



CORRESPONDENCE

# Why a Retroactive Analyzer Influence Should be Considered in Remote Viewing Research

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Müller and Wittmann (2021) used in their experiment a procedure called associative remote viewing (ARV), which refers to a specific tasking scheme within a free-response method known as remote viewing (R.V.). It allows a focus on a future event outcome when there are usually only two (or not much more) options possible. Such a protocol has been used many times to forecast, for example, whether a stock market price will rise or fall within a defined period or to predict who will win a particular sports game (an overview of relevant ARV studies is given by Müller, Müller & Wittmann, 2019). Instead of viewing the actual target event, digital photos, each associated with one possible event outcome, are used as referenced stimulus. The tasking describes a logical state: “If case 1 is the event outcome, the viewer will receive image A as feedback, and if case 2 is the event outcome, the viewer will receive image B as feedback.” The viewer should only be presented with the image that corresponds to the actual outcome of the event. According to the standard view, <sup>1</sup> which I strongly support, this is assumed to “close the feedback loop” using the correct associated image. When predicting that feedback image in advance, the associated event can be determined in advance as well. However, the alternative view, according to which feedback to the viewer is not relevant for the ARV process, is not disregarded.

In the experiment in question here, hit rates from two different associative tasking approaches were compared and statistically evaluated. One tasking approach related to the present condition (two statements about current world knowledge, of which only one was true), and the other tasking approach was used to predict future events (two possible outcomes of an event that had not yet occurred at the time of the remote viewing session). It was assumed that if there were no significant differences between the results of either the future predictive condition and the current condition, that would indicate a deterministic future, whereas significantly better results for the current condition would indicate a probabilistic future. Although I do not object to this logic, it can only be universally valid if the associative mechanism works reliably and cannot be influenced in the parapsychological sense by a mechanism which I will describe in this paper.

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## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

The evaluation procedure presupposes that the viewer’s description has a higher degree of correspondence to one or the other image. Simply put, the more convincing the description of a particular image, the higher the certainty for a correct prediction. However, it can happen that some descriptions in one session are highly relevant for the first image, and other descriptions of the same session are highly relevant for the second image, though the pairs of images are very different. In other words, both images were described in part. Following the hypothesis “feedback is not relevant,” one could



easily conclude that “the future has not yet been decided.” But when following the hypothesis that the viewer predicts his/her own feedback, my conclusion is that both target stimuli were accessed because an error source is responsible for two retroactive feedback signals at the same time. Accordingly, in those cases when the associative mechanism fails to work in the expected way, finding out the correct image might degenerate into a game of luck, no matter how carefully the analysis of results is done.

The first error source may occur if the viewer, at some point in the future, also receives feedback on the image that turned out to be wrong with respect to the actual outcome. When this happens, the viewer may be influenced at the time of the viewing by the experience of seeing the wrong image at the time of the future feedback, even if the viewer sees the correct image as well. But, this is a solvable problem since wrong feedback can be easily excluded by eliminating the wrong image after the judge has performed the analysis. As mentioned previously, this means that one important condition for ARV may be that the viewer should be shown only the correct associated image, and the incorrect image should be “sealed off” against the viewer’s access.

The second error source may be a retroactive telepathic connection (backward in time) between the viewer and anyone participating in the experiment and analyzing the correspondence between both images (either before or after the feedback time). More specifically, I term this a *retroactive analyzer influence* since the subsequent analysis process (after the session) may be a potential source of affecting the viewer’s result. What does that mean? An important assumption many people make in ARV is that if the viewer is never given access to the incorrect image, then that effectively “seals off” that image from the viewer’s access. However, if there is a retroactive effect, that effectively makes both images available to the viewer at the time of the session.

The implication is that the associative mechanism can have its own failure sources independent of the act of remote viewing and that the analysis process can influence what the viewer perceives, independent of the assumed predictability of the target event (whether present- or future-time condition).

### Loopholes in the Müller/Wittmann Experiment

As described in the Müller/Wittmann experimental procedure, the principal investigator (P.I.) prepared the image pairs for both time conditions. While this investigator received the results trial-by-trial, the viewer and

the judge received feedback for the present-time condition only after 50 sessions when all five viewers had finished the first block. Besides creating the target pools, the principal investigator performed the administrative work for the experiment but otherwise played no further role. However, he may still have unintentionally contributed to a retrocausal telepathic feedback loop. This would contribute to a better result for the present-time viewing condition. The reason is because the P.I. would always have the correct image in mind since he would have already known the correct outcome as he was preparing the target sets. This would especially be the case if the P.I. was motivated by curiosity to see whether or not the session results reflected the target image.

So unconsciously, the principal investigator could possibly have “sent” information about the correct image (since the correct image would be dominant in his thoughts) via the retroactive analyzer influence backward in time to the viewer—similar to the way a viewer may be able to “send” information backward in time along his or her own unconscious path to the time of the viewing event.

Because the viewers received no trial-by-trial feedback for the present-time condition, this could have increased the likelihood that the principal investigator took over the role as “reflector” on the timeline—and so both worked together as an information gathering team. Possibly, the same applies also for the judge in the latter period of the experiment.

Under the future-time condition, the analyst—no matter whether the principal investigator or the judge (or other relevant individuals) is meant—has no preference for either of the two images at the beginning of the analysis. In contrast to the present-time condition, the analyst is more deeply involved in a comparison mode. If we assume the possibility of an unconscious path via the retroactive analyzer influence, then it would be possible that there are two different signals, each originating from one of the two images as the analyst mentally perceives them during the analysis process. These signals could overlay, dominate, or replace the correct precognitive signal to the viewer from the actual feedback. This could cause the viewer to partially perceive both images (or even the wrong one exclusively) and easily lead to a worse outcome for the future-time condition.

In Müller and Wittmann (2021), the authors discussed the possibility that motivation and concentration may have biased the data in the block design. But, they did not consider the possibility of a “placebo effect” (the viewers knowing that the first target block 1-10 was present-time related could be psychologically relevant for some) since it is not an uncommon belief that the present is easier or

more reliable to view.

What I have explained above offers an alternative explanation of why the viewers obtained better results in the present-time condition compared to the future-time condition. This explanation would be independent of the assumed relation between hypothesis H2 ( $\text{effect}_{\text{present}} > \text{effect}_{\text{future}}$ ) and a probabilistic future as proposed by Müller and Wittmann (2021). Accordingly, it seems questionable whether comparing hit rates under present- and future-time conditions to decide if the future is probabilistic or deterministic is conclusive.

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

It is often argued that the term retrocausation can be interpreted as another way of referring to either precognition (that is, information-related) or to retroactive-PK (that is, action-related). Retrocausation, used in the sense of a connection from one mind to another mind backward in time, receives comparatively little or no attention. Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider a retroactive analyzer influence as a subset of precognitive telepathy,<sup>2</sup> from different contexts.

### 1. Historical Background:

The concept of future-related telepathy goes back to Whately Carington, who realized that telepathy need not be a “now or never affair” when he postulated the displacement effect from his experimental results (Carington, 1945, pp.31-32). Subsequently, the same effect was noted in the work of Soal & Goldney (1943), and revisited by J.B. Rhine as precognitive telepathy (Rhine, 1953, p. 92). In the post-Rhine era, research focused on the replication of psi-data, while at the same time, there was a tendency to consider psi categories (like telepathy, precognition, direct target access, etc.) as less relevant. Some even believed that such categories are misleading and prevent deeper understanding (e.g., Shoup, 2002).

### 2. Consideration in Known Experiments:

To prove the existence of direct target access (also called clairvoyance) in forced-choice experiments in their automated procedure, Targ & Tart (1985) eliminated “feedback to the percipient and/or telepathically mediated feedback wherein the percipient ‘reads the mind’ of an experimenter or observer who later observes the target set.” [emphasis added] Since the procedure and results were not directly transferrable to remote viewing, Targ, Targ, and Lichtarge (1985) conducted a subsequent free-response experiment. Again, the possibility of any type of retrocausation was eliminated: “A system of data handling was

arranged such that no single person (neither viewer, nor experimenter, nor judge) ever knows which non-feedback slide was projected during any given trial, or whether the viewer’s response to any given slide was correct.” Under the non-feedback condition, a p-value of 0.05 was achieved. In addition, not only did the feedback sessions not score better, they even failed to reach significance at the 5% level. I cite this experiment not because of the outcome but to demonstrate once again that the concept of retroactive telepathy (and more specifically, the retroactive analyzer influence) is not inconsequential and has been considered in serious experimental research.

### 3. General Theoretical Background:

Walker’s quantum mechanical theory (1974/2015) applies to consciousness and psi phenomena. He described a time-independent coupling between a recipient and an experimenter. In experimental mind-matter research, Schmidt (1993) reproduced a retroactive-PK effect under highly controlled conditions where influencing periods start after a random distribution has already been recorded. Costa de Beauregard (1987) has described retroactive-PK as a natural effect in his quantum-relativistic theory. He emphasized that retrocausation never means “reshaping the past but it does mean shaping the past.” This raises the question: is there a relationship or equivalence between retroactive-PK and precognitive telepathy, and if so, what does that relationship amount to?

### 4. Other Authors in the Field of Remote Viewing:

Brown (2006, p. 44) proposed that analysis can influence the session backward in time and that a session is not “closed” before the analysis has been finished: “‘Closing’ a remote-viewing session is done by the first person who seriously examines the remote-viewing data obtained in a session. This person does not need to be the remote-viewer.” He thus describes what I have called the retroactive analyzer influence. But in contrast, I do not see the need to introduce “a first person.” My view is that a backward-in-time causation can be connected to the viewer via feedback (thus precognition), to the analyst (thus the retroactive analyzer influence), or to both at the same time (superimposed).

### 5. The Experimenter Effect in Parapsychology Research:

From a broader perspective, in standard parapsychological experiments, there is often a well-known experimenter effect present, as re-examined by Parker and Mil-lar (2014). This indicates that the experimenters’ biased

opinion as to what the result should be could influence the result through some as-yet undetermined psi-mechanism. But, in this research, it is usually not explored from where on the timeline the experimenter's own psi might influence the result. Some may believe that this question is irrelevant. However, it seems plausible to assume that this effect is likely to be most powerful when analysis is performed, i.e., after the viewer has finished the session. It is at this point that the thoughts of the analyst are absorbed in the experiment and its results. So, a retroactive analyzer influence might be interpreted as a time-independent experimenter effect.

## THE RELEVANCE OF FEEDBACK

In their paper, Müller and Wittmann (2021) took up the controversy of what the source of information is: Does it come from the target itself, from later feedback, or from one of a number of possible futures? (They hypothesized the latter possibility, seemingly to more easily support their conclusion that the future is probabilistic rather than fixed or determined.) The authors stated: "In the present study, we gave feedback for both time conditions, but the hit rates still significantly differed. Therefore, feedback cannot be used as an axiomatic explanation for observed Psi effects." This suggests that a statistical comparison for both time conditions requires equal test conditions. But this raises the question: How can the authors assume that feedback (at the end) for the present-condition, and trial-by-trial feedback for the future-condition, are the same? In general, I would expect feedback that is given at the end of the total experiment, rather than at the end of each individual trial, to be less effective, if it isn't altogether useless (because it raises a significant risk of displacement conflating the results).

At first glance, this assumption seems to contradict my objections since the condition of no trial-by-trial feedback led to the better result. I would suggest, however, that according to the reasoning above, it is not a contradiction when considering the much more complex interrelationships that would apply in a retroactive analyzer influence scenario. The authors' overly simple assumption about feedback adds unnecessary complication to the analysis of the experiment and gets in the way of a sound conclusion.

However, the same conclusion about feedback arrived at in an earlier experiment by Müller, Müller, and Wittmann (2019), to which the authors also referred, may offer a clearer explanation. In that study, ARV was tested to predict the German stock index DAX. In 38 out of 48 predictions conducted by 15 viewers, a highly significant hit rate of 79.16% ( $p = 2.3 \times 10^{-5}$ ;  $z = 3.897$ ;  $E.S. = 0.56$ ) was

reported. To simultaneously investigate whether or not feedback is a necessary prerequisite for the ARV process, half of these sessions were designed with trial-by-trial feedback to the viewers and the other half without any feedback at any time. The authors concluded that "feedback seems not to be a necessary requirement for the process," based on the fact that a statistical comparison between feedback and no-feedback conditions showed no significant difference in the hit rate.

But once the session "monitors" (the term used by the experimenters for those who not only monitored the viewers during the session but also performed the analysis and judging) became aware of the actual result of the trial, it is possible that they could have "shared" the correct feedback via precognitive telepathy/retroactive analyzer influence with the viewer, especially when re-analyzing the session with full awareness of the actual outcome. This could explain why there was no significant difference between the feedback and no-feedback conditions in their previous study. It can, therefore, be only tentatively concluded that a viewer needs no feedback.

I suggest this for the following reasons. First, according to my hypothesis, it is possible that under certain circumstances, the experimenter would be the one who closes the feedback loop (the retroactive analyzer effect). Second, the assumption that there is no need for feedback can be only correct as long as the viewer and experimenter have not previously become "entangled" (that is before someone in the experiment has become consciously aware of the actual result). Being "entangled" before the results are known increases the risk of the viewer receiving two different signals, each originating from one of the two images as the analyst mentally perceives them during the analysis process, as argued for the experiment by Müller and Wittmann (2021).

Moreover, what actually happens can depend on many factors: the viewer, the experimenter, tiny details of the experiment, or coincidence. Not taking this complex situation into account can lead to the dangerous conclusion that it does not matter whether the viewer sees both images in (for example) ARV,<sup>3</sup> simply because of the premise that receiving no feedback leads to better results than receiving it. I would assume that it is better for the outcome if viewers receive no feedback than to see a wrong feedback by receiving both feedback images—but it is best for sustainable good results when viewers receive only the correct feedback stimulus in a trial-by-trial feedback.

Finally, Müller and Wittmann (2021) referred to (1) May et al., 2014; (2) Targ et al., 1985; and (3) Müller et al., 2019 to support their conclusion. But the following should be taken into account:

(1) In the referenced study by May, Lantz, and Piantanida (2014, pp. 104-116), the feedback issue was simplified by focusing on visual feedback *intensity*. The researcher postulated that if precognition of the feedback is the underlying mechanism for ESP (“anomalous cognition”), then the result should show a linear relationship: “The more information in the feedback, the higher the quality of the A.C. (anomalous cognition). That is, the more information in the receiver’s future, the more A.C. in the session.” Under the condition that “even the strongest display intensity was insufficient to provide a ‘satisfying’ study of the target material,” the result was: “None of the data showed significant correlation of feedback intensity with A.C. quality.” My objection is that nothing can be concluded about the question as to whether it is the intensity that matters. Consider the possibility that it is actually the *content*—the mentally perceivable *meaning*— of the target that catches the mind’s attention (whether the mechanism for that is conscious or subliminal in nature) through recognition of what the image *contains*. As a consequence, if my objection is correct, the result would be that the relationship between the intensity of feedback and the quality of ESP is perhaps less relevant than the meaningful content of the target, and therefore, there is no contradiction with the concept of feedback-mediated precognition.

(2) The relevant study for remote viewing (as I have referred to above) by Targ, Targ & Licharge (1985) indicates that there may be a direct target access without the need for feedback, but even though this study produced significant results, we cannot judge the validity of this conclusion without further replication under the same rigorous conditions (triple-blind to exclude precognitive telepathy). Over time, only a few forced-choice experiments have shown significant results under conditions without trial-by-trial feedback for research participants and experimenter (e.g., Targ & Tart, 1985). On the other hand, the meta-analysis by Honorton & Ferrari (1989)—a much larger database—found a strong relation between effect size and the degree of feedback in forced-choice precognition experiments. So, it appears the results for forced-choice type experiments are mixed.

In addition, there are also various experiments and experiences concluding that feedback seems a prerequisite for successful remote viewing (Puthoff, 1978; Puthoff, Targ, & May, 1978, p. 13; Targ & Harary, 1985, p. 27; Schnabel, 1995). But the crucial point should be that there are

two types of feedback: To the viewer and to a separate analyst who evaluates the session—both are possible reflectors in time which can close the feedback loop. Thus, applying the question of feedback relevance only to the viewer is likely too simplistic. Ignoring this possibility might be similar to trying to solve a mathematical equation with two unknowns, paying attention to only one unknown while ignoring the other.

## IMPLICATIONS

Bem (2011) remarked: “My approach to the problem of experimenter effects has been to minimize the experimenter’s role as much as possible, reducing it to that of greeter and debriefer, and leaving the experimental instructions and other interactions with the participant to the computer program.” Such kinds of safeguards can be easily applied only to forced-choice tests and similar procedures (where the psi result is the answer to a yes/no question). In any free-response technique, the experimenter becomes potentially a psi-active participant in the procedure during the analysis phase—this is unavoidable so long humans perform the evaluation. “Post-session activities” can trigger a retroactive analyzer influence just as ordinary telepathy can be triggered when the experimenter participates in the experiment in realtime (in remote viewing, sometimes called telepathic overlay). In the case of forecasting sports events or stock price movements with ARV, this effect can be easily masked by other assumed mechanisms and factors, such as the belief that a probabilistic future can limit the success rate, yet rarely does anyone challenge these conclusions. But in the experimental situation where reliability of the associative mechanism is an absolute prerequisite to decide whether a hypothesis must be either rejected or accepted, we should question the use of ARV as an experimental research tool to answer unknowns of a fundamental nature.

This would be true whether or not the postulated retro-causative mechanism can be proven. The justified doubt alone makes this conclusion necessary. Even from a “classical point of view,” we can say that no information is safe from access by remote viewing (even the wrong target), so the reliable functioning of the associative mechanism cannot necessarily be assumed. Therefore, I do not believe that replication studies of the Müller/Wittmann experiment can shed new light on the question whether the future is probabilistic or deterministic. I believe it would be beneficial to perform experiments involving manipulated target probabilities—but with a more explicit R.V. structure rather than the problematic ARV setting, as the authors have already suggested. Targ & Targ (1986) have performed such an R.V. study, and the

result seems not to indicate a probabilistic future.

Against this background, it is natural to consider retroactive analyzer effects in remote viewing research and practice outside of ARV as well. Even if the viewer does not describe his/her own feedback, he/she may describe a feedback or a conviction the analyst “injected” time-backward into the session. This is of high relevance because it is not easily possible to confirm direct target access (e.g., to a distant location) only because realtime telepathy and precognition under the applied procedures have been excluded. Any further research into the subject “from where does the information arise,” as Müller and Wittmann have proposed, is an important future task, but should not ignore the role of precognitive telepathy/retroactive analyzer influences when designing experiments, interpreting results, or drawing conclusions from hypothesized mechanisms. As an additional future task, it might be possible to investigate the conditions under which the occurrence of a retroactive analyzer effect is more likely, and whether there are individual susceptibilities to this effect. This could also contribute to improving the reliability of ARV in its classical field of application.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 According to Katz, Grgić, Tressoldi, and Fendley (2021), the importance of feedback in the ARV process is a widely accepted view.
- 2 In this article, I take telepathy and precognitive telepathy to be generic terms for a mind-to-mind connection, which could refer to two possible models. In the first model, the viewer’s unconscious mind, on its own initiative, picks up information from another mind (“reading the mind”)—where the active involvement of the other mind (the analyst) is not necessary. The second model is an “influencer model,” according to which one mind “offers” information to another mind via an unconscious channel. Independently of that, the term retroactive analyzer influence simply indicates that the analysis process after the session, performed by the analyst, is responsible for the information exchange without making further assumptions. “Precognitive telepathy” might then apply in situations where the analyst is not engaged in active analysis or similar activity, but rather, it is the residual knowledge resident in the mind of the analyst that seems to be the source the viewer is accessing.
- 3 Stephan Schwartz, the principal inventor of ARV, stated that the viewer should never be shown the second image to avoid creating more than one possible outcome. This seems to remain the most strongly held view in the R.V. research community (Schwartz, 2007, p. 160).

## EDITORIAL NOTE

*JSE* invited a formal Reply from Müller and Wittmann, but the study’s authors decided it was not necessary. Specifically, they indicated in a personal communication to the Editor-in-Chief (09 August 2023) that, “Thorsten’s comment contributes to the discussion, even if it remains un-commented from our side. Remote viewing is a controversial field where different opinions should coexist due to a lack of theory that ties it all together. What Thorsten does is discuss other potential interpretations concerning the differences in effects for the present-future conditions. We agree with the given interpretations in that they are potentially relevant. That is, a future study could take up the recommendations to exclude or verify the factors that potentially could explain our findings in a way that differs from our interpretation. In that respect the author does a good job in sketching potential further studies.”

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