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October 22, 1974

Dr. Bernard Dixon
Editor, New Scientist
New Science Publications
128 Long Acre
London WC2E 9QH, England

To the Editor of the New Scientist:

We would like to take this opportunity to comment on some of the points raised in your recent sixteen page article regarding Uri Geller and our investigation of him.

You correctly relate that the SRI paper in Nature does not indicate any observation of paranormal metal bending on the part of Mr. Geller. Our conclusions pertain only to his apparent paranormal perceptual abilities which were indicated by our tests. In these tests Mr. Geller was separated by up to 475 meters from the pictures that he was to attempt to duplicate.

The principle argument in the New Scientist article with regard to the SRI work is that Geller could have obtained target information through the use of an implanted radio receiver used in conjunction with confederates or bugged rooms. Since it was we who first brought this possibility to the attention of your author when he visited us last January, we consider it irresponsible for him to lay naivete about such matters at our door. At the time of his visit we alerted him to take appropriate precautions in experiments he was proposing to carry out with Geller because we were well aware of Dr. Puharich's expertise in the area of micro-electronics, having collected his reports on this subject since 1963. Throughout our work with Geller we took precautions against the very form of trickery suggested by your author, first, by excluding everyone other than the experimenter or experimenters from the target area, and, second, by maintaining silence about the target until after the experiment was completed and Geller's response was collected.

A similar case holds true for the allegation that Geller might have used a "radio-controlled die" in the SRI experiments in which he identified the uppermost face of a die in a steel box. The die we used was marked with an SRI code and was of the transparent variety to preclude the use of any internal electronics to indicate die position. Again, it is we who brought the existence of such electronic devices to the attention of your author. We are personally experienced and familiar with the use and variety of conjuring paraphernalia and we alerted your author to beware of such devices.

In view of the above we take great exception to the allegations that we were heedless of these possibilities, and we consider such reporting to be a substantial and deliberate misrepresentation of the facts.

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New Scientist
London, England

Russell Targ
Harold Puthoff

The New Scientist article also exemplifies a recurring dichotomy peculiar to reporting in this area. On the one hand, researchers who over a period of weeks set up carefully controlled experiments sometimes find evidence for certain paranormal phenomena and with great caution examine the data for a year before publishing. On the other hand, speculation to the contrary, (which is eventually given equal weight in the press) is often based on anecdotal material. An especially pithy example of this is the inclusion in the New Scientist of a story excerpted from a Time Magazine story which stated that SRI was visited by two U.S. Government representatives (George Lawrence and Ray Hyman) who purportedly observed our work and considered that "the controls were sloppy and inadequate". Although widely reported, we categorically deny that these men ever observed any SRI experimentation at all. When these men arrived at SRI with a request to observe our controlled experiments, they were denied permission to do so. We had had several such requests per week and had previously concluded that it would be impossible to carry out controlled experimentation under such conditions. As an alternative, they spent an engaging couple of hours with Geller in which they observed the informal coffee table demonstrations which Geller favors, and in which they tried a number of their own and, from our standpoint, uncontrolled experiments (which we have on videotape). It is irresponsible, however, for these men or anyone else to retroactively assign responsibility to SRI researchers for their unsatisfactory experiments. Similarly, it is unprofessional for a magazine of the calibre of New Scientist to proliferate such misinformation without determining the facts, especially since this had been previously corrected in New Scientist (July 12, 1973). The SRI criteria for a controlled experiment are carefully outlined in the Nature paper, and it is clear that we consider as uncontrolled any experiments involving observers knowledgeable of target material, as in the Lawrence-Hyman observations.

Finally, it is recognized that any researcher who tried to use anecdotal material obtained under uncontrolled conditions as proof of paranormal functioning would be considered derelict in his scientific responsibility. From the standpoint of a serious researcher, that sword must remain double-edged. Anecdotal material, no matter how circumstantial, must be handled with the same caution and restraint with regard to refuting a phenomenon as with regard to validating it. The position of the SRI researchers is this: what is required in this field is more experimentation, not more speculation.

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29 October 1974

Mr. Henry A. Grunwald
Managing Editor
TIME Inc.
Rockefeller Center
New York, New York 10020

To the Editor of TIME:



We would like to comment on some of the points raised in TIME's critique of our paper, "Information Transmission under Conditions of Sensory Shielding" (NATURE, October 18, 1974).

Your readers should be made aware that although your entire story deals with our investigation of Uri Geller, the major part of our paper is based on work with other subjects. Our primary concern is the study of the phenomenon of paranormal perception, not the study of a particular subject such as Uri Geller.

A substantial portion of TIME's story is based on reporter Joe Hanlon's comments in the NEW SCIENTIST magazine, in which he discusses SRI's investigation of Geller. A principle argument in Hanlon's article (which you repeat) with regard to the SRI work is that SRI researchers were unaware that Geller could have obtained target information through the use of an implanted radio receiver used in conjunction with confederates or bugged rooms. Since it was we who first brought this possibility to the attention of Hanlon when he visited us last January, we consider it irresponsible for him to lay naivete about such matters at our door. At the time of his visit we alerted him to take appropriate precautions, as we had done, in experiments he was proposing to carry out with Geller. This reflected our awareness of the expertise of Dr. Puharich (Geller's mentor) in the area of micro-electronics, having collected his reports on this subject since 1963.

In view of the above, Hanlon's allegations that we were heedless of such possibilities is a substantial and deliberate misrepresentation of the facts. Furthermore, we communicated the basic falsehood of Hanlon's allegations directly to TIME via one of your West Coast representatives. We note that you chose to run your article without including this information. Therefore, your magazine must share responsibility for proliferating misinformation.

In an area as controversial as paranormal investigation, charlatanism--the effort to deceive by misdirection--must be guarded against in reporting as well as in experimentation.


Harold Puthoff

Russell Targ

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