration. Those involved feel ever more insecure and try to find external assistance, for example from the police, firemen or from institutions who can provide technical assistance. In this way the phenomena attract wide attention. In many cases there are a number of respectable, reliable and independent witnesses, who feel completely desperate about the causes of the phenomena. We call this the "surprise phase". It is followed by the first hunches that something supernatural might be going on. Indeed, the media, such as newspapers, radio and television show up. Depending upon the socio-cultural background, the phenomena may be attributed to phantoms, spirits, the deceased, witches, poltergeists and parapsychological powers. Only at this point do parapsychologists have the opportunity to get involved. Quite often the previous phase of hunches has already attributed the phenomena to one or more persons, and has coupled general desperation and anxieties with curiosity: the "displacement phase". During this phase, the interpretation of the phenomena shifts from external to internal sources. The same displacement takes place in the phenomena themselves. New types of events manifest, replacing those that had become familiar. As bad as matters are, worse is still to come. Journalists hungry for sensation, self-appointed "parapsychologists" or "exorcists" will plague those involved. To the external curiosity is added an ever-stronger pressure to reproduce the phenomena, which are still strongly confirmed by the initial eyewitnesses. The stronger this pressure grows, sometimes even enhanced by the parapsychologists who rush to the scene, the less the phenomena occur: the "decline phase" has begun. Many of those who expected sensational effects are now disappointed and leave. Often enough, the person who evoked the events is found to make use of manipulations or fraud during this phase. In personal communication, Bender noted that it was his

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<sup>2</sup> Even though the problem of elusiveness came to the attention of some psychical researchers, it was not regarded as a hint to the systemic nature of psi. This can be seen in Kennedy's work (see Kennedy 2001), who included this aspect only after Bierman (2002) made a plea of it (see Kennedy 2003).

experience that in almost all cases this phase leads to manipulation, or that this can at least no longer be excluded, especially because the phenomena occur only seldom, in confusing situations or in the direct vicinity of the evoking person. Decline is followed by the final phase of poltergeist cases: “suppression”. Fraud is more or less openly discussed, the people and witnesses involved are often ridiculed and discriminated in the mass media, witnesses may even deny (in court) their previous statements and debunking articles are published. The process of social suppression starts: a “conspiracy to cover it up”, as Fanny Moser (1977, p. 30) termed it.

In an attempt to describe the psychological aspects of poltergeist phenomena, it is extremely important, as Bender emphasized time and again, to consider the possibility that someone is playing tricks. Its character is aggressive, regressive, and often atavistic. In this context, the psychodiagnostic investigation of the agent is of interest. Freiburg psychologist Johannes Mischo (1970) reports a number of common characteristics: actual conflicts, psychological lability, short but strong irritability and a low level of tolerance for frustrating events. Bender regularly pointed out that poltergeist phenomena should be understood as an unconscious plea for help. The main advantage of a systems-theoretical approach is that it is not necessary to check the reality of each phenomenon immediately, because the essential interactions between those involved in the phenomena and their observers need not be paranormal. It is useless to organize a hunt after each stone flying around, in order to calculate its trajectory, for example. Far more important is the meaning of the event, which can incorporate normal as well as paranormal effects.

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SYNTHETIC RSPK-CASE

Figure 1 represents a simplified model for poltergeist cases, a hierarchically interconnected system of organizationally closed subsystems. Each of these exchanges pragmatic (= meaningful) information with its enclosed subsystem.

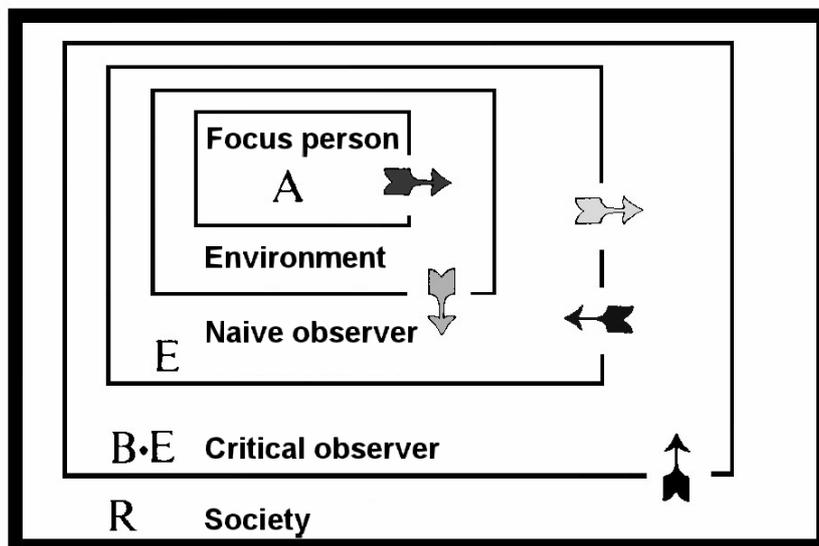


Fig. 1 Hierarchical poltergeist model

The different hierarchically nested subsystems describe the path of the RSPK-action which is exerted by the focus person to different observers and finally to the society. Its pragmatic information, however, flows in both directions, because each observer and the society are also “preparing” the observed system. This can

also be described in a formal way: Equation (1) can be considered as the fundamental description of the RSPK system<sup>3</sup>.

$$\mathbf{R} * \mathbf{A} = \mathbf{B} * \mathbf{E} = \mathbf{B}' * \mathbf{E}' < \mathbf{I} \quad (1)$$

**R** is a measure for the “reliability” of the observed phenomena;  
**A** is a measure for the “autonomy” of the RSPK-system;  
**B** is a measure for the “confirmation” (Bestätigung), which is given by an observation;  
**E** is a measure for the “novelty” (Erstmaligkeit) of an observation.

This fundamental equation describes the action of given pragmatic information on a system. Since **R** and **A** or **B** and **E** are corresponding pairs of complementary observables nothing can be said on a partitioning of an outside pragmatic information **I** to reliability **R** and autonomy **A** “inside” of the system without further specifying the “measurement”.

From equation (1) one can conclude that any piece of pragmatic information **I** which interacts with a system also produces pragmatic information, but with a new partitioning of novelty **E'** and confirmation **B'** which can be interpreted as the “reaction” of the (sub-) system. Therefore, it is an important question to specify the subsystem – or to be more precise – the boundary of the subsystem (for details see Lucadou, 1983, 1995). The four phases of RSK emerge from the dynamics of the partitioning of **E** and **B**. To “construct” the ideal poltergeist by means of this model, we start with the poltergeist agent.

### *Phase 1 “Surprise”*

The agent is struggling with e.g. puberty, a difficult phase in life, and tries to communicate the associated problems to the environment (unconscious cry for help!). The pragmatic information within his message will only have an effect if he succeeds in balancing novelty **E** and confirmation **B** in such a way that he attracts the necessary attention. If we also assume that his nearest environment and relatives remain deaf and blind (if they reacted properly, his cry for help would be unnecessary), the agent may consciously or unconsciously choose to enhance the novelty of his message. He may have experienced that a number of serious requests for help (confirmation) did not work out. As it is generally known that novelty draws attention, it is now badly needed. A subtle trick or a practical joke, as well as a PK effect is very effective in attracting the attention of the environment, as is clearly demonstrated by the surprise phase in the poltergeist case. It is very likely that another continuum exists between “pure” jokes and the “real” poltergeist, used by youngsters of this age who demand attention. The tricks are in no way less important or less harmless, but parapsychologists do generally not investigate them. Whether he fools his environment or uses psychokinesis, the agent can be assured that all eyes will be on him (or the phenomena) during the surprise phase. (See figure 2) But does the environment understand his cry for help? Naive observers search for all possible causes to “explain the unexplained”, but they do not recognize its meaning.

A typical example is a poltergeist case in Germany (Lucadou, 1981). Day after day, large numbers of stones flew into a house owned by a family of Italian immigrants. As a result, their home was largely demolished, but no suspect could be found. The father, a tall man, was very afraid and believed that spirits caused the phenomena. When one of the authors tried to gather more information in a police station, he was told that the case had been solved. A police officer had taken position in the hallway of the house, to observe the incoming stones. The three children of the family were in the children’s room at the end of the hallway, while the door to the room had been left ajar. The officer sat with his back towards the door. A

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<sup>3</sup> For our consideration it is not necessary to give explicit operationalizations of the described variables. In the context of the MPI **R**, **A**, **B**, **E**, and the operators **\***, **<** serve as meta-observables or meta-operators which means that they can be operationalized in any system in many ways. The operationalization depends on the specific situation under investigation. (E.g.: **R** and **A** could be measured by the frequency of the observer’s attribution of the phenomena to „technical defects“(R) or to „ghosts“(A)). This is just the advantage of the systemic approach.

stone coming from the children's room had narrowly passed his head. Although he did not see any of the children throw the stone, no one else could have done so. Thus, concluded the police, the poltergeist case had satisfactorily been solved. When the police officer was asked, whether he considered it normal behavior for children to demolish their own house by throwing stones, he stared quite dumbfounded.

Paradoxically enough, the likelihood that the environment finally understands what it is all about is higher in cases of trickery. As soon as the observers find out who is playing tricks on them, there is at least the possibility that one wonders why the "poltergeist agent" acted as he did. In cases of a "real" poltergeist, this possibility is initially neglected, because one tries to locate the sources of the events in a quite different direction, such as technical malfunction, spirits or angry neighbors, meanwhile overlooking the real message. This enables the poltergeist to go on and on, nourished and at the same time disturbed by the attitude of curious misunderstanding in the environment. In this phase, the elusiveness of the poltergeist is already apparent. Of course people want to see events. There are indeed events, but always at a location where one does not expect them to happen, otherwise there would be no novelty. In the end, however, the game of elusiveness and the continuous flow of pragmatic information leads to the understanding that a specific person is "the center of the cyclone".

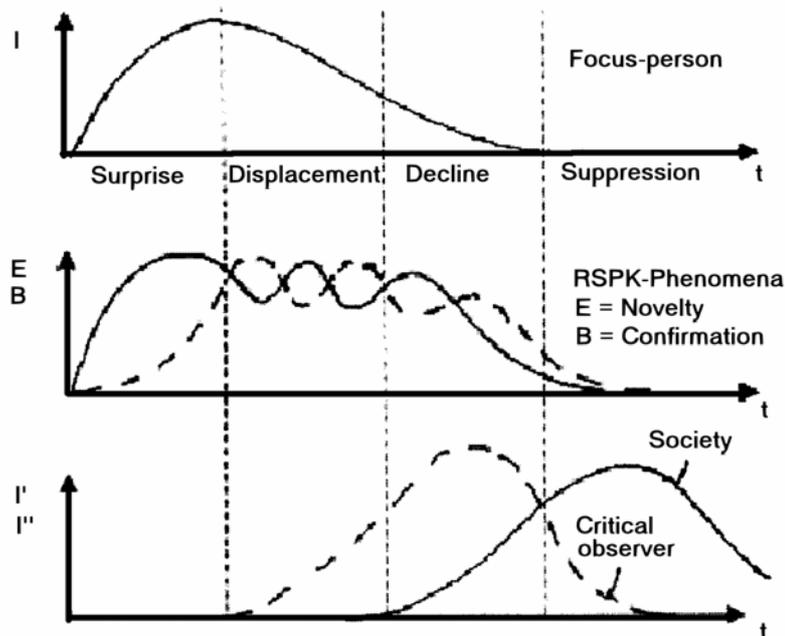


Fig. 2 The four phases of RSPK-activity: The dynamics of RSPK is a result of the complementarity of the autonomy **A** and the reliability **R** of the system, respectively of the novelty **E** and the confirmation **B** of the observations. The subconscious "message" of the focus person shows up in the action on the system, but the "pragmatic information" **I** is limited. This leads to a continuous change and finally to the disappearance of the RSPK-phenomena (elusiveness). The "critical observers" and the society also exert some action (i.e. pragmatic information **I'** and **I''**) on the RSPK-system in order to "eliminate" the anomaly. The four phases are called: Surprise phase, displacement phase, decline phase, and suppression phase.

### Phase 2 "Displacement"

After this Gestalt switch the second phase begins. A beginning is made on a new organizational closure by the naive observers and the person on whom they focus their attention. They join forces and establish one tight group of those who have experienced the inexplicable effects, only to find themselves now confronted with the disbelief and the uncompromising questions of critical observers, such as journalists

and parapsychologists. It should be noted here that naive observers need not be uncritical, just as critical observers can be believers in psi. During this phase the focus person, who has in many cases been isolated until then, often becomes the center of attention among the social group to which he addressed his cry for help. In practice, this person is considered special, a medium who has a personal link with the spirit world, a witch or a paranormally gifted person. This would serve his goal, if it were not for the presence of the critical observers in his surroundings, who exert enormous pressure and expect him to produce effects. Suppose that the new organizationally closed unit succeeds in providing these critical observers with pragmatic information. (The message reads: I am something special!) Even in this case it will not generate enough novelty, because the critical observers cannot get enough of it, but according to our model, they also prepare (in the sense of the term “preparation” used in quantum physics) the system because of their observation.

### *Phase 3 “Decline”*

They describe the system because they want to document the phenomena reliably and beyond doubt. To reach this goal, the system needs to be prepared appropriately. Currently, we use video and audio recording apparatus, personality questionnaires and Rorschach tests to do so. Is it then any wonder that the autonomy of the system disappears and that it can no longer exert any scrap of novelty that could be interpreted as psi? In other words: If **B** is increased **E** must decline since  $E \cdot B < I$  and **I** is limited.

Nevertheless, the critical observers are still interested in the phenomenon (often less in the persons involved). One cannot exclude therefore, that these observers too still manage to experience something of the original novelty. It is more likely that something has been made up for them, though certainly not with negative intentions. The result can even represent a joint venture of the group as a whole. The remarkably simple moral justification for such manipulations is often the fact that those involved know what has “really” happened and do not hesitate to lend the phenomena their support, in order to enhance them a little. Among the members of the group, the neat distinction a scientist makes between simulation and reality may not be that important. For this reason the parapsychologist who uses the in itself very acceptable method of participant observation, should be very careful.

In many cases, however, it is too late to do so during the decline phase, since another and permanent level of the system has come into being. It represents the border between, on the one hand, the organizationally closed system of those who are interested in the poltergeist phenomenon and, on the other hand, society in general.

### *Phase 4 “Suppression”*

The phase of suppression and denial has started. Neither society nor governmental institutions are fond of the anarchy of poltergeist cases. Their objective is to command (or govern) reliable systems. A poltergeist is indeed a very unimportant example of the “preparation” effect of society. Social psychology calls this effect “social perception”. Experiments show that pressure from society can alter the way in which individual members of the society perceive a particular phenomenon. One can drive someone to “see a U where there is an X”. It is, after all, no coincidence that (at least in Germany) jurists, people in forensic medicine and police officers, etc., feel the need to eradicate parapsychology root and branch.

### *Duration and structure of RSPK in the light of the MPI*

According to the Model of Pragmatic Information, the components of pragmatic information in poltergeist cases are alternatively determined by two goals. The first goal is the internal goal of the organizationally closed system to produce an effect in society. The second one is the external goal of society to prepare the organizationally closed system. The internal goal affects the combination of novelty and confirmation, while the external preparation of the system has an effect on the autonomy and reliability of the system. Only autonomous systems can produce novelty, a necessary component for a phenomenon to be evaluated as anomalous or psychical. To preserve the autonomy of the system, however, one should not

prepare it in such a way that everything has been determined. The system “can only behave as it pleases” as long as one does not observe it with great care. A predetermined system loses its autonomy and because of that it loses its ability to be unique as well. For this reason, a poltergeist, which can reliably produce “recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis” (RSPK) for an extended period, needs to be very “strong” indeed. This conclusion neatly fits the experimentally supported “rule of Timm”.

The structure of RSPK is governed by a very fundamental assumption of the MPI which suggests that the complementarity of autonomy and reliability originates from an even more fundamental complementarity, that of structure and function. We could even say that all things we are able to describe are described according to these categories. It depends upon the author of the system which of the two aspects is emphasized.

As an example, let us use the description of a radio receiver. For the user, a general description of its functions will do. He only wants to know what purpose the apparatus serves, how to switch it on, how to find a particular station and so on. He is hardly interested in the structure of the receiver. As long as it works, he does not care about the internal construction of the equipment. In case of malfunction, however, the user may suddenly begin to show interest in the internal structure. The repairman cannot do without the description of the electronics in the receiver, a structural description with the greatest possible accuracy, to be able to restore the proper functioning of the apparatus. This description as such is not sufficient to trace the fault. The repairman also needs to know what changes in the machine’s behavior were observed, how it malfunctions. The owner should tell the technician which functions do not work properly. Only after the two categories of description match the system has been described in an optimum way. Probably each of us has brought a defective piece of equipment to a repairman: when the technician takes it apart and reassembles it, no defect can be traced, and no one can say why. In general, a change in the functioning of the system, a malfunction, is experienced as something unique. Suddenly, the apparatus “does not work as it ought to”. If, however, we can attribute the changed functioning to a changed structure of the system, after a while we find confirmation, because the new “system configuration” no longer changes. Suppose that a tube in a receiver has blown. In this case the structure of the system has changed and it produces only confirmation: it does not work any more. This proves that functional and structural changes are linked to the concepts of novelty and confirmation and therefore to autonomy and reliability as well. One of the basic statements of systems theory holds that these categories of description do not simply represent properties of the system to be described (its perception of the world), but that they represent the system itself.

In poltergeist cases, we can test this hypothesis empirically. If structure and function were merely categories of the observer, we would expect to find these categories in different quantities in witness reports on poltergeist cases. If we combine reports of different witnesses (statistically), the unimportant differences of the reports should vanish. In the long run, therefore, the characteristics of the poltergeist itself will become visible. (The same thing happens when a police officer tries to reconstruct the causes of an accident by interviewing different witnesses, each of whom has his own point of view.)

A recent analysis of witness reports on poltergeist cases actually demonstrated that these reports contain two factors, which can be labeled “structure” and “behavior”. These factors even persist if one takes the mean of several observers of a poltergeist case. This result teaches us that structure and function are really two categories of the poltergeist itself, instead of merely belonging to its observers. This hypothesis of the Model of Pragmatic Information was stated before the experiment started, and the two psychologists who carried out the research, Monika Huesmann and Friederike Schriever (1989), were not aware of it. For this reason they cannot have adapted the interpretation of their data to make them fit the hypothesis. Furthermore, they developed an objective procedure in which all witness reports of over 60 cases were split into parts (so-called items) and then analyzed by a statistical procedure (factor and cluster analysis). This analysis led to the two basic factors discussed above, which were predicted by the model. From this, we can conclude that the Model of Pragmatic Information is also capable of predicting aspects of “macro PK phenomena”, though these conclusions have more of a qualitative than a quantitative nature. It teaches us more about the limits or restrictions of the phenomena, than about their strength.

## IS ELUSIVENESS A PSYCHOLOGICAL OR SYSTEMIC EFFECT?

It seems logical to extend the findings of the MPI across the limits of experimental psi effect or poltergeist phenomena, into other situations dealing with qualitative macro-psychokinesis. In so doing, we find that the model need not even be afraid of the darkened rooms in the era of physical mediums. Moreover, we can find that another prediction of the MPI can be tested empirically, namely a kind of “uncertainty relation” between the “effect-size of the phenomena” and the “quality of their documentation”:

$$\text{Effect-Size of a psi Phenomenon} * \text{Quality Of its Documentation} < 1 \quad (2)$$

According to the MPI this equation holds for all types (experimental, RSPK, sitter group) of genuine psi effects. However, in general it is very difficult to distinguish between its common psychological interpretation and the systemic interpretation of the MPI. Fortunately, in a single case of a sitter-group experiment this important distinction could be demonstrated. (It goes without saying that further research is required. However, in the practice of the Parapsychological Counseling Office in Freiburg we have used this theoretical model in dozens of cases with remarkable success.<sup>4</sup>)

The English psychologist Ken Batcheldor (1979) developed a psychological model, which might explain why the phenomena observed by a group of sitters are so much stronger than the results of experiments with single subjects. Batcheldor’s model suggests two inhibiting factors, which generally stop people from exerting their psychokinetic abilities. The first of these is ownership resistance, the fear of possessing psychokinetic powers. The second factor is witness inhibition, the fear of witnessing a paranormal phenomenon. Batcheldor assumed that even if people are not aware of these fears, they can even play a role, which means that if someone is convinced he is not bothered by any of them they may be subconsciously active. Even parapsychologists suffer from these fears, let alone skeptics. It seems quite obvious that such a psychoanalytically oriented characteristic leads to the danger of self-immunization (a non-falsifiable hypothesis), particularly if it is used to explain the absence of an effect.

The main aim of Batcheldor’s model was to investigate under what circumstances both defense mechanisms could be switched off. According to his numerous experiences one of the best conditions is the technique of the sitter group, since it resembles the classical mediumistic séance, though often without a professional medium and not necessarily using the ideology of spiritualism. According to Batcheldor, this technique relieves each of the sitters from the burden of personal responsibility for the phenomena. Each sitter can always feel himself a relatively uninvolved observer. In other words, it is not he, but the other sitters who produce the phenomena. Furthermore, the possibilities of observing effects in a group are in no way as good as many tend to believe. After all, the sitters are expected to create a relaxed and jolly atmosphere. This is especially so for séances in darkness or under red light. In many cases a trickster is elected beforehand, to simulate “phenomena” and trigger off the real thing. Needless to say, this sounds somewhat suspicious. On the other hand, it can help to reduce witness inhibition among other participants, because they do not know for certain whether they are seeing only a trick or a paranormal phenomenon. It will be clear that the experimental setup should nevertheless offer the opportunity of distinguishing tricks from real phenomena. From a psychological point of view, it is very interesting to note that spiritualistic ideology, too, can contribute to the elimination of psychological defense mechanisms. If the sitters are convinced that spirits of the deceased produce the phenomena, they do not feel responsible for these phenomena and their origin. This resembles spontaneous paranormal cases, where the alleged spirits and demons can serve to suppress the real problems.

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<sup>4</sup> The aim of the therapeutic approach is of course to reveal the unconscious problem of the focus-person, however, sometimes an immediate intervention is so urgent, that we recommend to the persons concerned to install a video camera, which is able to “observe” the whole room and the camera itself in a mirror. With such an installation the RSPK-phenomena immediately vanish at least in this room - to the incredulous astonishment of the persons involved (see below).

One can even combine Batcheldor's technique of the sitter group with an experimentally produced spiritualistic tale, to yield fantastic results. A group around the Canadian parapsychologist Iris Owen did such an experiment, in which the sitters deliberately "constructed" an artificial spirit. To do so, they invented the tragic-romantic story of an English squire by the name of Philip, who lived in the middle of the 17th century. The details of the story were carefully elaborated. At the same time, however, the group took great care to prevent a resemblance to any existing historical entity. The fictitious squire Philip fell in love with the beautiful gypsy girl Margo, but could not face the consequences of this romance, and finally committed suicide. Since then, he has been a spirit, and was conjured up during the Canadian pseudo-spiritualistic séance. And indeed, he came into being, produced rapping sounds in the table and finally demonstrated the whole spectrum of spiritualistic manifestations. The complete experiment has been described in an interesting book "Conjuring up Philip" by Iris Owen and Margaret Sparrow (1976). The book clearly demonstrates that spiritualistic phenomena can also be produced by invented "pseudo-spirits". In this respect, it is an impressive illustration of Batcheldor's model.

On the other hand, there are observations, which do not readily fit into Batcheldor's model, which holds mainly psychological factors responsible for the elusiveness of the phenomena in the era of physical mediums. If only psychological factors could be held responsible for the avoidance of a paranormal phenomenon, it would suffice to eliminate these factors. Indeed, many parapsychologists argue that the elusiveness of the phenomena is only an "irritating by-product" of unfavorable psychological conditions, which should be eliminated. This is why authors of reports often simply neglect the remarkable elusiveness, upon which the astonished reader wonders why such massive phenomena were not "properly" investigated with all the technical facilities available to the experimental sciences. Not until such a reader requires more precise answers, is he informed that the phenomena behave in such an elusive way that they can hardly ever be properly objectified. Even after many years of effort, Batcheldor could not lay his hand on a single video recording of a paranormal phenomenon. In a letter to one of the authors, Batcheldor (1985) described a typical situation:

During an experiment we had switched on the infrared video camera when the table levitated. Although we thought the video recorder was running, we did not feel inhibited and I believed we had achieved a success. When we played back the tape, however, it did not contain any images at all! We found out that a switch had been in a wrong position. The next time I carefully checked the position of all switches and, indeed, the table refused to levitate. So would it be possible, though difficult according to your theory, to acquire a detailed video recording of a levitation?

According to the Model of Pragmatic Information, we should indeed assume that the psi effect remains elusive even when the psychological barricades have been eliminated, because every observation seeking confirmation prepares the system in such a way that its autonomy is restricted. In the situation described by Batcheldor, the psychological conditions were in fact favorable and levitation was observed. Nobody knew about an erroneously set switch and it is difficult to understand why after the correction of this mishap the psychological situation would have changed so dramatically. According to our model, however, the position of that switch, which is of no importance for the psychological situation, is of fundamental importance. Because of the erroneous setting of the switch the total system was objectively unable to make a recording of the phenomenon. In other words, any measurement or recording was impossible. The phenomenon could only occur because it was not completely objectifiable. A complete video recording would comprise more pragmatic information than the system was able to produce. The subjective experience of the sitters, on the other hand, is "diffuse" enough to record the less voluminous or less reliable information of the phenomenon. The situation remains vague, the system is not completely prepared for reliability. Confirmation of the actual phenomena by means of a video recording is lacking. By resetting the switch, the structure of the complete system is altered to such a degree that the phenomenon cannot occur. Switching on an additional measuring apparatus changed the potentiality of the system in such a way that particular (complementary) measurements were prevented from taking place. It goes without saying that the above does not mean that the Model of Pragmatic Information considers any objective observation of psi phenomena absolutely impossible. This would represent an inadmissible immunization. One could summarize it as follows: less equipment may have produced more phenomena! It is necessary to adapt the

objective conditions of observation to the phenomenon, in such a way that enables the observer to gather the optimum pragmatic information the system is able to deliver. Without this adaptation, one throws away information. If no phenomenon occurs when a complete video recording is made, one apparently threw away too much information about the phenomenon: it does not occur any longer. If, on the other hand, a séance in darkness prevents the observer from separating trickery and real phenomena, then he has also thrown away too much information, because he does not know what he has observed. Where is the royal road between the Scylla of an observation and the Caribides of a phenomenon without observation?

In answer to Batcheldor's letter, it was suggested to reduce the resolution of the method of observation, i.e., to defocus the video camera or to limit it to documentation on audiotape only. In this sense, "less" would really be "more", because we would obtain an objective recording of the phenomenon, which would be less easy to interpret than a perfect documentation, because it contains lacunae. These are exactly the ambiguities resulting from an imperfect method of recording. Suppose that only noises are recorded, in which case the causes of the noise remain unclear. If a camera is out of focus, it reduces the possibility of determining the exact location of any phenomenon. This is not to say that lacunae in the documentation procedure should leave room for manipulations or fraud (for example because one can no longer see any wires used for trickery). They should rather prevent the system from being prepared too unilaterally for reliability, so that it loses its autonomy. This method of recording reduces the pragmatic information and offers the experimenter fewer opportunities to utilize the phenomena in the sense of signal transfer. He has only a limited degree of control over the system. As the recording does not teach him exactly what is going on in the system, he cannot undertake any goal directed actions. In one way we are familiar with this connection since the era of physical mediums, but up to now it was interpreted in a completely different way. The pioneers of that era had already found out that the phenomena "feared daylight" and were only produced in darkness or under red light. From their point of view, however, this could be attributed to the danger light posed to a "fragile" substance, the existence of which was a necessary condition for the phenomena to occur. This substance would be destroyed by daylight. Batcheldor, too, reported that he could often make an audio recording of his experiments, but that no phenomena occurred when video recordings were made.

In the experiments Batcheldor performed till shortly before his death, he tried to utilize observations with differing degrees of resolution. He reported darkened sessions as well as the use of a fluorescent background panel, in front of which "cloths could materialize in the air". As predicted by our hypothesis, in front of a panel with a grid of fluorescent dots these materialized objects (or whatever they were) remained visible for a longer period than in front of a panel completely covered by fluorescent paint. In rare cases (infrared) video recordings succeeded. In these cases levitated objects were always in such a position that it was impossible to decide whether they were really levitated or only held in front of the camera. They seemed to have been put in a position that prevented the observer from finding out how the phenomenon came about. Batcheldor emphasizes that it would have been very difficult for the sitters to manipulate the object in this specific position, as they did not know what visual field was covered by the camera, which was not equipped with a viewfinder. These manipulators could, therefore, easily have been detected. Batcheldor's impression is that the complete system "knew" exactly what was recorded by the camera and that one could only record a phenomenon if its cause remained hidden in darkness, so that it was impossible to decide whether a normal or a "paranormal" event had taken place. This is exactly the same as not being able to interpret the video recording. It contains less pragmatic information and prevents the experimenter from having complete control over the system or from making it reliable.

The discussion of Batcheldor's approach in the light of the MPI shows that the notion of (more or less complete) "control" is an important issue for the structure and limitations of PK-Phenomena. Again, this feature also shows up in RSPK-cases.

## TWO TYPES OF EXPECTED RSPK PHENOMENA

As we have argued above RSPK phenomena are mainly a subconscious action of the focus person, which can be compared with a psychosomatic reaction in his or her environment. However, we found in the parapsychological counseling project some cases, which do not fit with this assumption. (It will be the aim of future research to collect such cases systematically and to provide a statistical analysis; here we are discussing this issue for the reason of completeness of the MPI).

Some persons suffer from RSPK activities, but no subconscious problem seems to be present. This is, however, not a hard criterion because one can never guarantee whether this assumption is justified. But the model can easily be extended to such cases.

In these cases the focus person seems to be much more passive, for instance, it is very often a person who suffers from depression and is not able to control anything in his or her life and also not in her environment. This in contrast to the active RSPK focus person where one gets the impression of a boiling pot, which is ready to explode, and the phenomena are just the sign of an “explosion”. With the passive ones the opposite is the case.

This feature can be included in our model by using the concept of “system control”. System control describes how an organizational closed system controls itself by interaction with the environment. In the active case the focus person serves as the “master” part of the control-cycle and the environment as a “slave”. In the passive case it is just the other way round. The focus person is not able to control anything and is not able any more to stabilize his or her world. The active focus person in contrast is even over-controlling his or her environment, which leads to macroscopic random fluctuations i.e. RSPK phenomena.

We assume here that everybody under normal circumstances subconsciously controls his or her environment to stabilize it. This means that random fluctuations, which are too large, are suppressed. This can be seen, for instance, in the sitter-group experiments discussed above and in many PK experiments with subjects who do not get deviations from chance but instead a smaller variance. This means that natural systems themselves – whatever this means – may produce larger fluctuations if they are not observed. (In quantum physics this is known as “Quantum-Zeno-effect”: “An observed pot never boils”). It is a fundamental assumption of the model of pragmatic information that observation and also non-observation are different preparations of the system. This idea can also be found in folkloristic reports that spooky events seem to happen at unobserved places, for instance, that houses where nobody lives crumble more rapidly than if they are in use.

From this point of view it could be assumed that in a case of depression the person loses more and more the control on the organizational closed environment, which shows up in fluctuations within this environment. This means that the integrative power, which keep the whole system together, cannot suppress individual fluctuations within the system with may destroy the system. In this case it is expected that this will occur only in a certain period before the whole system dies out. In such cases we have no real displacement phase but only a decline phase and even the suppression phase is not necessary. The decline phase is not driven by the attempt to produce the phenomena but simply by exhaustion.

Therefore the active RSPK case can be considered as an immune reaction of the whole system caused by an unconscious problem, which acts like a “virus”, where as the passive RSPK case must be considered as a disease, which leads to disintegration of the system.

In clinical terms, the active RSPK can be considered as a phenomenon of dissociation<sup>5</sup> whilst the passive RSPK phenomena show the phenomena of depression and degeneration. This fits exactly with the assumption of the model of the pragmatic information that psi phenomena correlate with the temporal change of complexity and not with complexity itself.

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<sup>5</sup> In the Parapsychological Counseling Office at Freiburg, over years, we have indeed collected strong empirical evidence, that RSPK-focus-persons show a high degree of personality dissociation (disorder).

## CONCLUSIONS

The examples discussed above show that there is not too much difference between the phenomena produced by physical mediums and by poltergeist phenomena if we consider them within the MPI. Both types of phenomena are difficult to observe and they are dependent upon the preparation of the system. There are also common aspects in their psychological description. In both cases there is the dynamical process within a group, in which the interaction among its members is of fundamental importance, though often inadvertently in poltergeist cases.

It will be clear that we are still far from being able to say which phenomena in the area of macro-PK are possible or impossible, or to conclude why they are as they are and not different. We simply do not have a clue how strong the “stochastic fluctuations” of a system can become and why they often seem so bizarre. After all, such a group represents a system with an immense degree of entanglement and it comprises many levels of description. Even if properly controlled PK experiments with random generators yield so small a result that it is hardly detectable, it need not be small in real life too. A controlled experiment represents a very artificial, more or less sterile situation, offering no opportunity of drawing direct conclusions as to what occurs in daily life. In the EPR experiment, too, the difference between the (invalid) classical theory and the (correct) quantum mechanical description can only be detected by means of complicated measuring techniques in a most artificial situation. The concrete effects of quantum physics, however, do not only steer our modern technology, but all the phenomena in nature, which we cannot describe if classical physics were universally valid. Once we have accepted that the descriptive language of psychology, too, is of a “non-classical nature”, then many at first sight simple events suddenly look quite different. It seems to me, that we are still light years away from real understanding of the mysteries behind poltergeists and physical mediums.

Nevertheless, the Model of Pragmatic Information seems to provide some concepts with which we can formulate experimental hypotheses and which can in principle be falsified. Whenever it could be shown, that psi-phenomena do not suffer from the limitations discussed above (e.g. a deliberate repeatable PK-action) the model would clearly be falsified. Furthermore, the MPI does not only enable us to integrate very different areas of parapsychology, but has already made clear-cut predictions, without the necessity of restricting ourselves to empty concepts like psi. These are no more than “empty words”, as Hans Bender often used to say. In most cases they rather represent our despair than our understanding.

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