

# Television Tests of Masuaki Kiyota

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and Michael Hutchinson

We were asked by Granada Television to participate in tests it was to conduct in London on August 8-10, 1978, with Masuaki Kiyota, a 16-year-old Japanese who had been featured in part of an NBC-TV program on the paranormal. It is claimed that Masuaki can project mental images onto unexposed film under very tight conditions.

Granada proposed to start the tests very informally under whatever conditions the young man desired. Further tests would be progressively more difficult, first of all under the control of Professor John Hasted in a laboratory at Birkbeck College, and finally under the skeptically tight conditions of the writers. We would therefore not be required to participate until the third day. In the meantime we were kept informed of progress.

Through a change in plans, the very first day was spent in the laboratory of Professor Hasted. Whatever the protocol, the results were negative. The monotony of the day was broken by the production of what Hasted hailed as a "whitey," a term invented by American parapsychologist Jule Eisenbud. This was a photograph which, when peeled, was completely white, whereas it should have been black, as Masuaki

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The "Trafalgar Square" photo

works without operating the camera shutter. When Morris Smith, the technical representative from Polaroid, was asked for his comments, he pointed out that a light-sensitive diode—which had been used for the previous experiment—had been removed, leaving a hole through which light could pass. When the rest of the pictures from the pack were removed and peeled, they too were "whiteys," to no one's surprise.

At the start of the second day, Masuaki managed to produce a photograph of poor quality, with the foreground completely underexposed and the rest of the picture blurred. In the center was a grey "pole" which could have been Nelson's Column in London's Trafalgar Square, although it was not clear enough for anyone to be absolutely positive. A

building on the right showed up well enough to be compared with an original, if this could be identified. We later spent considerable time in and around Trafalgar Square but failed to find an angle from which the picture could have been taken. However, most people who saw the photograph initially thought that it *was* Trafalgar Square.

The second photograph, even poorer in quality, was said to show six guardsmen in file, from the right to the left. Questions were then raised as to whose camera and film had been used for these shots. It transpired that both had been given to Masuaki the previous evening and had been with him overnight. How many shots had been left on the film was not known, but “Trafalgar Square” was on frame seven and the “Guardsmen” on frame eight. While the former could have been the result of a normal shutter release exposure without pulling the photograph from the camera, the latter could not. Morris Smith stated that it was not possible to tell if the film pack has been tampered with.

The rest of the day was spent conducting tests using a camera and film supplied by Morris Smith. The location was changed from the previous day’s laboratory to a room in the White House Hotel—where the first two photographs were produced—and later to the local park. Relatively tight conditions produced no results. But once more, after being allowed to have a camera and film to himself—this time for a two-hour lunch break—Masuaki achieved some success. What actually happened was later to cause a fierce argument between the interpreter on one side and the television presenter and his director on the other.

The interpreter was an Anglo-American journalist named David Tharpe, who had lived for some years in Japan. He had written at least one article about Masuaki, had been present at the young psychic’s home during some successful experiments, and had been proposed by Masuaki (or his advisers) as interpreter for the London trip.

In an interview at the end of the test, Tharpe said that the most interesting photograph taken during the two and a half days was the one taken after the lunch break on the second day. He said that the camera and the film had not left his sight or that of his girlfriend, a Japanese-American who had been in London for some days. She was not part of the “official” group from Japan, which consisted of Masuaki, Tharpe, and Professor T. Miyauchi, who is an expert on “nengraphy,” which is Japanese for “thoughtography.” He didn’t take any part in the Granada experiments.

According to Tharpe, the first two photographs were black, but the

third produced a picture. This “picture” looked like a black square partly washed out by a white circle, leaving two black corners in the shape of triangles. Tharpe said that Masuaki had asked him how to symbolize Switzerland. His answer had been, “By the Alps, or the Matterhorn,” subsequently explaining that the shape of these was triangular. The photograph was therefore captioned “The Matterhorn.”

The version given us by the producer on the morning of our arrival was more detailed. The session after lunch took place in the hotel room. Masuaki said he wanted to work without the film crew—there were too many observers around, he said—so the camera and lights were switched on by Gordon Burns, the program presenter. Also present were Jeremy Fox (the producer), David Tharpe, and his girlfriend. Granada suggested the use of another Polaroid camera, and a fresh film pack was loaded in front of the movie camera. But, said the producer, Masuaki wanted to use the camera that had been with him over lunch. He drew attention to this camera and the case that had held it. This was a small black case with a hinged lid, and was only just large enough for a Polaroid camera.

With both hands Masuaki placed the camera in the case and closed the lid. After several seconds, the producer told us, Masuaki took the camera from the case and produced the “Matterhorn” photograph. This was the first photograph, not the third as claimed by Tharpe, who also seems to have forgotten that, for no apparent reason, Masuaki had placed the camera in the case.

We have tried, without success, to find out what the developed movie film showed. However, the circumstances do not convince us that the photographs were evidence to prove the case for “thoughtography,” for Masuaki could have operated the shutter release while placing or removing the camera from the case.

As previously mentioned, the afternoon brought no further results. Masuaki thought that he might be able to produce some photographs that evening if a small party were held in his room. This the television team arranged, and the party was held. But still Masuaki was unable to live up to his claims.

When we arrived on the third morning we were told that Masuaki had again been left with a camera and film overnight. It was confidently expected that—as on previous occasions—this would lead to an early success.

The first photograph to be peeled was black. But the second had a gray impression of the Eiffel Tower with a lamppost in the foreground

and slightly to the right of the tower. After inspection, Morris Smith again said that there was no evidence to show whether or not the film pack had been tampered with. The serial number on the photo confirmed that the film was from the batch supplied by Polaroid for the tests. This had also been the case with the other "successes."

Further tests using fresh film were not successful. After about an hour a short break was called. While few people were paying attention, Masuaki pulled a shot from the camera. On it were a number of vague light smudges running down the picture. These, it turned out, can be produced by pulling the film out of the camera in a jerky manner, as Morris Smith effectively demonstrated. Further tests using fresh film

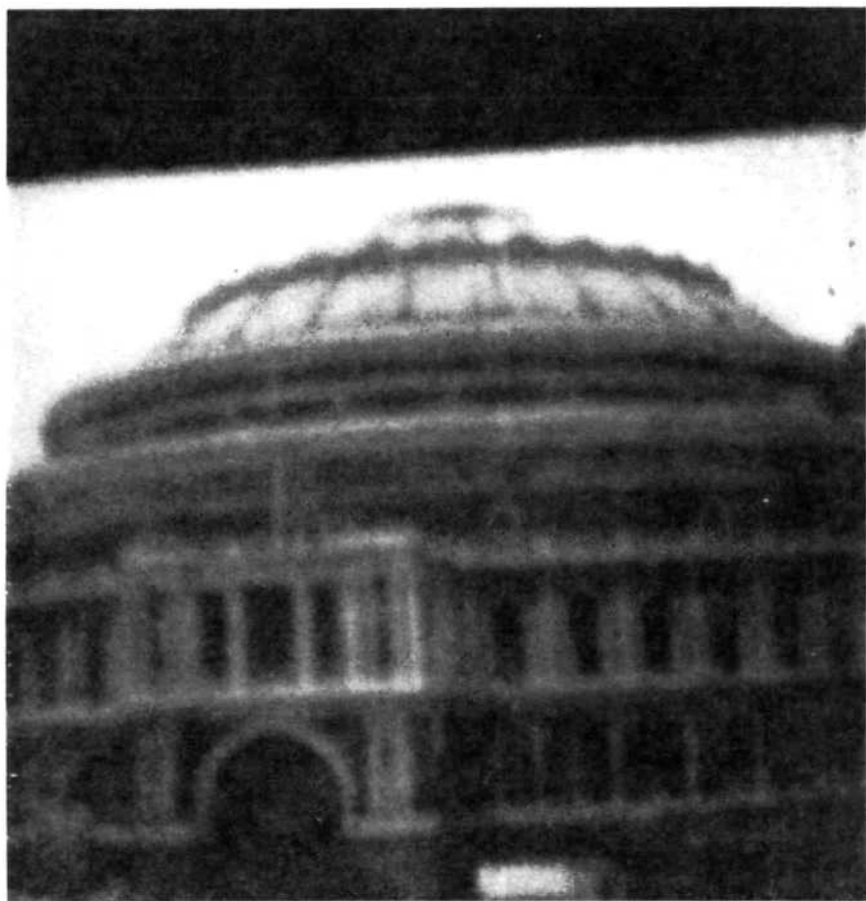


Image of Bath Cathedral exposed onto Polaroid film by Mike Hutchinson without a camera, using a color transparency and a "pinhole projector."

were not successful.

Morris Smith told us that, while in theory it is possible to take a film pack to pieces, expose each frame to the light, and reassemble it, he wasn't exactly sure how. (Obviously this is not something that Polaroid needed to do.) The main problem is that complete darkness is necessary. The film is very fast (3000 ASA, compared to around 100 ASA for normal film) and even a "safe" light used in a conventional darkroom would fog the film. He and one of the writers (M.H.) decided to take the pack to pieces and reassemble it. M.H. tried to reassemble it with his eyes closed, but found that when trying to slide the final piece on, it fouled the film, and if he continued would have folded it back. Opening his eyes, he realized that this final piece need not be slid on but could be snapped in place without difficulty.

It still remained to be discovered how an impression could be made on each frame without showing signs of tampering. We knew that the film could be folded back without showing signs that it had been. Perhaps at this stage a contact print could be made. Alternatively, it might be possible to make a crude pinhole "projector" using a slide viewer. If pointed at the folded film, a quick press on the slide illuminator might create enough light to produce a poor quality picture.

To test this theory, M.H. carried out experiments in his apartment hallway. This was the darkest place he could find. Even so, a small amount of light came through glass panels at the top of five doors. This light was just enough to see by when his eyes became dark-adapted, but did not fog the film in any noticeable way.

The front lens of the slide viewer was covered with a piece of cardboard that had a hole in it made by a small darning needle. The pack was taken to pieces and the film was unfolded. One end of the film is fixed to the pack by a staple. Taking care not to tear the film from the staple, it was folded back with one hand. The other hand pointed the "projector" toward the film at a distance of six to eight inches. An exposure of two or three seconds is all that is needed. In this way, up to eight frames can be exposed.

In M.H.'s experiment the "projector" was hand-held. While this did not cause much "shake" on the prints, it did make it difficult to expose the full frame every time. However, it would be quite simple to make a small stand that would both steady and aim the projected image correctly.

The size of the subject on the print can be varied by altering the

distance of the projected image. This means that sometimes only part of the original slide will be reproduced. The positioning of the main subject can also be altered by different angles of projection. For example, two of Masuaki's previous successes were aerial photographs of the Statue of Liberty. While the view and the shadows were identical, the Statue in one picture was in a different position of the frame.

These variations are to be expected when using a pinhole "projector." Similarly, variations of exposure also occur. Could it be that, after seeing the underexposed photographs of "Trafalgar Square" and the "Guardsmen," Masuaki decided to give a second or two extra to the "Eiffel Tower," which turned out to be overexposed?

## Conclusions

Under fairly tight conditions Masuaki Kiyota was unable to fulfill his claim to project mental images onto film. The only time he achieved any success was after the film had been in his possession—and not under any control—for at least two hours.

Unfortunately, no steps were taken to ensure that the film pack could not be tampered with. In fairness to the television team, this only seems important with hindsight. Given the benefit of this report, we hope that future experimenters will either seal the pack or, preferably, prepare it in such a way that any signs of tampering would be obvious.

Finally, a few words of praise for the television team. They started the assignment believing in Masuaki and hoping for good results. Their initial enthusiasm and confidence gave way to understandable skepticism when it became evident that Masuaki couldn't perform under tight conditions as claimed. However, they didn't let this sway them in their professional approach, nor encourage them to loosen the controls. Whether the negative results will lead to a final program being broadcast remains to be seen. •