

BOOK REVIEW

The Star Gate Archives. Volume 1: Remote Viewing, 1972–1984 compiled and edited by Edwin C. May and Sonali Bhatt Marwaha. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018. 546 pp. \$95.00 (paperback). ISBN 978-1476667522.

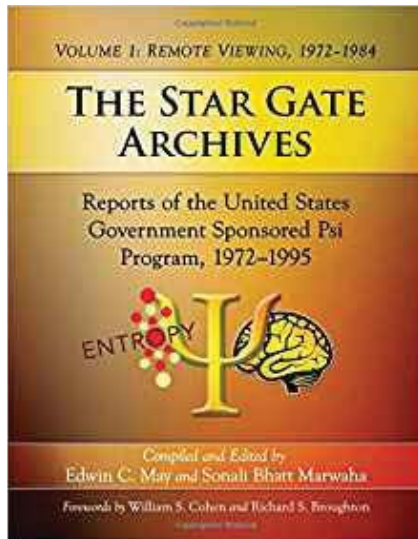
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Remote viewing (RV) has been defined as “. . . the ability of a person to perceive, by an intellectual process, remote physical locations blocked from ordinary perception by distance or shielding” (p. 228). This was long the focus of research at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) by Harold Puthoff, Russell Targ, and Edwin May, all with backgrounds in physics. May joined the researchers at SRI in 1976 and directed the research from 1985 until the closure of the Star Gate program in 1995 (the text on the back cover is misleading). Star Gate was the last name used for a military RV program that was initiated in 1977. That name was chosen because it “. . . invoked the feeling of exploration, a sense of reaching beyond our ordinary capabilities, of expanding the boundaries of our human potential” (Graff 2002:8). During the period covered by the anthology, the names used for the program were Gondola Wish, Grill Flame, and Center Lane.

Although the researchers were engaged in classified work, they attended conferences and presented some findings in the open literature. *The Star Gate Archives Volume 1* consists of a collection of unclassified reports and declassified documents. The anthology also includes no fewer than nine appendixes, a list of abbreviations, an extensive glossary, an author index, and a subject index. Brief comments about all reproduced documents can be found in the Introduction. The Editors, May and Sonali Bhatt Marwaha, have really tried to be helpful.

The Backstory

The U.S. and the Soviet Union had long been engaged in the Cold War after World War II. During the 1960s, U.S. intelligence agencies became puzzled and somewhat concerned because in the Soviet Union parapsychological research was once again being undertaken after a long hiatus. The CIA had dabbled with parapsychology earlier and funded Stephen Abrams (Black



2001), but had not developed any operational applications of psychic abilities.

Although exchanges with Western parapsychologists had been tolerated (though no doubt monitored) for some years in the Soviet Union, at the end of the 1960s the Soviet attitude changed as if the research had become classified. The sensational book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (Ostrander & Schroeder 1970) became a best-seller in the early 1970s. This and other publications awakened the fear that the Soviets were ahead of the Americans in a psychic arms

race. Ebon, almost alone, argued that “. . . American and Soviet researches in parapsychology are actually more complementary than competitive” (Ebon 1971:8). Several reports concerning the developments in the Soviet Union were requested (e.g., LaMothe 1972, Hamilton 1977, Wortz et al. 1976). The researchers at SRI, too, made threat assessments, mainly by doing their own experiments.

In 1972, first Targ and later Puthoff reached out to the CIA. Puthoff wrote a letter concerning an experiment at SRI with Ingo Swann, now known as the father of RV. That letter arrived at the right time and the CIA provided funding for additional experiments with Swann. In 1973, Swann and Patrick Price accidentally remote-viewed a National Security Agency facility (the West Virginia Site). In 1974, Price remote-viewed a site in the Soviet Union, at Semipalatinsk: “Several hours of tape transcript and a notebook full of drawings were generated over a two-week period” (p. 93). The reproduced documents cover all this, but not the evaluations—many remain classified (but see Kress 1977/1999, Richelson 2001, Stillman 1975). Wilhelm (1976, 1977) revealed to the world that the CIA had been interested in the research at SRI. However, by that time, Price was dead and the CIA no longer funded the research (they nevertheless continued to task RVers).

Introduction

Parapsychological research funded by intelligence agencies and psychic spying were bound to be controversial from the start. However, the RV program had some supporters in high places. Among them were Senators

William Cohen, Claiborne Pell, John Glenn, and Charles Rose. Cohen has written a brief Foreword: "I believe it was a mistake for us to abandon the effort to explore the power of the mind" (p. 1). The parapsychologist Richard Broughton has contributed a generous Foreword about the history of parapsychology and the RV research.

The Editors have written an informative Introduction, which covers the backstory and outlines the history of the RV program. The Editors have included commentary about important reviews of the program, timelines, detailed information about funding, and a glossary. In an appendix the Editors list subcontractors, which included parapsychologists such as Charles Honorton, William Braud, and Robert Morris. It seems clear that parapsychology benefited from the belief that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were engaged in a psychic arms race. Although the Editors acknowledge that the research provoked criticism, they provide no details.

Controversies

The first reproduced document is a proposal, now mainly of historical interest, addressed to the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Targ and Puthoff wrote

Ultimately we would hope to obtain both an understanding of the ESP phenomena, and the skill to train subjects sufficiently to provide them with an ESP ability functioning at a useful operational level. (p. 34)

They got funding and their later report, concerning research with an ESP teaching machine, is reproduced. The study was criticized by Gardner (1975), and later he republished his article and the subsequent correspondence, including letters from the researchers (Gardner 1981). Apparently, people at the CIA also studied the report and were unable to explain the results (Kress 1977/1999). However, in light of their goal the results were disappointing, though a gifted subject was identified, Duane Elgin, who later participated in RV experiments.

In the 1970s, Uri Geller was famous for metal-bending, clairvoyance, and telepathy. A magician, James Randi, became well-known for his attempts to convince the public that Geller was just a magician and not a psychic. Geller was tested at SRI, and although many strange events occurred in his presence (Targ & Puthoff 1977/2005), in their report to the CIA the researchers concluded: "It was always necessary for him in the experimental situation to have physical contact with any metal he bent" (p. 66). Their films were ". . . insufficient to determine whether metals are being bent by normal or paranormal means" (p. 66).

Geller also participated in ESP tests, and in some he was to reproduce drawings. The first trials were single-blind (at least one experimenter knew the target): “Geller made seven almost exact reproductions of the seven chosen target pictures, with no errors” (p. 65). The results encouraged the researchers to have Geller participate in better-controlled experiments. They published the results of their research in the prestigious journal *Nature* (Targ & Puthoff 1974)—the publication was bound to provoke controversy. The Editors have reproduced the article. However, the issue that included the article also included a critical Editorial that is not reproduced. Randi (1975) argued that Geller must have fooled the researchers. In response, they circulated a Fact Sheet and in their popular book, *Mind-Reach* (Targ & Puthoff 1977/2005), commented on Randi’s speculations.

In addition to the experiments with Geller, the article in *Nature* included the results of nine RV trials with Patrick Price—this, too, provoked controversy. Marks and Kammann (1978) discovered that the transcripts contained cues about in which order the trials had been carried out and argued that the cues had helped the judges. The researchers tested this hypothesis. Charles Tart edited the transcripts and the series was rejudged by a new judge—“. . . seven of the nine were again correctly matched” (Targ, Puthoff, & Tart 1980:191). However, years later, when Marks and Scott (1986) were finally allowed to see the edited transcripts, they found that not all cues had been removed. It is unfortunate that the Editors do not discuss this controversy and other methodological problems in RV studies (e.g., see Kennedy 1979).

The Research

During the period covered by the anthology, 1972–1984, the focus was on evaluating the operational utility of RV and finding practical applications of psychic abilities. For example, the researchers tested whether Price could detect which envelopes contained secret writing. While two RVers were onboard a submersible, an attempt was made to use RV to communicate (by associating the targets with different messages), but only two trials were carried out. Twice RVers were provided with just a driver’s license, despite this “excellent results were obtained” (p. 160). Studies involving search tasks were also conducted, but the researchers eventually concluded: “. . . on average, both the laboratory experiments and operational use have been disappointing” (p. 501). Nevertheless, the researchers gradually assembled an impressive body of evidence for RV which suggested that it could be useful now and then. However, the documents often only summarize experiments and operational RV sessions, and many of the descriptions are spare and inadequate for making assessments.

Much of the early research was exploratory, but there is a noteworthy exception, namely the research with Hella Hammid. The researchers became interested in her when they analyzed the results of an EEG experiment. The basic idea is that a sender is stimulated, in this case with a flashing stroboscopic light, and elsewhere a receiver is supposed to react. Similar studies had already been conducted, including one funded by the CIA (i.e. Duane & Behrendt 1965). Formal replication attempts of their pilot study were made with Hammid as the receiver. This research is described in several of the reproduced documents (some descriptions give the reader the impression that either four subjects or just Hammid participated in the first study when, in fact, six subjects participated). When taken together, the results are inconclusive. That said, Hammid turned out to be a good RVer (but see Marks 1981, 1982, Puthoff & Targ 1981).

In our experiments, we have never found anyone who could not learn to perceive scenes, including buildings, roads, and people, even those at great distances and blocked from ordinary perception.

(Targ & Puthoff 1977/2005:5)

Even CIA personnel occasionally participated in experiments and were able to RV. However, after having conducted mass-screening studies (Lantz & May 1988, Trask, Lantz, Luke, & May 1989), the researchers concluded: "Approximately 1% of the general population possesses a natural remote viewing ability" (p. 495). One is reminded of how J. B. Rhine and his associates early on discovered several gifted subjects, but later on had to work with ordinary subjects (Pratt 1975). If the researchers are to be believed, many people are able to RV now and then, but gifted subjects are rare.

Once the CIA realized what gifted subjects such as Swann, Price, Elgin, and Hammid could do, they wanted to know everything about them. One of the reproduced documents concerns the results of the extensive testing they undertook. Neuropsychologists may find the results interesting, but no clear profile emerged:

Several years of observation by workers in the field has, however, led to an informal guide . . . successful remote viewers tend to be confident, outgoing, adventurous, broadly successful individuals with some artistic bent . . . (p. 352)

This is essentially what Frederick Atwater was told when he visited SRI International in 1978 (Atwater 2001).

The reason for Atwater's visit was that the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) in 1977 had initiated a program (Gondola

Wish). The Soviets' interest in parapsychology still worried intelligence agencies. In 1978, the basic idea was that the best way to assess the threat was to teach Americans to RV. Eventually, six subjects were selected and their RV abilities assessed at SRI International. One of the reproduced documents concerns this evaluation. Part of this report was published by Targ (1994) in the open literature, and more recently Targ (2015) has shared some further details. It is noteworthy how little the researchers wrote about the subjects (cf. Schnabel 1997). Joseph McMoneagle (1997), now one of the best-known RVerS, has revealed that he was subject 372. The reproduced drawings are certainly thought-provoking. The RVerS went on to become psychic spies for the U.S. intelligence agencies, using RV to gather information about various sites and people.

In order to learn what characterizes good RVerS, the Personality Assessment System (PAS) was administered. The PAS is “. . . a comprehensive interpretive framework for profiles of subtest performances that have been generated by the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)” (p. 422). The sample of RVerS was small, so to bolster the sample additional participants were recruited, “persons who had spontaneously reported psi phenomena” and “people with demonstrated psi skills” (p. 423), but it is unclear how many of them were RVerS. The researchers concluded:

It appears that potentially good viewers appear in about five to seven personality categories and collectively represent about 10 percent of the general population. (p. 427)

The involvement of the military brought along the need to enhance RV and to develop a training program. The latter task mainly fell to Ingo Swann. He had already tried for years to understand RV, and gradually after extensive self-testing he developed what came to be known as Coordinate Remote Viewing, also known as Controlled Remote Viewing (CRV). The Editors have reproduced several documents about this. One of Swann's ideas was that during training the RVerS should get feedback immediately—if what the RVer said was wrong Swann remained silent. Swann was hence not blind to the target during training sessions. Elsewhere, one of the Editors, Edwin May, has provided some frank critical commentary about this fact (May, Rubel, & Auerbach 2014). The researchers understood that Swann's training method was problematic, but he was allowed to continue. Swann's own RV appears to have improved, but the efficacy of the training for his trainees was in fact not always properly assessed at SRI International (due to lack of time and funds). There is no consensus about the value of CRV training in the RV community.

Summary

The Editors have put together an informative anthology that gives readers a good idea about the kind of research that went on at SRI International. However, since the book is dedicated to present and future generations of researchers, the lack of information about methodological problems is unfortunate. The methodological problems alone, however, are insufficient to dismiss the evidence for RV. That said, the reproduced documents “. . . were written as responses to explicit statements of work and, therefore, do not generally follow an academic model of scientific reporting” (p. 6).

It is not easy to say whether intelligence agencies should task RVerS. The researchers often stressed that “. . . the information is fragmentary and imperfect, and therefore should not be relied on alone . . .” (p. 361), but the anthology offers enough evidence to make it clear why intelligence agencies tasked RVerS. However, few operational RV sessions “. . . are carried out under the same conditions. Feedback in operational contexts is often limited, making evaluation difficult” (p. 399). The reproduced documents do not contain detailed information about the sponsors’ evaluations, and many remain classified (though two examples are presented, one target was a chemical warfare storage facility in Germany and the other target was a biological warfare facility in the Soviet Union). The evaluations conducted while the program was active make it clear that the RVerS’ accuracy was highly variable. Some data are undeniably interesting, but much erroneous data were also generated by RVerS (e.g., Lenahan 1981).

For various reasons, the focus early on had to be on operational utility and practical applications rather than on the basic research that was needed (Kress 1977/1999). In hindsight, it seems as if the RVerS became operational too early and that CRV was taught before it had been properly evaluated; in fact, it was not even fully developed when Swann accepted his first trainees. There were mitigating circumstances. Because of the Iran hostage crisis, the military RVerS became operational just months after their RV sessions at SRI International. The need for funding and the involvement of the military produced the need to offer a training program fast. Now that the Cold War is over, it is possible to step back and assess the evidence for RV and its operational utility—reading the *Star Gate Archives* is a good starting point.

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