

The Magic of Uri Geller

by James Randi

by Hal Puthoff

Fact Sheet correcting errors with regard to SRI work with Geller

1. Preface by Jaroff (p. xi): Geller convinced executives and researchers at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI)...that he could (among other things) distort solid metallic objects.

Fact: SRI's position on Geller's putative metal-bending ability is clearly stated in the researchers' Nature publication; "It has been widely reported that Geller has demonstrated the ability to bend metal by paranormal means. Although metal bending by Geller has been observed in our laboratory, we have not been able to combine such observations with adequately controlled experiments to obtain data sufficient to support the paranormal hypothesis." (Nature 252, No. 5476, pp. 602-607, October 18, 1974)

2. Randi (p. 7): Few of the Geller experiments, especially the famous tests at SRI in which Geller performed apparent miracles of ESP, include in their reports the fact that one Shipi Strang, once claimed by Geller as his cousin and his brother, was present.

Fact: During the SRI experimentation, neither Shipi nor any other potential confederate was permitted in the target area, a pre-condition for experimentation adopted on the basis of advice by project consulting magicians.

3. Randi (p. 9): But scientists are loathe to consult magicians.

Fact: At SRI one of the two responsible investigators is an amateur magician with over 20 years experience, a bay area magician who specializes in exposing fraudulent poltergeist

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cases is a continuing consultant from the beginning of the project, and Milbourne Christopher, a world-reknown magician and critic of psychic phenomena, was brought in to critique videotape and film of the Geller work, and to suggest protocols for further experimentation.

4. Randi (p. 9): Even while the Stanford Research Institute was involved in testing the Israeli Wonder, I wrote, offering my services, and have never received the courtesy of a reply.

Fact: Randi's letter, dated September 6, 1973, was months after completion of the SRI work with Geller.

5. Randi (p. 15): Then too, there seems to be developing a public belief that science approves the trend toward parapsychological research and that most people believe in psychic marvels. It is a fact that the vast majority of scientists today have no interest, nor belief, in these things...

Fact: According to a recent survey reported by Chris Evans in New Scientist, pp. 209, January 25, 1973, "Parapsychology-- What the Questionnaire Revealed," 67 percent of nearly 1500 responding (the majority of whom are working scientists and technologists) considered ESP to be an established fact or a likely possibility, and 88 percent held the investigation of ESP to be a legitimate scientific undertaking.

6. Randi (p. 34): Puthoff reprinted the Nature article without the page-and-a-half introduction! (Following paragraph implying editing out of material unfavorable to the paper.)

Fact: Reprint of article to which Randi refers is the standard Nature reprint sent to authors. The so-called Introduction Randi claims is deleted refers to an editorial at the front of the magazine, several pages earlier. Nature reprints standardly do not carry editorials, letters to the editor, etc.

7. Randi (p. 39): After reprinting Nature editorial Randi claims that he must give his own version of SRI paper, as SRI did not make paper available to him.

Fact: SRI paper to which he refers was in same magazine as the editorial he reprinted, a few pages later...a document in the public domain, available in any technical library, permission for the use of which is obtained from the magazine as was done for the editorial.

8. Randi (p. 42): There was no way that I could get to see the SRI film. Only the elite of the world of science and journalism were invited (to the Columbia symposium).

Fact: The Columbia symposium was widely known to be an open symposium to which any interested individual could come and for which no invitations were required.

9. Randi (pp. 43 and 44): Randi would have the reader believe that the compass sequence and spoon-bending sequence of the SRI film "Experiments with Uri Geller" are examples of where SRI scientists were taken in by magic tricks.

Fact: With regard to the compass sequence the film narration states "The following is an experiment which in retrospect we consider unsatisfactory as it didn't meet our protocol standards. Here the task is to deflect the compass needle... However, according to our protocol, if we could in any way debunk the experiment and produce the effects by any other means, then that experiment was considered null and void even if there were no indications that anything untoward happened. In this case, we found later that these types of deflections could be produced by a small piece of metal, so small in fact that they could not be detected by the magnetometer. Therefore, even though we had no evidence of this, we still considered the experiment inconclusive and an unsatisfactory type of experiment altogether."

With regard to the spoon-bending sequence, the film states "One of Geller's main attributes that had been reported to us was that he was able to bend metal...In the laboratory we did not find him able to do so...becomes clear in watching this film that simple photo interpretation is insufficient to determine whether the metal is bent by normal or paranormal means... It is not clear whether the spoon is being bent because he has extraordinarily strong fingers and good control of micro-manipulatory movements, or whether, in fact, the spoon "turns to plastic" in his hands, as he claims." (Text of narration of film "Experiments with Uri Geller," shown at Columbia and elsewhere. Text released as part of SRI press release of March 6, 1973, accompanying Columbia presentation.)

10. Randi (p. 56): Shipi was there, according to Hanlon, "constantly underfoot" during the tests.

Fact: Neither Shipi nor any other potential confederate was permitted in the target area during the tests. Hanlon's allegations to the contrary were refuted in Letters to the Editor, New Scientist, p. 443, November 1974.

11. Randi (pp. 47 thru 57): If you made an excuse to leave the room - and could have gotten just one quick glance at Shipi Strang, and he was trying to signal... A quick glance at this target might have given Shipi an impression of a horse... Such a response could result from a hand signal... This shape, which could have been transmitted by simple hand gestures or by a verbal clue...They might even have been watching Shipi by now...etc.

Fact: As indicated above, neither Shipi nor any other potential confederate was permitted in the target area, and Geller was never permitted to change his position (i.e., enter or leave experimental room) while an experiment was in progress.

12. Randi (p. 55): Captain Edgar Mitchell has said "I was there virtually all the time. I am a co-investigator on all that work...they were so eager to keep him (Geller) around that they worked themselves into a box by meeting his every whim..."

Fact: Captain Mitchell was not at SRI for any of the experimentation reported in Nature, but rather only during early efforts to find whether it was possible to introduce strict protocols as was finally done successfully.

13. Randi (p. 57): Only in the tests where there was no possibility of transmission of data from a confederate did Geller refuse to try the test or just fail it. (Referring to Experiments 5 - 7)

Fact: Two of the three experiments (6 and 7) were carried out under the same conditions as all of the others - no potential confederates in the target area. The third experiment (Exp. 5) was a special clairvoyance experiment - again with no potential confederate in the target area.

14. Randi (p. 58): (With regard to the Faraday cage experiments.) He could even reach his arm out of the cage. What is to prevent Shipi from signaling these three to Geller? Nothing.

Fact: The Faraday cage is entirely sealed and guarded. Only by opening the door can one reach out. With regard to Shipi acting as a confederate to signal to Geller, again, as in all experiments, neither Shipi nor any other potential confederate was permitted into the target area or knew of the target, a precaution insisted upon and followed as a result of advice from consulting magicians.

15. Randi (p. 63): And is it not curious that this Geller test series was never reprinted or mentioned by any of his SRI

disciples? (Referring to the 100-envelope double-blind clairvoyance test that Geller failed.)

Fact: This test, with its negative results, is also in the Nature paper, fourth paragraph from the end of the section on Geller.

16. Randi (p. 73): ...agreed to examine Geller's claims, with the arrangement that if the results were not positive no report would be issued...Did Geller have the same arrangement with the boys at SRI before he agreed to be tested there? I'll bet he did!

Fact: Negative results on compass deflection and metal bending are reported in the SRI film "Experiments with Uri Geller" Columbia Physics Colloquium, March 6, 1973, and negative results on metal bending and 100-envelope clairvoyance test are reported in Nature, October, 1974.

17. Randi (p. 107): Now, SRI, in its great wisdom, has called in a magician briefly as consultant. Not before Geller's tests, mind you, but after. With them, the alarm system is installed after the robbery. It is interesting to note that when Geller did a subsequent series of tests there (p. 62), he failed. Any connection?

Fact: SRI called in a magician as consultant before any of the tests with Geller, not after. (A magician who specializes in exposing poltergeist cases as frauds.) If Randi is referring only to Milbourne Christopher, no tests, including those of page 62, were done after Christopher's consultancy, all work with Geller having been completed before Christopher's arrival.

18. Randi (p. 125): And the SRI public relations man (who has since quit the organization) called Wilhelm of Time to see what could be done about the story.

Fact: SRI's public relations man, Ron Deutsch, did not quit the organization over this or any other issue, and is still there.

19. Ray Hyman quoted by Randi (p. 148): So I asked them (Puthoff and Targ) if he could bend them without touching them (metal rings). They told me he could do it either way. I asked Puthoff if he or anyone else at SRI had seen Uri do it without touching the ring. They never did answer me. They simply assured me that he could do it either way.

Fact: The above is false reporting. It is well known that Puthoff and Targ of SRI have been agnostic on the subject of metal bending since the beginning, and reported thus both in the SRI film and in the Nature paper.

20. Randi (p. 157): First of all, Taylor's statement about the magician is not true. Where he got that idea, I cannot tell. There was no magician present.

Fact: Taylor's statement is true; he got it from SRI researchers. A magician was present.

21. Randi (p. 173): You might recall, professor, that your counterparts in America - Targ and Puthoff - obtained single-sided pulses when Uri tried to hex a sensitive weighing device. And no one thought to try testing the chart recorder then, either...

Fact: As is apparent from the SRI film (a) the chart recorder was remote from Geller in the experiment, and (b) the chart recorder was continuously monitored by film and videotape, specifically as a guard against chicanery.

22. Randi (p. 189): And finally, as if there were not enough doubts about the procedure used to conduct this "test,"

Time's Wilhelm has reported that the set of tries with the die actually consisted of MANY HUNDREDS OF THROWS, the object being to get a run of consecutive wins.

Fact: There was no selection of a good run out of "hundreds of throws." There were ten throws only, as reported in the Nature paper, eight of which were correctly guessed by Geller, two of which were passed. All the throws were reported.

23. Randi (pp. 186-190): An elaborate hypothesis is put forward as to how Geller might have handled the dice box and cheated.

Fact: Film and videotape show otherwise, and magicians examining this material have failed to detect a conjuring trick.

24. Randi (p. 294): Targ and Puthoff say, in a letter to Communications Society magazine, that, "In lengthy consultation with professional magicians, no viable conjuring explanation for these or other experiments reported in Nature has emerged." What magicians? If these gentlemen have examined this book carefully, they may now have another conclusion.

Fact: Having examined this book carefully, we find that in every instance Randi, in his efforts to fault the SRI experiments, was driven to hypothesize the existence of a loophole condition that did not, in fact, exist. If Randi believes that the conditions he hypothesized were responsible for the results of those SRI experiments with Geller that were successful, then, by their negation, Randi has provided further evidence for the genuineness of the phenomena as observed and reported.