

## Goose bumped

John Lewis

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines goose bumps as *a rough bristling state of skin produced by cold or fright*. But it was neither *cold* nor *fright* that suddenly goose bumped me one evening; it was a mix of *astonishment* and *incredulity*. At this point, I feel obliged to warn anyone ardently sceptical of the legitimacy of anything termed *paranormal* or *supernatural* that, upon reading the following, your sceptical bent may be damaged or, if not damaged, at least less inclined. And in case you are now becoming glassy-eyed and are beginning to detach for fear of being led painstakingly through description of something supposedly mysterious or unusual, about which you would not have the slightest interest or any chance of giving even a modicum of credence, I also feel obliged to assure you that I am not going to relate a ghost story or the like.

Nor will I embark on a defence of extra-terrestrial kidnapping, crop-circles, flying saucers, water-divining, astrology, demonic possession, spiritual healing, channeling, reincarnation, clairvoyance, levitation, magic of any colour, or unnatural interference with the normal shape of keys or spoons. I am not going to provide what might be considered by the more gullible, undeniable evidence of fairies, elves, sprites, goblins, leprechauns, trolls, dragons, werewolves, vampires or any other creature resembling these. Nor will I try to persuade you on the possible present or past existence of bunyips, yowies, yetis, big-foots, Loch Ness monsters, or any of their hairy, scaly or slimy cousins. And I certainly would not presume attempting to change anyone's mind on the existence or otherwise of a supreme being of any shape, colour, temperament or religious affiliation.

In short, I will not attempt to persuade you of the legitimacy of anything referred to as paranormal or supernatural.

Except one thing: telepathy.

Or, more accurately – for reasons which will be revealed – *unconscious* telepathy. By *telepathy*, I refer to communication of thoughts between at least two people without involvement of what are generally accepted as the normal limits of our senses.

For fear that this declaration of my intent has already, or again, started you packing, I will try to arrest your departure by stating that I could represent my country in the field of

To return to the previous page, click on the arrow on the top left of the page.

scepticism. If scepticism were an Olympic sport, I would feel confident of being picked in the national team.

Even on the subject of telepathy, should any man tell me that he could read my mind, I would fancifully toy with the proposition – I stress *man* and I stress *fancifully* because I would never deliberately hurt a woman and I'm a gentle soul – of head-butting him so that I could respond to his remonstrations by querying how was it that he did not see it coming. However, if any man were to tell me that he *had* read my mind (perhaps unconsciously) as opposed to *could* read my mind (suggesting intentionally), I would stay my fanciful head-butt; at least until I had heard him out. The reason for this hesitancy would stem from having once experienced a violent tremble assail the previously unyielding foundations of my arch-scepticism, a vibration that shook the certainty out of the cynicism with which I would have formerly viewed the subject of telepathy.

The following describes what others might label my *Road-to-Damascus occasion*. I wouldn't; mainly for lack of confidence in the legitimacy of the derivation. I have provided as much detail as I believe is necessary to include all of the possible contributing factors and reinforce the proposition that what occurred could not have resulted from anything other than unconscious telepathy.

Make of it what you will.

Several years ago, I was consulting about security matters for a company that produced communication equipment.

One day I became aware that the owner of the company was worried about the water-treatment plant at his manufacturing facility. Whenever a fault occurred on the plant and it had to be shut down, he believed that far too much time was usually consumed in identifying the cause and either fixing or circumventing the fault and putting the plant back into operation. And whenever the plant was off-line for lengthy periods, the entire manufacturing facility had to be shut down, causing customer concern and understandable owner-angst.

The exact details of how I became aware of the owner's problems now escape me, but I don't believe it had anything to do with telepathy. If, at that time, someone had suggested it

[To return to the previous page, click on the arrow on the top left of the page.](#)

did, I would have assumed that that someone was not of sound mind. Two weeks later I would not have been so quick to judge.

Although it wasn't my area of responsibility, I did have some experience with computer-controlled machinery. So, I offered to carry out a thorough assessment of the problems with the plant and prepare a detailed report containing recommendations on how I believed he could overcome them. He agreed to this and, after I spent some time on-site and was allowed to take away copies of existing diagrams, I prepared my report.

I concluded that the problems were mainly caused by the maintenance staff having difficulty in reading the schematic diagrams that described the operation of the plant. Schematic diagrams are those that illustrate how the various items of the plant interact with each other (electrically, hydraulically, pneumatically, etc), as opposed to diagrams that illustrate where the items are located on the site, or diagrams that illustrate the appearance of the equipment, which are often three-dimensional and occasionally supported by exploded views to identify the individual parts.

Unfortunately for the owner, someone had attempted a dubious economy by combining the schematic diagrams with the location diagrams, giving unintentional emphasis to the term *killing* in the expression, *killing two birds with one stone*. For the result was a confusion of vertical and horizontal flowlines crisscrossing the pages in every cardinal direction to connect with an untidy scattering of boxes representing the items of equipment. Differing from what was probably originally intended, the position of these items on each page bore little relation to their actual locations on the site or juxtaposition with neighbours because of the diagrams also having to accommodate multi-laned highways of crossing and interconnecting flowlines. The birds had died a violent death, their bodies dismembered, their feathers askew.

Unfortunately, the diagrams had been created to industry standards – albeit with emphasis mainly on the quality of the line-work – by professional draughtsmen using the latest graphics-creation software and hardware. This suggested that the owner had already spent a considerable amount on having them produced, which could undermine my chances of convincing him that they all be redrawn.

Late on the day before I was due to meet him to present my completed report, I began to suspect that if I failed to convince him in the first few minutes of the meeting to implement my recommendations, the work I had already done would have been wasted. At that time, I was

[To return to the previous page, click on the arrow on the top left of the page.](#)

making final edits to what I believed was my most persuasive argument, a lengthy mathematical appraisal of what savings could be expected by using improved documentation to reduce the mean time to repair the equipment and place it back in operation.

While checking my figures and visualising how I would take the owner through the associated equations, I could not drive from my mind a persistent image of his eyes becoming as glassy as ardent sceptics when I mentioned that I was going to relate a story involving telepathy. Even the summary of the report could not be presented persuasively without lengthy reference to supporting detail in his excessively cluttered schematic diagrams. The image of the glassy-eyed owner's attention drifting from the discussion at hand to the amount of money he had already spent in acquiring his diagrams, began to eat away at my confidence that I was on the right course.

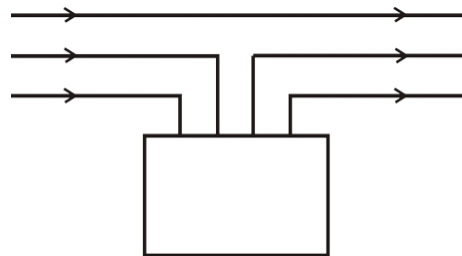
So, I suddenly changed tack. And, in the process I jettisoned my weighty mathematical approach. I decided instead to try to consolidate how his problems could be solved with a simple drawing on a single sheet of paper, and pitch this to him in a similar manner to a screenwriter pitching the plot of a screenplay to a film producer. He could then read the report in his own time or pass it on to others.

After much deliberation, sketching, groaning, swearing, head-cradling and kicking of tightly balled pieces of discarded sketches across the office – deserted at that hour – I produced two line-diagrams. The first consisted of a single box and associated data flowlines I copied from a typical example of how the information was presented in one of the electrical schematic diagrams. I removed all annotations to avoid unnecessary distraction and labelled this diagram BEFORE. I then produced another diagram that showed how the first should have been drawn so that it would better communicate the information contained. I labelled this diagram AFTER and placed one above the other to form a composite drawing.

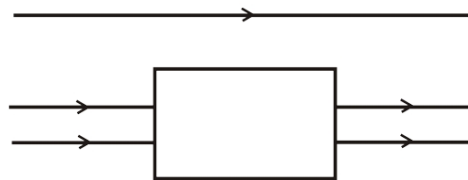
And there, with a few lines on a single sheet of paper, was the indelible message that the AFTER component of the drawing revealed at a glance what the BEFORE component concealed. At that point, I don't think I shouted, "Eureka!", but I'm sure I was swept with a similar wave of elation to that which supposedly sent Archimedes leaping from his bath and racing naked down the street.

To return to the previous page, click on the arrow on the top left of the page.

Suppressing any temptation to celebrate in similar fashion – or with similar lack of fashion – I accessed an appropriate graphics package on my computer and produced the tidier version of my composite drawing, shown here.



BEFORE



AFTER

The message contained was not quite as succinctly presented as in the (probably mythical), “Arnold Schwarzenegger, Danny DeVito, Twins,” pitch that sent Hollywood studio bosses reaching for their chequebooks, but it did have similarities in not needing much further explanation.

The drawing represented a consolidation of almost two weeks of researching the task, drafting and continually redrafting the report, and subjecting every aspect of the exercise to exhaustive review and re-review. It would not be looked upon, of course, with the same level of reverence as the minute blue glow of radium that Marie and Pierre Curie processed from several tons of pitchblende. But similarities existed; with the product in each case representing the very essence of the wealth of raw material from which it had been extracted.

You would probably cry, “Enough! We get the message. Get on with it!” if I were now to continue in similar vein and claim that, whereas the Curies’ product had glowed literally, my drawing shone figuratively with the brilliance of its relevant simplicity. But perhaps there is more to the message. Perhaps the level of my esteem for the drawing, experienced then and

[To return to the previous page, click on the arrow on the top left of the page.](#)

purposely accentuated now at the risk of inviting impatience, seared its image into my subconscious with such intensity that it possibly had some bearing on what was to follow later that evening.

My wife Jenny was already asleep when I arrived home, so I reheated and ate the dinner she had prepared for me, showered, and slipped into bed beside her. I slept for a while, but later woke and, abandoning a struggle to drop off again, silently rehearsed how I would present my case at the meeting the following morning.

I imagined myself opening the discussion by pointing out to the owner that, when a fault occurred on his plant, the role of schematic diagrams should have been to provide the maintainers with ready appreciation of which flowlines were inputs to a particular item of equipment, which were outputs from it, and which items were upstream or downstream from any other; crucial information when isolating a problem. I then imagined myself placing my drawing on the table in front of him.

At that point my thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a loud metallic clattering outside our house which caused Jenny to be jolted awake and ask what had happened. These were the days before there were wheeled plastic garbage bins in our area; and probably a dog, or perhaps the fox I had once seen bounding across our front lawn just before daybreak, had knocked over a metal bin. When I told Jenny what I suspected, she said that she was glad to have woken, because she was having a most frustrating dream.

And then, as she went on to explain the cause of her disquiet, every hair on my body lifted away from my skin as the smug confidence with which I had previously viewed the world was destroyed. I was left severely goose bumped, mentally chastened and shaken to the core.

She said that she was describing to a man she did not know, with reference to a drawing, how to connect four wires to a little box; and that the extreme frustration she was experiencing was caused by her not having a skerrick of understanding of either why she was doing this, or what she was actually talking about.

When I explained to Jenny what I believed had just happened, she was struck by a similar wave of amazement to the one that, shortly before, had engulfed me taking my breath.

So, there you have it! An astonishing occurrence providing for me and Jenny, such compelling proof of telepathy that we hold it irrefutable.

[To return to the previous page, click on the arrow on the top left of the page.](#)

This could not be dismissed as belonging in the same category of claims of telepathic communication as those tainted by the probability of prior complicity – either innocent or contrived – on the part of either or both of the people involved; claims that I, as a practiced disbeliever, could discredit with as little effort as it took to roll my eyes skyward in dismissal of them.

Nor did this have similarity with the common occurrence of someone answering a telephone and claiming that they and the caller must have been telepathically communicating because they could tell who the caller would be before they answered; when it was simply a good guess, or the odds were in favour of the caller calling on that day, or at that time of day, or after a particular interval of not calling, or whatever else made a correct assumption of the caller's identity a reasonable possibility; with every incorrect assumption conveniently forgotten.

This was different.

This was real.

This was telepathy!

To those who are convinced that what happened was simply coincidence, I would point out that the odds against Jenny – whose background is in medicine, and for whom even having to think about the mechanical or electrical innards of anything inorganic would be an anathema – dreaming of using a drawing to explain to a stranger how to connect wires to a little box at exactly the same time that I was lying beside her silently planning the same activity, would be, in my mind, astronomical and, in Jenny's, beyond calculation. And if these people remained unmoved in their conviction, I would diplomatically suggest that, if it was indeed coincidence, then the relationship between telepathy and coincidence should be thoroughly examined, with possible surprising results.

For those who would tell me – to emphasis the improbability of telepathy – that there are large amounts of money on offer to anyone who can prove under sound, indisputable scientific examination that they could communicate with others telepathically, I would point out that the event I have just described involved unconscious telepathy.

And reinforcing the proposition that telepathy will perhaps only work under this or similar circumstance and cannot be deliberately initiated, all subsequent attempts on my part to implant

[To return to the previous page, click on the arrow on the top left of the page.](#)

thoughts of any nature into Jenny's mind telepathically, while she was either asleep or awake, have been entirely unsuccessful.

So, there you have it: an event that confronts and destroys lofty dismissal (my own included), hasty ridicule, smarter-than-thou arrogance, unwarranted cynicism, inaccurate assumption, misplaced confidence, and all of the like on the subject of telepathy. An event that throws down a challenge before the qualified seekers of truth, the credentialed inquisitive. A reminder that there is still much to wonder and to discover under the sun.

Reflect upon it.

And if you are ever involved in a situation which is shaping to have a similar conclusion, brace yourself to be severely goose bumped.

For those of you who are still interested in the outcome of a matter that was overshadowed by a far more significant event – rendering it inconsequential by comparison – the owner did have all his schematic diagrams redrawn.

*John Lewis is a published novelist*

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[To return to the previous page click on the arrow on the top left of the page](#)