

## BRENDA DUNNE

[PRINCETON ENGINEERING AND ANOMALIES RESEARCH]

“COGNITIVE DISSONANCE HURTS.”

Necessary preconditions for telepathy:

*You have to be focused*

*You have to stop thinking*

**I**n 1979 Robert Jahn founded the PEAR laboratory (Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research) in the basement of Princeton University's Engineering School. Set up to follow a few areas of inquiry in particular—mainly human-machine interactions, remote perception, and random processes—the interdisciplinary PEAR staff is made up of mathematicians, electrical and aerospace engineers, theoretical physicists, and experimental psychologists, among others. Together, the group hoped both to formalize its scientific methodology and to quantify data, to support the validity of these phenomena often relegated to pseudoscience.

According to the PEAR website, remote perception is “the ability of human participants to acquire information about spatially and temporally remote geographical targets.” Known in various disciplines as telepathy, this phenomenon was taken seriously enough by the United States government to employ more

than twenty-three “remote viewers” at a time under a covert program called Stargate that lasted more than twenty years (under various names and divisions) and cost up to twenty million dollars. The program was declassified and cancelled in 1995. Though entirely unaffiliated with the Stargate program, Brenda Dunne and Jahn have been exploring remote perception for more than twenty-seven years, in an unconventional office filled with stuffed animals and strange apparatuses involving a motorized frog, a cascade of falling balls, and dated-looking number-generating machines. At the end of February, Dunne and Jahn were preparing to close down the lab.

—Suzanne Snider

### I. REMOTE PERCEPTION

BRENDA DUNNE: I've been exploring these phenomena most of my life. I've been here for twenty-seven years.



THE BELIEVER: Does it ever hurt your brain?

BD: Yes, that's how I got into this. Because it hurt my brain so much I couldn't stand it. I had to know more.

BLVR: Could you explain what remote perception is?

BD: Remote perception is what got me into this business. [Harold Puthoff and Russell Targ] had described some experiments, in a paper that they called "Remote Viewing," where they ask a person that they would call the "percipient" to describe a geographic location where another person (called the "agent") was, at an agreed-upon time.

So, for example, we would agree that you're going to be the percipient and I'd say, "OK, Suzanne. I want you to try to describe where Elisa is."

BLVR: So I'd be sitting here?

BD: You would be sitting here and Elisa's—you don't know where she is. Before she would leave, we would have a drawer with, say, a hundred envelopes in it, each of them containing a place that she could go. We would generate a random number and give her a numbered envelope. When she got outside, she'd open it and go to where the envelope says—

BLVR: Let's say the card says that she goes to the gas station—

BD: She goes to the gas station. And she'd stay there for, say, twenty minutes. Not knowing where she was—only that she was somewhere at a specific time, and who it was, only that she was going to be somewhere within a half hour's driving distance from the campus—you would then be encouraged to let yourself free-associate.

I would say to you, "All right, Suzanne, I want you to try to imagine Elisa. Try to envision her surroundings, and just describe whatever comes to mind. You can do it into a tape recorder, you can write it down. But try to just allow your mind to meander. Don't worry if it makes sense or if it's consistent. Just write or say whatever comes to mind for, say, fifteen minutes. And with

the focus being: 'Where is Elisa at four o'clock?'"

Hal Puthoff and Russell Targ had done these experiments at SRI [Stanford Research Institute] back in the '70s, and they had one line in the paper that changed my life. It was an almost casual line, where they said, "In fact, this worked very well, and there were even some percipients who said that they were able to describe where the agent was going to be *before the target was even identified.*"

## II. TK

*Precognition is a special form of remote perception where the percipient scans the given target before the agent even arrives at the target, or before the agent even knows where she or he will be heading.*

BLVR: Were there better results for the precognition experiments than for those remote perception experiments that were "on-time"? [Note: In an on-time experiment, the percipient tries to view the agent at a particular (unknown) site when the agent is actually present at the site. In other words, the percipient and agent are working simultaneously. In an off-time version, the percipient would attempt to view the agent at his or her assigned site *before* or *after* the agent actually arrives at the site.]

BD: Better. Slightly. It was almost as if the more impossible the task got, the better the results were.

BLVR: I read the same article you're talking about and there was the implication that not only are we moving across space but we're also, in this instance, moving across time.

BD: Virtually all of our experiments deal with time. Some are *retrocognition*. I would say that 95 percent of our experiments are "off-time." Most of them are precognitive, sometimes up to several days, or I think we have a couple that are a week or two apart. "Suzanne's going to be traveling next week, in a place where she's never been before. Why don't you set it up so that you try each day to experience her surroundings as a target at a x o'clock local time, *before* she leaves?"

BLVR: Would it matter if I focused on being the target as well? Would it matter if I really stopped and focused?

BD: Oh, yeah. You have to be engaged. If you don't do it at all, you get weird things, which we have seen before. The percipient writes down, "You know, I'm not getting anything at all."

BLVR: Is there a difference between "Where is someone?" and "What is someone looking at?"

BD: I don't think so. I think the question is "What is so-and-so's experience at a certain time?"

BLVR: But isn't it a different perspective, literally? Seeing a person in another setting versus seeing what that person is looking at?

BD: The bottom line is that we *do* seem to have the ability to acquire information about situations or events that are not local, either in terms of space or time. And it seems that the more unlikely the event, the more the cognitive logical mind disengages. Like you say, it starts to hurt to the point where "this is impossible." And then you stop trying and thinking. It's like the koans in Zen. You stop thinking because you can't think about it. There's no thought response.

### III. THE LAB, THE MISSION

BD: In particular, this is the question that we're trying to understand: what is the role of consciousness in the establishment of reality? Most of our scientific understanding these days tends to think that the human mind is a passive observer of that reality and recorder of it, and the scientist is the one that observes and measures. But we take the approach that the mind is actually an active participant in that reality and that you can't really describe reality—even physical reality—without taking into account the role of the subjective mind that is experiencing and describing it.

BLVR: Let me ask you about the name PEAR, because it includes the word *anomalous*—is that really accurate? Isn't part of the point to show that these so-called

anomalies are not anomalies at all?

BD: It's a touchy issue. We use the word *anomaly* to avoid the word *paranormal*. An anomaly is something that's normal that happens, but it's something you can't explain. And as such, it's an appropriate name. These things do happen. We still do not have a comprehensive explanation. We have hunches, we have suspicions, we have hypotheses. But we are far from a full-blown theory that can explain and predict them.

The question that PEAR has been addressing from the beginning—Can consciousness have a measurable effect on physical reality?—has been a pragmatic one. Are we here as isolated little particles floating around in some random fashion? Or is there some underlying connection that ties it all together? Religion and science started out really as the same thing and they became separated. I think we need to return to the principles of the ancient alchemists, where the experience of knowing or being and the description of that experience are not seen as two separate things but as complimentary components of one whole holistic image. I regard the concept of complementarity that Niels Bohr came up with a century ago as perhaps one of the most brilliant insights of the human mind. Frankly, I find it much more impressive than  $E=mc^2$ .

BLVR: You mentioned that there was a certain emphasis on formalizing the scientific methodology, based on what detractors saw as experiments with imperfect controls. But do we need to reshape people's ideas about the value of qualitative information? Or do we need to translate everything into quantitative information?

BD: The former. We need to recognize that the qualitative dimensions are every bit as important. We've talked about the need to develop a science of the subjective. Science is an intellectual pursuit.

BLVR: When you look at those earlier experiments, do you agree they were fallible?

BD: All human activity is fallible. You can always find something you have done wrong.

BLVR: So what were you trying to improve upon?

BD: We were trying to apply some state-of-the-art engineering tools. Moving from a perspective that arose from psychology and the social sciences to one that came out of the more “exact sciences” but trying to maintain respect for both.

We said, “Let’s not focus on the people. Let’s focus on something that is easier to quantify—a machine that flips coins (metaphorically speaking).” This is something where you don’t have to worry about personality types, state of mind, your blood sugar, your mother’s genetic line, or how you feel today, or the moon phase, or any of these other things.

BLVR: I’m wondering if you approached this with excitement, or sadness in the sense that you’re indulging detractors—

BD: No, it was very exciting. The program began and has continued to this very day as a dialogue between Bob Jahn and myself. My background is in psychology, the humanities, history of religion, anthropology. Bob is an engineer and a physicist. He’s quantitative. He knows how to do all kinds of exotic math and do equations that make me go bug-eyed. But the two perspectives together—they talk to us.

Any activity that involves human participation involves some subjective component. The scientist chooses: What am I going to study? How am I going to study it? What’s my motivation? Do I want a grant? Tenure? A Nobel Prize? Do I want to prove something to my boss?

And those unconscious motivators could have something to do with the “random” choices that one makes about how one sets up one’s experiment.

BLVR: So if we’re to accept that an investigator wields influence over the outcome of an experiment, how should we regard scientists studying behavioral elements in animals?

BD: Don’t underestimate the animals! You know the old story of Schrödinger’s cat? I’ve always thought it was strange that nobody has taken into consideration the

cat. I mean, that cat wants to live! That’s going to bias the outcome of the experiment right there!

BLVR: If we accept that the will of the scientist is affecting the process, approach, and the outcome—then what? If the objective is never extractable...

BD: For starters, just recognizing that takes you a little closer into being really objective. There’s a wonderful story about a laboratory in some pharmaceutical firm that was doing work with rabbits. What they found was that the control group that wasn’t being given the treatment was actually doing better than the group with treatment, and they couldn’t figure out why.

It turned out that there was a lab technician who happened to like rabbits. He would walk into the lab in the morning to give the little bunnies their food and he’d say, “Hi, bunny, how ya doing? How’s my favorite little rabbit this morning? There’s your carrot, sweetheart.” Well, that had more of an impact on their health and physiology than the medication they were testing...

It’s about taking responsibility. Recognizing that you’re *always* part of the experiment. You cannot take yourself out of it. And we’ve actually gotten to a point where we believe that uncertainty may be a very important part of the whole process itself. Uncertainty is something that’s incredibly profound. It’s there at the core of quantum mechanics—it allows us to move into this complimentary way of looking at the world. It also makes us aware of the fact that those areas, those margins of reality, if you will, are areas of uncertainty: the area where the “out there” and the “in here” overlap, the seashore phenomenon. You’ve got the seashore, the undertow, the beaches... these are anomalous. They are not of the earth and they’re not part of the sea either...

I don’t think mutation is totally random. I think there is also a desire. I don’t think that species go blindly, driven only by their hardware and hard wiring.

#### IV. COLD WAR/STARGATE

*In 1972 the government began a covert program called Stargate in response to news of a parallel Soviet program. The main objective of the program, which began at Stanford University’s SRI*

laboratory in Melo Park, CA (and later moved to Fort Meade under the name "Project Grill Flame"), was to collect intelligence through remote perception, which was also known as remote viewing. Developed in conjunction with the SRI lab, remote viewing was used as an integral part of the military's intelligence-gathering, beginning during the Cold War but relied upon as late as the Iran hostage crisis (1979–1981). The SRI was initially contracted by the CIA (but later moved to the Defense Intelligence Agency, or DIA) to explore the usefulness of remote viewing in various political scenarios. In 1995, Ted Koppel exposed the program and it was canceled (another version of the story claims that the program was officially declassified rather than exposed). It had been slated to move from the DIA to the CIA that same year.

BLVR: From the very beginning, many people in the scientific community wouldn't accept these ideas. But the government had people on million-dollar payrolls, right?

BD: So they say. But they heard the Russians were doing it.

BLVR: And the Russians *were* doing it.

BD: Because they heard we were doing it.

BLVR: So they shared the idea! Dale Graff said he was heading up Stargate and about to move to the CIA before Ted Koppel announced this to the public in '95. So that's not the Cold War, right?

BD: I have not tracked the covert—well, I don't have clearance to do so. Frankly, I was talking about my *Monty Python* mentality. I find the idea of trying to contain a secret study of remote perception rather comical.

BLVR: There is something ironic about it.

BD: There is something rather stupid about the whole thing. I haven't tracked it. I know there has been a program—there was a release of some of the papers and I've seen them. There was a journal issue that addressed some of these. I don't know what's going on now.

BLVR: Did you read about examples of remote view-

ing in the case of the Iran hostage crisis?

BD: I heard there were some. I never read the examples.

BLVR: Does that surprise you?

BD: No, not when they thought the others were doing it. Or when they thought it would give them some edge. I think it's probably used more often than people would admit. I had heard that sometimes police departments use it to find missing people or bodies or crime detection. I don't know how seriously it's taken. But there's the practical application as opposed to the scientific. There's a fellow, Stephen Schwartz, who used it for archaeological discoveries. But the practical applications and the scientific explanations are almost like two different worlds. Scientists *will not* accept it until they see the numbers. And even when you give them the numbers, I can tell you, they still won't accept it.

BLVR: And yet the government would spend the money?

BD: I don't think the government cares about the money. They care about numbers, if it works. And it doesn't work all the time. But it does work more than it should, and I think if people are using this for real-world applications,





I think it would be a mistake to put all your bets on that, because it is only a probabilistic outcome. But if you were putting it together with other forms of investigation, it gives you another vector on your problem—it might provide information that you can take or leave as the case may be. We all have events where we get inspiration or a hunch about something out of nowhere.

They found that in cases where there were plane crashes or train crashes, that on those particular trips they had a much higher than average last-minute cancellation.

BLVR: That's fascinating. But aren't those stories happening all the time, and you just don't hear them? The end of the story always tells the beginning, right? So it's not a significant cancellation if nothing happens...

BD: Except that they *do* keep track of cancellations. And if they do find that there are significantly more cancellations on doomed flights than they get on ordinary flights, then you can start to make some connection. But statistics can only tell you if something *probably* happened or not. It doesn't tell you any more than that.

BLVR: Well, in one of your articles, your conclusion about this idea of mind affecting matter was cautionary.

BD: We just don't know enough. You asked me if, after all these years, it still blows my mind. It does still blow my mind. But it has become increasingly frustrating over the years. Because it is evident that our initial hope—that if we did good work and were able to demonstrate under controlled conditions a phenomenon—was that people would take it seriously. And it's clear they're not going to. The resistance is emotional. And you can't get past that. Cognitive dissonance hurts.

## V. C

*For many years, esteemed universities have formed precarious bonds with those engaged in anomalous research and remote viewing. Two of the most famous labs were set up at Duke (Rhine Laboratory, 1935) and Stanford (SRI, 1946).*

BLVR: What does Princeton think of PEAR?

BD: "I wish they'd go." "They are an embarrassment." "I wish there was a way we could get rid of them without making martyrs of them or looking bad." My favorite story is how at the very beginning, when this laboratory was just a storage idea—didn't have a room number or any identification, didn't even have a name. But we had to tell people how to find us. I thought I was being very clever. I said, let's put a Greek psi on the door—you know, scientists use it, the psychologists use it, and the parapsychologists use it. And within a matter of just months I had four people stop me and ask me why I had a devil's pitchfork on my door. And I found this astonishing.

BLVR: How do you explain the history of relationships between labs and prestigious universities? Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Duke...

BD: Let's not forget the University of Chicago. I think they've all been embarrassments to their institutions. Our program has survived over the years because, well, there are a number of factors. We have focused on our main issues of human-machine interaction, random processes, and quantifying of remote perception. We haven't tried levitating tables, evoking the spirits of the deceased, or turning any of the faculty into frogs (although there have been days when it's been tempting).

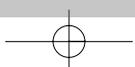
## VI. STUFFED ANIMALS

*Inside the PEAR laboratory is a lounging area comprised of a long sofa and heaps of stuffed animals. A handsome plush panda bear straddles a giraffe, while a miniature Paddington Bear sits on top of a separate mound that one might find in a pediatrician's office.*

BLVR: I'm fascinated by all the stuffed animals. Explain the stuffed animals.

BD: Oh, I can't explain all of them. Each of them has a wonderful story. Each of them is a gift from somebody who—this is a gift from a TV moderator who came here and did a program.

BLVR: Do you think they're mind or matter?



BD: Yes.

BLVR: Which?

BD: Both.

BLVR: Could they be influencing?

BD: Yes. I'm not saying they sit here and think or they get up and dance at night, though who knows... it's part of the spirit of PEAR. It's part of what makes this place what it is. It's a silliness, but it's a high silliness. It's a profound silliness that speaks to a deeper meaning or level of reality.

The wonder never goes away. It hasn't for me. And that's another reason it's time to close—because I don't want that to ever get stale. I want to keep the wonder. I want to be able to pass that on intact to the next generation without becoming jaded, without becoming

dogmatic, without thinking I know everything. I want to leave the business when I can still say, "I don't know," and "I was wrong." There's a Native American tradition that says, "You can't begin to understand something unless you've looked at it at least seven different ways." And that's wisdom. If you can't think of at least seven different possibilities, then you're not being open-minded enough.

We're here doing science, but we also treasure the connections and the people; the machines are important, but so are the people. We cannot have people come in here and just treat them like subjects: "Here's ten dollars, thank you. Don't call us, we'll call you." It's not our style. ★

*The PEAR lab closed at the end of February (2007). CDs and DVDs related to the lab's work, called The PEAR Proposition, can be purchased through the lab's website, [princeton.edu/~pear/index.html](http://princeton.edu/~pear/index.html)*

*Sedaratives, continued from page 72*

coughing every time I light up. Is there a not-so-unhealthy-but-equally-as-annoying habit I could pick up that'd allow me to live longer while continuing to piss off the right people?

Thanks for your help.

*Jason S.*

**Dear Jason,**

*Join the Republican Party. Do what they tell you.*

*Janeane*

**Dear Sedaratives,**

I went to a swap meet where I cut my leg on some rusty scrap metal. I don't remember the last time I had a tetanus shot. It hurts and there is blood. Should I buy the mannequin arm or the Marky Mark coffee mug?

*Maggie Faris*

*St. Paul, Minn.*

**Dear Maggie,**

*The three-foot Mr. Peanut icon is a better buy. After you leave the swap meet, put the oversize peanut in the car. Drive to the*

*nearest apothecary. Squeeze a dollop of Neosporin from the tube onto your leg. (You don't need to buy the salve.) Exit the pharmacy. Drive home. Install the large peanut in your bedroom. Throw damp laundry over it.*

*Janeane*

**Dear Sedaratives,**

My dad, whom I haven't seen in almost two decades, suddenly turned up on my doorstep the other day. He wants to make up for lost time and have the father-daughter relationship he denied me as a girl. Is there a nice way to tell him, "You're my dad, I love you, but buying a My Pretty Pony for a twenty-eight-year-old woman isn't sweet, it's just kinda creepy and sad?"

*Regards,*

*Anonymous*

**Dear Anonymous,**

*You now have the perfect opportunity to utter, "Father, don't darken my doorstep again!" I envy you. Most people don't even have a doorstep.*

*Janeane ★*

*Send real, non-joke questions to [seदारatives@believermag.com](mailto:seदारatives@believermag.com)*