# Exploring Psychomanteum as a Psi-Conducive State of Consciousness

Alejandro Parra and Jorge Villanueva

**ABSTRACT**

The mirror gazing procedure termed the "psychomanteum" was developed by the world renowned psychiatrist Dr. Raymond Moody. It was designed to facilitate reunion experiences with deceased individuals, as a means of addressing the feelings surrounding bereavement. Although the modern psychomanteum is not normally employed to seek *extra-sensory perception* (ESP) information about the future, it may be that the psychomanteum is psi-conductive. For example, there are many similarities and differences between psychomanteum experiences and accounts of hypnagogic/hypnopompic imagery, which is conducive to ESP. The aim is of this paper was to explore whether the psychomanteum technique encourages a psi-conducive state of consciousness, which would result in scoring that is significantly above *mean chance expectation* (MCE). One hundred and thirty participants (92 females and 38 males; mean age= 47.44) were recruited by announcements in newspapers and our web site. Under psychomanteum condition, psi-hitting was obtained (30.8% above MCE); however, under no-psychomanteum (control) condition, 29.2% was obtained (where 25% was expected). The results differ slightly from MCE in the psychomanteum condition ($p$= .02, one-tailed) in comparison with no-psychomanteum condition, but no significant differences were found. A number of positive correlations were also found, for instance, participants who attained higher scores on auditory and visual hallucinations tended to demonstrate psi-hitting.

**Key Words:** psychomanteum; state of consciousness; mirror gazing; extrasensory perception

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## Introduction

This mirror gazing procedure termed "psychomanteum" was developed by psychiatrist Dr. Raymond Moody (Arcangel, 1994; 2005; Moody, 1992; Moody and Perry, 1993; Moody and Arcangel, 2001) who authored the best-selling book *Life after Life* (Moody, 1975) at the seventies. It was designed to facilitate reunions with deceased individuals, as a way of addressing feelings of bereavement. Moody conducted clients through a process of remembrance and counseling combined with the mirror-gazing, and reported that about 50% of the participants believed they had a reunion with a loved one.

Some of these reunion experiences involved apparent apparitions of the deceased person, both in the mirror and externally in the room. The apparitions that appear in the Psychomanteum may be similar to crisis and other apparitions that have been the topic of parapsychological theory and research, and the question of survival after death. Moody has directly observed more than 300 individuals during psychomanteum experiences and interviewed them afterwards about their experiences. Based upon this work, he concluded

**Corresponding author**: Alejandro Parra
**Address**: Institute of Paranormal Psychology. Salta 2015 (C1137ACQ) Buenos Aires, Argentina
**e-mail** ✉ rapp@fibertel.com.ar
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that crystal gazing can be a helpful technique in tapping into one's creative potential and as an aid to self-understanding. According to Dr. Moody's files, several people reported using their experiences as a part of a process of psychotherapy, for example in ferreting out conflictual issues and even in recovering repressed early trauma.

Radin (2001) noted at least five possible hypotheses about the psychomanteum, one of which is the telepathic hypothesis. Intense telepathic rapport may affect brain functioning, causing the telepathic communication to be perceived as though it was projected from outside the body. Sometimes this may take the form of the "sender's" image, as is often reported in cases of crisis telepathy (Gauld, 1977). Other hypotheses are neurological, perceptual, psychokinetic and the ghost hypothesis. In recent years, a number of researchers have employed psychomanteum chambers to try to facilitate reunions between participants and their deceased loved ones (Hastings *et al.,* 1999; Moody, 1994; Moody and Perry, 1993; Radin and Rebman, 1996; Roll and Braun, 1995; Moody and Arcangel, 2001).

One possible explanation for psychomanteum apparitional experiences is that they involve hypnagogic-like imagery whose content may be strongly influenced by the needs, motivations and expectations of the participants. Hypnagogic/hypnopompic imagery is that which occurs during the transition states between sleep and wakefulness (Mavromatis, 1987; Schacter, 1976). However, the main difference between psychomanteum imagery and hypnagogic/hypnopompic imagery is that in the former case the participant presumably has his/her eyes open whereas in the latter case the participant may or may not have his/her eyes open. Another difference is that, unlike hypnagogic/hypnopompic imagery, psychomanteum experiences do not tend to feature non-verbal auditory imagery.

Like other forms of sensory deprivation, psychomanteum stimulation would be associated with increased attention to internal imagery. Investigators suggested this association to develop an "experimental-hypnagogic" technique to facilitate the study of hypnagogic imagery. Studies of sensory deprivation suggest that perceptual isolation effects are related to the length of isolation. This appears to be particularly true in the case of the psychomanteum technique. For example, the result of ganzfeld stimulation is the experience of diffuse, unpadded light characterized by reports of being immersed in a "sea of light," disorientation, and the occurrence of "blank out" periods in which there is a complete disappearance of visual experience.

Irrespective of whether the psychomanteum technique induces a quasi-hallucinatory psi-conducive state, we might learn from the work of the early English psychical researchers in the 1880's and 90's. They began to see a new meaning and interpretation in psi hallucinations. L.E. Rhine (1953; 1963) found a total of 825 hallucinatory experiences, which she had drawn from a general case collection of over 8,000 items. As such, hallucinations comprised about 10 percent of the total. The classifying of the types of ESP phenomena represented in the hallucinatory cases involved the sense modalities. However, the decision as to whether these cases were telepathic, clairvoyant, or precognitive in origin depended on what was perceived.

When applied to a parapsychical occurrence, the word hallucination has not always meant exactly what it does today. Before the discovery of any of the extrasensory phenomena –telepathy, clairvoyance, or precognition– such occurrences could not have been defined in terms of psi. Hallucinatory parapsychical experiences can be defined as the expression of the sensory equivalent of impressions received by extrasensory means. Hallucinations are one of the four forms of spontaneous experiences, the others being intuitions, and unrealistic and realistic dreaming (Rhine, 1953; 1963).

Our study compared psi performance in the psychomanteum with performance in an equivalent non-psychomanteum condition. It also explored ASC in the psychomanteum as a potentially psi-conducive state of consciousness. We hypothetized that (1) significant difference between scoring in the psychomanteum and the non-psychomanteum condition in a positive direction for the psychomanteum condition. Our rationale was that (2) if the psychomanteum truly induces a non-ordinary state of consciousness, this would increase ESP scores, and the presence and intensity of a non-ordinary state of consciousness could be related with ESP hits. It was decided in advance that we would conclude that this experiment offers support for

the claim that psychomanteum stimulation is psi conducive only if there was a significant difference between the psychomanteum and the non-psychomanteum condition.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample included 130 participants, of which there were 92 females (71.4%) and 38 males (28.6%). Ages ranged from 19 to 75 years (M= 47.44; SD= 12.02). Participants were recruited by announcements in newspapers and magazines and our web site in order to request an admission interview for the psychomanteum session. The participants did not receive information about characteristics related to the hypothesis of the experiment. As a part of the recruiting procedure, participants filled out a consent form.

### *Sender and Experimenter*

The first author (AP) was the experimenter, who met and ran each participant in the study. The second author (JV) was sender to the entire sample. Each session was carried out in two trials per participant (psychomanteum/no-psychomanteum condition). The sender had taken part in other ESP studies as a sender (Parra and Villanueva, 2003a; 2003b; 2004) and knows meditation and imagery–techniques.

### *Psychomanteum Chamber*

The chamber is a space of 4 meters square with a 2.35 meter ceiling. The chamber is built within this larger room, with dimensions of 6 by 8 feet and an 8 foot ceiling, and it has no windows, the ceiling and two walls faced the outside (i.e., had no common walls with other rooms). It is located above a storage room. To help create an isolated, undisturbed setting, the selected chamber room is in a remote, second floor area of our laboratory building at the *Institute of Paranormal Psychology* in Buenos Aires. The walls and ceiling of the lab are painted matte black to reduce light reflections. The chamber itself is electromagnetically shielded.

The walls of the psychomanteum chamber were constructed out of 2 inch x 4 inch wood studs, 5/8 inch wood studs, 5/8 inch wallboard, and R11 Fiberglas insulation. To form a rudimentary electromagnetic shield inside the chamber, the floor, walls and ceiling are completely covered with aluminum insulation, and then checked throughout for electrical continuity. The insulation consisted of a sheet of 1/16**,** 99 percent pure aluminum, a quarter-inch air spacing consisting of plastic bubble wrap, and then another sheet of 1/16 aluminum. The walls and ceiling of the chamber are covered by black velveteen fabric to create a dark, featureless interior, and the floor is covered by a black carpet.

A reclining chair and a wall mirror (1x1 meter) were brought inside the chamber and positioned for optimum comfort and viewing angles. Because the chamber is essentially a darkroom, a dim incandescent reclining chair lamp was placed behind the reclining chair, facing down, to provide some illumination so the participant could see the mirror. A dimmer control for this lamp can be operated outside the chamber to adjust illumination levels.

### *Type of Targets*

A CD-pool containing 3,500 color pictures of high-quality were designed from many collections of CDs clip-art. For each participant one picture-target randomly selected was used. A personal computer Pentium© IV (Intel©), 2.4 GHz, 512 RAM, 30 Gb. hard disc with SVGA color screen, PC-system video 8Mb, 3D AGP and a CD ROM reader 56X owned by the *Institute of Paranormal Psychology* was used.

### *Targets*

A CD–Rom contained 3,500 high–resolution jpg pictures was used. All pictures were taken from a clip-art, which contained nine groups of irregular, well differentiated pictures, such as animals, icons, foods, people, landscapes, religion, scenic pictures, structures, and humoristic cartoons. AP, selected approximately. 200 attractive pictures from each group according to the original clustering of the product. He designed a pool where all pictures of each subgroup were numbered from 1 onward. An individual who had no contact with the participants and the sender and almost none with the experimenter, used a random number generator to separately and sequentially select pictures within each subgroup. The target was selected once the experimenter (AP) and participant had entered the psychomanteum chamber. The three decoys were selected before AP and the participant came into the sender's room. During this procedure, the sender remained alone in his room. A standard coding of digits was used for all

participants according to their testing numbers (determined by the order of testing).

When both conditions (psychomanteum and control) were complete, a randomization procedure for judging was used by JV for displaying the three decoys and the target picture. This procedure was employed for five reasons: 1. picture subgroups are easily clustered; 2. it facilitated randomization process; 3. target pictures were characterized by their diversity and visual attraction to serve as a good target for a GESP experiment; 4. this avoided any sensory (visual) cues, 5. finally, this avoided any manipulation of the target, mainly during the target-viewing and judging stages. The distance between sender and participant, as well as the walls of the Institute, and the design of the Psychomanteum chamber is optimal and safely isolated. As such, there could not have been any communication of sensorial clues either intentionally or unintentionally.

## *Testing Procedure*

Participants received an information pack before the session. It included a 4-item previous psi experience questionnaire designed by the authors. General information on the research program was also delivered. AP greeted participants at the door when they arrived and attempted to create a friendly and informal social atmosphere. AP engaged in conversation with the participants before the session. The experimenters sought to encourage a positive expectation for the selection of the target picture among participants.

Both conditions were carried out in separated rooms, one of them using free-response technique under psychomanteum stimulation and other one using a non-psychomanteum, both conditions used a free-response methodology. Both conditions were counter-balanced for each participant, who visited to the psychomanteum chamber just one time. The sender was not aware which condition the experimenter had randomly assigned.

Each participant was asked to verbalize his mental impressions as much as possible following the psychomanteum, which were then tape-recorded by the experimenter. Many people felt better speaking after rather than during psychomanteum (as Moody recommended). As participants did not have to verbalise during the session, the collection of mentation information was improved as it could be transcribed directly from a tape recording. Then, both experimenter and participant went into the sender's room. When the participant was seated in front of the computer's screen, a judgment procedure began.

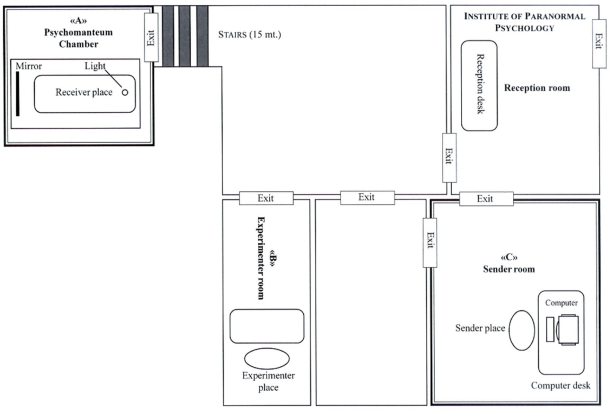


**Figure 1**. Psychomanteum Chamber.

## *Psychomanteum condition*

The experimenter remained in room B, so that he had no contact with the sender during the observation of the target. The target remained on the computer's screen for twenty minutes, while being viewed by the sender. Using a caller (a sound gadget which emits a *bip*), the experimenter communicated to the sender the beginning–end of the "viewing" period of the target. Immediately after the psychomanteum session, each participant was asked to verbalize his/her impressions as much as possible. They were audio-taped by the experimenter.

## *No-psychomanteum condition*

The participant was placed in room A. No light under the reclining chair was used during the no-psychomanteum period. The mirror was also covered using a blackboard. The experimenter also had no contact with the sender. The sender observed the target, which was displayed on the computer's screen for the same duration as for the psychomanteum session. Again, using a caller, the experimenter communicated to the agent the beginning–end of the "viewing" period of the target. Within no-psychomanteum condition the participant´s mentations were not audio-taped.

## *Judgment procedure*

The participant viewed the four potential targets (the actual target and three decoys on the computer screen), which were presented in one

of four random placed at the computer screen. The participant, viewed each possibility and associated to the picture as though it were the actual target, describing perceived similarities between the item and the impressions experienced in the psychomanteum. Ranks were allocated as follows: rank 1 represents the highest coincidence with the potential target and 4 represents the lowest (or null) coincidence. Scores 2 and 3 represented "mid-scores". Both conditions were not compared to one another. The judgment procedure lasted between five and ten minutes (according to each participant) for both conditions (psychomanteum/non-psychomanteum). The forms were individually signed by each participant.

## Results

The aim of this research project was to explore whether the psychomanteum technique is a psi-conducive state of consciousness more than chance expectation. Z-score test was used to determine if a significant relationship exists between psychomanteum and no-psychomanteum condition. It was hypothetized that this experiment would offer support in a positive direction for the psychomanteum condition. Table 1 indicates that expected results were better using psychomanteum condition than the non-psychomanteum condition. The *z*-score was also obtained by means of the sum of ranks, however the results were not significant when the results of the psychomanteum were compared with non-psychomanteum condition (Table 2).

**Table 1.** Distribution of Scores: Judging Procedure.

| | ***Scores*** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1st | 2nd | 3th | 4th | *z* score | *P* (one-tailed) |
| **Expected** | 25.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 | | |
| **Observed psychomanteum** | 30.8 (40) | 28.5 (37) | 20.8 (27) | 20.0 (26) | –2.00 | .02 |
| **Observed non-psychomanteum** | 29.2 (38) | 23.8 (31) | 21.5 (28) | 25.4 (33) | –.67 | n.s. |

* Negative z score indicates score position. First is highest coincidence; fourth is lowest or null. Hits refer to first-place rank (p= .25).

**Table 2.** Comparision between psychomanteum and no-psychomanteum condition using Wilcoxon rank test.

| ***Scores*** | ***Ranks*** | ***N*** | ***Mean Score*** | ***Sum of Score*** | ***z*** | ***p*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | NEGATIVE RANKS | 41(a) | 49.34 | 2023.00 | | |
| **psychomanteum – non-psychomanteum** | POSITIVE RANKS | 54(b) | 46.98 | 2537.00 | –.97 | n.s. |
| | TOTAL | 130 | | | | |

a. Ranks no-psychomanteum < Ranks psychomanteum.
b. Ranks no-psychomanteum > Ranks psychomanteum.
Hits refer to first-place rank (p= .25).

## Discussion

Our results showed that scoring was better for the psychomanteum condition than the control (non-psychomanteum) condition, although there was no significant difference between the two conditions. We should not conclude that if the "good" ESP results in our experiment using psychomanteum induction were related to a modified state of consciousness or not. As such, even if we could compare the hits in studies using free response with and without psychomanteum (or other techniques), we cannot evaluate with certainty that the hits are related to a modified state of consciousness without being able to measure the extent of this modified state, as these results could be dependent on other variables which are independent of a non-ordinary state.

Our research also attempted to associate ESP scores and the altered state that the technique was presumed to induce. This study did not show a relationship between the main ASC items of the PCI to our psychomanteum hits. We cannot be sure our procedure is actually causing changes in the participants' attention states because such changes cannot always be measured in the studies.

This also raises the controversial question of what a 'non-psychomanteum' condition actually is, if a participant is relaxing in the same place in a quiet room, with eyes closed or with

eyes open, sitting upright in a chair or in an ordinary (not soundproofed) room. Moreover, others have mentioned problems such as lack of control groups, a variety of design and individual difference problems, and an alternative (more general) explanation using expectancy effects of different types. The argument is that although some procedures may have a track record of producing ESP, we do not know if an alteration in consciousness has occurred, or at what degree, and if alteration of consciousness contributes in any way to success in the experiment.

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