

BOOK REVIEW

The Star Gate Archives : Reports of the United States Government Sponsored Psi Program, 1972–1995. Volume 3: Psychokinesis
compiled and edited by Edwin C. May and Sonali Bhattacharya.
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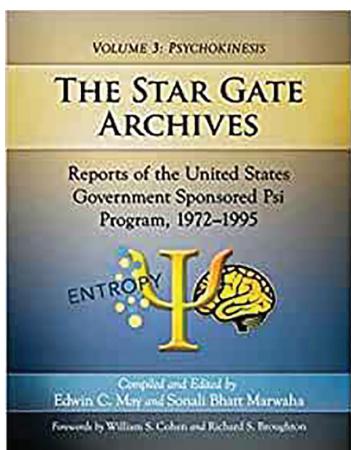
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The remote viewing research conducted at Stanford Research Institute (SRI) and later at Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) was covered in *The Star Gate Archives Volumes 1* and *2*, both reviewed in this journal (see Mörck, 2018, 2019). Less well-known is the fact that much psychokinesis (PK) research was also carried out. This research “ . . . was never intended to be an academic exercise typical of most laboratories. Rather, the only interest was to determine the degree to which PK might be used as part of a defensive or even offensive weapon system” (p. 12). This sounds dramatic. To U.S. intelligence agencies, a proper threat assessment was deemed necessary due to research conducted in the Soviet Union. The research in America, at SRI, was initially directed by Harold Puthoff from 1972 on, and later, for about ten years, by one of the volume’s editors, Edwin May. In addition to research reports and reviews, Volume 3, like its predecessor volumes, includes nine appendixes, a list of abbreviations, an extensive glossary, an author index, and a subject index. The papers are arranged chronologically, but it is not necessarily a good idea to read them in that order.

THE BACKSTORY

After World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union engaged in the Cold War: “The era was marked by deep suspicion, espionage being the tool at hand . . . ” (p. 7). In the U.S., the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)



channeled money for research through the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology (also known as the Human Ecology Fund). Unwittingly, the American Psychological Association, in 1960, accepted money from the government to send psychologists to the Soviet Union (APA, 1977). The psychologists, including Gardner Murphy, later wrote about what they had seen (Bauer, 1962).

In 1960 there were already rumors that parapsychological research was

ongoing in the Soviet Union after a long hiatus (Krippner, 1971). A reason for the renewed interest was the so-called Nautilus hoax. The USS Nautilus was the world's first nuclear-propelled submarine and could remain submerged far longer than diesel-electric submarines. It was also the first submarine to travel beneath the North Pole, in 1958. The next year a story appeared, and it claimed that the Nautilus had been involved in a successful telepathy experiment. This has never been confirmed. Eventually, it turned out that the original story derived from Jacques Bergier (Ebon, 1983). The Soviets could not ignore the story due to its implications. At the time, radio communication with a submarine was not possible unless the submarine surfaced, hence the Nautilus story suggested that the U.S. had an advantage.

As a result of the increased interest in parapsychology, psychics such as Boris Ermolayev, Nina Kulagina, Rosa Kuleshova, Julius Krmessky, and Alla Vinogradava emerged in the Soviet Union. In addition, Kirlian photography and psychotronic generators were developed. Allegedly, the latter, popularly known as psychotronic weapons, could store and direct psychic energy. Robert Pavlita was perhaps the best-known inventor of these devices. Reports about experiments in the Soviet Union appeared in the *Journal of Paraphysics*, but many accounts about experiments were published in newspapers and popular magazines. When a clip of Kulagina moving objects with PK was shown to members of the Society of American Magicians, it evoked laughter (Christopher, 1975), but to U.S. intelligence agencies

this was no laughing matter. Lack of information, alarmist claims, and uncertainty about the possibilities forced U.S. intelligence agencies to pay attention.

During the 1970s U.S. intelligence agencies such as the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) requested several reports about parapsychological research in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (e.g., Khokhlov, 1975). In 1978 the psychic Ingo Swann was invited to the 17th Annual U.S. Army Operations Research Symposium where he delivered a talk, "The threat of possible psychic techniques in future conflicts." Later, a few articles about parapsychology appeared in journals such as *Military Review* (Alexander, 1980) and *Military Intelligence* (Groller, 1986). During the 1980s Jack Houck popularized PK parties. Readers must have paused when they saw the heading "Metal-bending parties draw government brass" in *Science and Governmental Report*, 1 October, 1983.

In America, parapsychology had gained a foothold in the 1970s, and Willis Harman, futurist at SRI International, was quoted:

It is hazardous to make predictions in this field, but I believe we are on the verge of discoveries at the outer fringes of scientific knowledge that may completely alter our notions of the mind's capabilities. (*U.S. News & World Report*, 1978)

INTRODUCTION

Former Senator William Cohen and the parapsychologist Richard Broughton have contributed Forewords. Broughton puts the research in context. In addition, May has written a brief Preface. These texts are the same as in Volumes 1 and 2. However, the Editors have written a new Introduction, in which they draw from two reports requested by the DIA (Maire & LaMothe, 1975; LaMothe, 1972). These reports have long been available. The one by LaMothe, in particular, is curious. One cannot help but be surprised by the sources he naïvely relied on. The Editors have included a section from his report. LaMothe thought that the intelligence agencies had to pay attention to the research in the Soviet Union due to "its military implications especially in mind manipulation and controlled offensive behavior" (LaMothe, 1972, p. 358) and claimed that the U.S. had lagged behind.

Among other strange claims, LaMothe noted that Soviet researchers had (allegedly) tried to “apply telepathy to indoctrinate and re-educate antisocial elements. It was hoped that suggestion at a distance could induce individuals, without their being aware of it, to adopt the officially desired political and social attitudes” (p. 361). This sounds like science fiction. One comes across this claim in an earlier report by Milan Ryzl (1967). Ryzl claimed that the secret service in Czechoslovakia had pressured him to “supply information for it about parapsychological research in abroad” (Ryzl, 1967, p. 7). This contributed to his decision to move to America. In contrast to LaMothe (1972), Khokhlov (1975) emphasized the possibility that the Soviet Union had engaged in a disinformation campaign. The Editors briefly touch on this possibility. U.S. intelligence agencies must have been bemused by the situation.

In some circumstances electrostatic effects can produce phenomena that are erroneously interpreted as evidence for PK. The Editors write about this and stress how difficult it is to rule out normal explanations in PK research. They also comment on a clip with Felicia Parise (Honorton, 1993/2015; Pilkington, 2015), but miss a better opportunity to discuss electrostatic effects. Many of the effects produced by Vinogradava in the Soviet Union were most likely due to electrostatics; although, according to Adamenko (1979), she could perform even when grounded.

The Editors note:

One of the most important conclusions to be drawn from the reports in this volume is that conducting proper PK research requires substantial engineering skill and insight into the many things that may mimic PK but are not PK. (p. 18)

THE RESEARCH

The focus in Volume 3 is on PK research. PK, according to the Glossary, “refers to the direct influence of mind on a physical system that cannot be entirely accounted for by the mediation of any known physical energy” (p. 460). The researchers at SRI International defined it as “human-centered production of physical effects not mediated by

any obvious mechanism" (p. 82). A number of terms have been used in place of PK, including anomalous perturbation, causal psi, remote action, and remote perturbation. The researchers noted that PK "offers the potential for remote man/machine interactions with computers, locks, switches, codes, and other sensitive or delicate mechanical or electronic apparatus" (p. 35).

Early on the reader comes across brief accounts of an informal test, in 1972 with Swann, involving a magnetometer. (Puthoff described this in a letter to the CIA; the people there were, however, more intrigued by the remote viewing also displayed at the time than by the PK effect). A PK study, involving a gradiometer, with Pat Price, better known for his remote viewing, also is described. The researchers noted that the passage of a truck in the parking lot adjacent to the lab could cause an artifact, hence it had to be monitored.

In the late 1960s, Helmut Schmidt, at Boeing Science Research Laboratories, developed quantum-based random number generators (RNGs) which he used in a number of studies. The participants were asked to either predict or influence the output of the RNGs. In the wake of his early studies, other parapsychologists also used RNGs in a number of studies. Early on, Schmidt let the beta decay of strontium 90 function as the source of randomness, but the sources of randomness have varied. Just as strange as the fact that some participants seem to be able to predict or influence the output of true RNGs is that some perform as well when pseudo-RNGs are used; their random numbers derive from a computer-based algorithm rather than from hardware. Schmidt thought that psychological factors were important for the success of his participants, and when possible he went out of his way to make them feel comfortable. The researchers at SRI International were clearly aware of this, during an initial pilot study, in 1979, with RNGs:

. . . each subject was allowed to select his favorite time of day, his preferred experimenter, the source [of randomness] that seemed to work best for him, and the number of trials he would do at a single sitting. (p. 65)

The participants in the pilot study were 17 employees at SRI International. Seven subjects were selected for participation in a formal

study. During the pilot study the number of trials they undertook varied widely (42, 115, 14, 29, 74, 45, and 228). Two of the participants who contributed most trials scored significantly above chance in the pilot study. In the formal followup, each participant undertook about 100 trials. The researchers wrote that “precautions and controls exceeded any former experiments” (p. 67). One of the two who scored significantly above chance in the pilot study did so again. That subject went on to participate in further studies. In addition, another participant scored significantly above chance. However, a later study, in 1986, was conducted with 20 subjects who were expected to undertake 100 trials; four dropped out, and no new high-scoring subject was identified. Unfortunately, one of the high-scoring subjects was unavailable for research in 1987, and another dropped out during an RNG study the same year.

The researchers noted the possibility that:

... the subject scans the unperturbed binary sequence ahead in time and selects the proper time to initiate the trial. This strategy enables him to take advantage of an unperturbed, yet significantly deviant subsequence and achieve a success for that trial. (p. 67)

Schmidt (1970) briefly noted this possibility, but this way of thinking is at the core of the intuitive data sorting (earlier referred to as psychoenergetic data selection or intuitive data selection) model developed by researchers at SRI International. This was later further developed into Decision Augmentation Theory (DAT) which the Editors describe as “a heuristic mathematical model that determines whether the data . . . are a result of a force-like causal effect or an informational effect” (p. 20). In simple terms, PK or precognition. The anthology includes papers about this, including two from the *Journal of Parapsychology* (May et al., 1995a, 1995b).

In 1983 parapsychologists were given an opportunity to present at the *Symposium on Applications of Anomalous Phenomena* (Jones, 1984) to which only government scientists and intelligence personnel had been invited. Among others, May, Puthoff, and Russell Targ gave talks. May spoke about the PK research that had been conducted at SRI International. His talk has been included in the anthology. Puthoff

spoke about the remote viewing research, and Targ spoke about what he had seen during a visit to the Soviet Union. Someone later wrote an article for the National Security Agency's journal about Targ's observations (*Cryptolog*, 1983).

While reviewing the literature, the scientists at SRI International became intrigued by the research conducted by Julian Isaacs (1984) in the UK. Isaacs (1989) once shared his thoughts and misgivings about studies involving RNGs. His own approach was rather different. Participants in his studies were expected to influence piezoelectric strain gauges. He also held so-called PK parties during which the attendees bent spoons. By the time the researchers became interested in his work, Isaacs had moved to the U.S. and was teaching at John F. Kennedy University. Isaacs accepted a subcontract; his task was to "screen, assess, train, and make available to SRI International" (p. 148) participants whose performance was deemed promising. Meanwhile the scientists at SRI International "retained the task of designing and constructing all experimental hardware" (p. 148).

May once noted: "In human-oriented sciences, replication usually implies conceptual replication, since exact replication of experiments is impossible and probably undesirable" (p. 80). The papers concerning the replication attempts with subjects selected by Isaacs are (like others) technical and show how much care the researchers paid to potential artifacts. Three events during the first study at SRI International were "sufficiently interesting to warrant further investigation . . ." (p. 174). However, later a likely artifact was identified. In addition, after a second, "the most elaborate and exhaustive" (p. 178), PK study, the researchers had to acknowledge that they had found no evidence of a PK effect.

William Braud at the Mind Science Foundation was also a recipient of subcontracts. Braud had participants "attempt to retard the rate of hemolysis (destruction) of red blood cells which had been placed into a tube of distilled water and saline in a distant room" (p. 300). He reported the results in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* (Braud, 1990). The researchers at SRI International were not only interested in the results, they also wanted to know whether intuitive data sorting was the cause. They were unable to determine this (but see May, 2015). Palmer (2007) suggests that an experimenter psi effect was at play. Thanks to another subcontract, Stephen LaBerge

and Marilyn Schlitz were also able to follow up on earlier research on the effect of remote staring. Many people report having felt when they were being stared at. This is not surprising given that the results of much research suggests that the observed person's physiology does react. LaBerge and Schlitz noted:

This work, in the context of previous research by independent researchers, has significant implications for our understanding of human communication processes and for a reevaluation of a worldview in which humans are seen as isolated beings. (p. 331)

SUMMARY

The conclusion Edwin May drew from the results of the research was that there is insufficient evidence for PK; it remains unproven, and the results of much research can be better explained by Decision Augmentation Theory (DAT). The Editors do however acknowledge that "there are a few documented cases of macro-PK that are most intriguing such as poltergeist phenomena . . ." (p. 18). May has been in Russia several times, and together with Larissa Vilenskaya (also known as Laura Faith) he wrote two reports about the PK research conducted there (May & Vilenskaya, 1992; Vilenskaya & May 1994); which are included. The Editors think that the Russian research efforts "are not very promising" (p. 18). Some papers about research carried out in China also have been included. What comes across most clearly in the anthology is actually how hard it is to conduct much PK research and to determine the true cause of effects. Nevertheless, many researchers are up for a challenge.

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