

# Satanist abuse and alien abduction: A comparative analysis theorizing temporal lobe activity as a possible connection between anomalous memories

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## SUMMARY

This paper compares two sets of scarcely believable reports: those of satanist abuse survivors and those of people with apparent memories of alien abduction. There are striking parallels between the two phenomena, which are explored in some detail. Whilst the comparison may be unexpected, and will no doubt provoke scepticism in some readers, the similarities are difficult to ignore; and I suggest that they give rise to unavoidable questions about the nature of both kinds of experience. The paper therefore concludes with a sketch of some neurophysiological and psychological research which may help to account for them.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to some striking parallels between two sets of phenomena which, as far as I am aware, have not been systematically compared before. The analysis is based entirely on library sources, and I can make no claims to personal experience in either case, whether as an empirical researcher or a therapist. The fact that a comparison can be made, and that the parallels are so marked, raises interesting questions about the nature of the phenomena concerned. I will return to these questions in the later part of the paper.

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The comparison suggests that there may be an unexpected connection between satanist abuse and the apparent abduction of people by 'aliens' in space-craft.

I make this claim hesitantly because most of those working in the field of ritual abuse will not readily believe that the comparison is fruitful, and they may well feel that the debate about satanist abuse can only be trivialized by associating it with such an off-the-wall subject as 'ufology'. In response to this, let me say just two things at this stage. First, I am reluctant to claim that satanist abuse does not exist; and I have no doubt that something which can legitimately be called 'ritual abuse' does exist. Second, I would ask the reader to suspend disbelief, for the duration of the paper at least. The similarities between satanist abuse and abduction do not, in themselves, demonstrate that reports of either are necessarily false. But the questions posed by the comparison are not easily answered, and cannot honestly be avoided once the parallels have been recognized.

### SATANIST ABUSE

The emergence of satanist abuse is usually dated to 1980, when a book called *Michelle Remembers* (Smith and Pazder, 1980) was published. The book described the experience of a young woman, Michelle Smith, as, with the help of her psychiatrist, she retrieved memories of abuse by a satanic cult. It was not until 1984, however, that the phenomenon suddenly appeared to escalate, becoming 'a tidal wave that hit the psychiatric world' (Greaves, 1992, p. 45). Although the literature on satanist abuse (like the literature on abductions) remains predominantly American, well known cases in the UK, beginning with the events in Nottingham during 1987, the Netherlands (for example, Rossen, 1989), and elsewhere, have ensured that there is also a debate in Europe.

In this paper, I adopt the distinction between 'ritual' and 'satanist' abuse proposed by La Fontaine:

Rites that allegedly include the torture and sexual abuse of children and adults, forced abortion and human sacrifice, cannibalism and bestiality may be labelled satanic or satanist. Their defining characteristic is that the sexual and physical abuse of children is part of rites directed to a magical or religious objective (La Fontaine, 1994, p. 30).

La Fontaine's own finding is that, in the 84 cases she studied, there was no evidence that rites of this kind had taken place. However, she claims that three cases of ritual, not satanic, abuse were substantiated:

These are cases in which self-proclaimed mystical/magical powers were used to entrap children and impress them (and also adults) with a reason for the sexual

abuse, keeping the victims compliant and ensuring their silence. In these cases the ritual was secondary to the sexual abuse which clearly formed the primary objective of the perpetrators. (La Fontaine, 1994, p. 30).

This is broadly consistent with the conclusions of investigators in the United States. For example, Lanning (1992) concedes the existence of 'multidimensional child sex rings' which employ ritualistic trappings, either for fetishistic purposes or as a device designed to intimidate the victims; but he remains sceptical about the existence of satanic 'covens' in which sexual abuse is merely one feature of a set of savage, quasi-religious practices.

It is necessary to distinguish between two groups of informants about satanist abuse. The first consists of children making allegations about what has been done to them in the recent past. Many highly publicized cases fall into this category, with events in Nottingham, Rochdale and the Orkneys being prominent examples in the UK, and the McMartin case in Los Angeles being the most notorious case in the USA (Boyd, 1991). The second group of informants consists of adult 'survivors', who claim to have been abused over a considerable period of time, extending back into their childhoods. Characteristically, these victims are referred to therapists or counsellors for a variety of personal problems, and their memories of abuse are gradually retrieved during therapeutic sessions (often involving hypnosis). The more 'popular' books on satanist abuse deal with the experience of these adult survivors (Smith and Pazder, 1980; Spencer, 1989; Mayer, 1991). The recent UK literature, whilst it is primarily focused on child care cases, suggests that even in this country there are certainly hundreds, if not thousands, of people who claim to be adult survivors of this kind (Boyd, 1991; Core, 1991; Tate, 1991; Sinason, 1994).

In this paper, I am primarily interested in the accounts of adult survivors which to an even greater degree than the allegations of children, seem to suggest the existence of a large network of groups engaging in satanic practices of which sexual abuse is only a part. In the nature of the case, these accounts—if true—imply that such activity has been widespread for much longer than a decade, extending back at least to the 1960s, and probably much earlier.

## ALIEN ABDUCTION

Although it is difficult to say precisely when sightings of unidentified flying objects began, the modern interest in flying saucers is usually dated from 1947. Detailed histories of the phenomenon can be found in many places (for example, Jacobs, 1975; Randles, 1987; Thompson,

1991). Serious academic investigators, as well as amateurs, continue to research these sightings, and to seek out confirming physical evidence (Vallee's trilogy, 1989, 1990 and 1991, represents one computer scientist's account of his own investigative work). It should be noted that 'serious investigators' include those who accept the extra-terrestrial origins of UFOs, and those who (like Vallee) do not, but who nevertheless believe that something is happening which is currently beyond the reach of scientific explanation.

The first story of an abduction surfaced in Brazil in 1965, although the event itself occurred in 1957. Several cases were reported during the 1970s, but in 1981 a study of abductions was published which radically changed the focus of UFO research (Hopkins, 1981). It began to seem that UFO sightings were quite often accompanied by 'lost time', and that these blank periods might be amnesia, suppressing memories of abduction experiences. Since 1981, therefore, research on the abduction experience has become more intensive, and various studies have appeared, including Rimmer (1984), Hopkins (1987), Ring (1992) and Mack (1994). There is also Streiber (1987), a best-selling account of the writer's own bizarre experience. The publication of Jacobs (1993) was something of a landmark, as Jacobs is an academic historian who has studied more than 300 abduction experiences. By this time, the number of people claiming to have been abducted, world-wide, was estimated to be in the thousands, if not tens of thousands.

### PARALLELS OF CONTEXT

Some parallels will already be evident from what has been said so far. In both cases, we are confronted by a large number of bizarre accounts, reporting on experiences which seem close to incredible. The literally fantastic nature of these accounts predisposes to disbelief and a search for some alternative explanation, and the literature divides quite sharply between 'believers' and those who cannot accept that such things happen.

Perhaps the central issue is the consistency between reports. Time and again, the 'believers' appeal to the fact that, all over the world, people are describing the *same kinds of* events—people who have no contact with each other, and who cannot have based their accounts on second-hand material. Almost everyone who has studied satanist abuse remarks on the uncanny similarity of the reports victims provide: 'there are so many threads going through the cases which are the same thing' (Dianne Core, quoted in Boyd, 1991, p. 54; see also Core's own book, 1991; Greaves, 1992; Sinason, 1994). Similarly, the stories told by

abductees fit a consistent pattern; so much so that Jacobs (1993) has been able to formulate an 'abduction scenario' which encompasses all the common features. For believers, this is the key point. There seems to be no way of explaining the consistency of abduction and satanist abuse reports other than by accepting that the events described really do take place.

Moreover, there is no doubt—even among sceptics—that most (not all) victims are themselves believers, and that they are traumatized by the experiences to which they are subjected. The severe emotional damage sustained by both groups appears to be absolutely genuine, and many of the victims have spent years in therapy trying to undo it. Again, this is frequently taken as strong evidence of the reality of both types of abuse. The trauma, the fear, the conviction that abuse or abductions have taken place—these can only be satisfactorily explained, it is said, by the hypothesis that the events concerned are real.

For both satanist abuse and abduction, the spectrum of alternative explanations is the same. It is accepted that a small minority of cases may be hoaxes. Believers claim to be able to distinguish contrived reports from genuine ones, mainly because they lack detail and do not fit the established pattern of 'common threads'. Similarly, a few cases may be the result of delusion: part of a psychopathology which can be independently identified. However, there are still thousands of reports which cannot be set aside in this way. Greaves (1992), reviewing the literature on satanist abuse, and Jacobs (1993), reviewing the literature on abductions, produce almost identical lists of the 'alternative explanations' that have been canvassed. These include the following:

1. incorporation, the unconscious internalization of information which is later falsely 'remembered' as a personal experience;
2. screen memories, the adoption of a fantasy scenario which effectively 'hides' a different kind of traumatic experience;
3. urban legends, which begin as 'small stories', get amplified, and then become the basis for a more generalized public 'hysteria';
4. contamination, the process whereby artefact 'memories' are produced by the recall procedures, often involving hypnosis;
5. the collective unconscious, which produces archetypal fantasies, sometimes as a result of altered states of consciousness.

In both literatures, the believers argue that these hypotheses do not fit the facts, or else are even more implausible than the view that the reports can be taken at face value.

Relevant to the 'urban legend' and 'contamination' hypotheses is the fact that both satanist abuse and abduction reports started to become more common following the publication of a key text. For satanist

abuse, it was *Michelle Remembers* (Smith and Pazder, 1980), and for abductions it was *Missing Time* (Hopkins, 1981). Sceptics claim, in both cases, that it was the appearance of these books that triggered the escalation of accounts, and created a climate in which therapists began 'looking for' satanist abuse and abduction descriptions. It is perhaps also worth observing that both books were published at about the same time, and that the two 'escalations' have a similar chronology. As with all the other similarities, this may be purely coincidental. However, the parallel chronologies have continued recently with the appearance of 'retractors'—people who, having claimed that they were victims of satanist abuse or abduction, subsequently withdraw the claim. In the case of abuse victims, this phenomenon has been used to support the 'false memory' hypothesis (Yapko, 1994, for example). The most notable abduction 'retractor'—though his current views are hard to determine—may be Whitley Streiber (Schnabel, 1994).

The similarities identified so far might all be thought of as parallels of context: intriguing, but of no great consequence. However, when we come to consider the nature of the accounts themselves, the coincidences begin to multiply. In what follows, I shall use a number of convenient headings to assemble these parallels.

## THE VICTIMS

Inevitably, there are no statistics on satanic covens, but Lanning (1992) comments that nearly all adult survivors of ritual abuse (or, in his terms, multidimensional child sex rings) are women. As for child victims, his view is that 'both boys and girls appear to be targeted, but with an apparent preference for girls' (p. 129). A reading of the satanist abuse literature also suggests that a clear majority of victims are female (compare Gardner, 1992). Correspondingly, about two-thirds of the abductees in the Jacobs (1993) study are women, and Jacobs observes that 'women seem to have a larger number of more complex experiences' (p. 15).

Satanist abuse is repetitive. Almost all victims are subjected to a series of abuses, with adult survivors typically recalling events that took place on numerous occasions over a period of several years. Remarkably, the same is true of abduction reports. Most subjects recall not one abduction, but many; and Jacobs claims that there is evidence to suggest 'that people who have been abducted only once are targeted as a matter of expediency and are in close proximity to an abductee during an abduction' (Jacobs, 1993, p. 307).

In both cases, the experiences usually begin in childhood. Streiber's (1987) is a graphic, but otherwise typical, account of the discovery of memories extending back at least to the age of twelve, probably nine, and conceivably two. Jacobs says that, for most abductees, the first episode takes place between the ages of four and seven: 'I have no record of a series of abductions that begin when the abductee is an adult' (p. 308). Meanwhile, according to Lanning, ritual abuse generally begins between the ages of two and six. This certainly reflects popular accounts of satanist abuse (Spencer, 1989; Mayer, 1991) by therapists who have worked with adult survivors. Like the subjects described in more academic sources (Young, 1992; Coleman, 1994), their patients eventually retrieve memories from early childhood.

There may also be a 'clustering' effect. Jacobs says that abductions 'may increase as the child approaches and goes through puberty, continue through the teens, and then abruptly stop. Long periods of time may pass without an abduction and then they begin again' (Jacobs, 1993, p. 308). It is my impression from the more 'popular' literature on satanist abuse that there is often a similar pattern with adult survivors of satanist abuse.

A more difficult point is that there appears to be a cross-generation effect. Jacobs observes: 'There is a good chance that one or both of the abductees' parents may have had these experiences, and our research indicates that if a man or woman is abducted, the chances that his or her children will also be abducted may increase' (p. 307). No evidence is provided for this claim; but it does echo the familiar idea that abuse victims frequently become abusers themselves. It is also parallel to the belief that, for many adult satanist abuse survivors, abuse takes place in the context of multi-generational satanic cults, with at least one of the victim's parents actively co-operating (Spencer, 1989; Mayer, 1991).

## RETRIEVAL

Characteristic of both satanist abuse and abduction reports is that they have to be retrieved over a period of time. Adult victims rarely have 'natural' memories of the events they ultimately recall. Amnesia is all but universal and, among satanist abuse victims, is sometimes associated with more extreme forms of dissociation. The most dramatic cases of dissociation in satanist abuse involve Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD)—which is not typical of abductions—and it has been estimated that about 20 per cent of MPD<sup>1</sup> patients may also be victims of cult abuse (Sachs and Braun, 1987). Abductees do not usually experience such extreme dissociation, but do nevertheless suffer from systematic

'memory loss' in which recall of the abduction itself is suppressed, even when the victim remembers seeing something strange, or even terrifying, and recognizes this experience as a 'close encounter' with a UFO. For Hopkins (1987), 'missing time'—a period for which the UFO witness cannot account—is itself a clue to the fact that an abduction has taken place. For both types of victim, the amnesia can (on the face of it) be maintained for many years.

It is also worth observing that, in many accounts, there is a suspicion that dissociation is 'deliberately' induced (Coleman, 1994). Mayer's patients described events that led him to speculate that the abusers knowingly created circumstances in which alternative personalities, characteristic of MPD, were likely to emerge; while Streiber, like many other abductees, was aware of an injunction—that 'he was not supposed to remember'—associated with his memory blocks.

Hypnosis is very frequently used in assisting recall for both satanist abuse and abduction victims. Indeed, in many cases it is regarded as the only way of breaking through amnesia. This has aroused suspicion among sceptics. It is claimed that patients diagnosed as having MPD are particularly susceptible to suggestion, and that if therapists are inclined to believe in satanic abuse then patients may end up believing in it as well, as 'the reconstruction of their memories is in the hands of the therapist' (Boyd, 1991, p. 275). More generally, hypnosis may allow 'the production of increased errors in recall . . . Sometimes, increased suggestibility leads a patient to "recall" phenomena introduced as a leading question by a therapist' (Young, 1992, p. 262). The debate about 'false memory syndrome' (for example, Barnier and McConkey, 1992; Yapko, 1994) has sharpened popular awareness of this possibility. The same suspicion characterizes abduction cases, and Vallee (1991) is particularly scathing about the way in which some practitioners of hypnosis may be inducing artificial memories among apparent 'abductees'.

Predictably, therefore, the accounts of both satanist abuse and abduction victims, and especially hypnotically facilitated accounts, often contain contradictions, inconsistencies and apparent impossibilities. It is, of course, possible to interpret these anomalies in different ways: as evidence of conscious or unconscious fabrication, on the one hand, or as a product of confabulation, on the other. Equally, a 'believer' might argue that they are indicative of distortions or screen memories, conceivably planted by abusers and abductors in order to mislead both the victim and the therapist.

## ABDUCTORS AND ABUSERS

To claim that there are parallels between abusers and abductors might seem to be stretching it a bit, for how can one draw convincing compar-

isons between the human and the apparently non-human? Certainly, I do not want to force the issue too much. On the other hand, several unexpected points are worth noting.

Both satanist abuse and abduction are characterized by multiple 'offenders' (as well as multiple victims). In virtually every case, the abuse is perpetrated and witnessed by members of a group gathered together for that purpose. Moreover, a significant proportion of the 'offenders' are 'female'. The last word has been placed in inverted commas in acknowledgement of the fact that alien abductors are not easily discriminated into gender categories. Most abductees assert they are unable to distinguish between male and female in the normal way. Almost all of them, however, report that they experience a convincing 'intuitive' awareness about the gender of their captors; and it would seem that at least 50 per cent of them are judged to be 'female'. Meanwhile, according to Lanning (1992), ritual abuse reports imply that around 40 to 50 per cent of offenders are women. As he points out, this is unusual in the field of child sexual abuse, and contrasts markedly with 'normal' child sex rings, where the great majority of offenders are men. The literature of satanist abuse also suggests that both sexes are involved, to a roughly equal extent (for example, Coleman, 1994).

It may also be worth mentioning facial characteristics, again without placing undue emphasis on the comparison. Alien abductors do not have faces which appear human. However, the arrangement of eyes, nose and mouth is identical, even though shape, size and colouring are, almost always, distinctly different. It is not too great a leap to suggest some affinity with the masks frequently worn by satanist abusers, in that these too distort individual features without altering the overall geometry of the face.

Similarly, I do not feel that great emphasis should be laid on the hierarchies which alien and satanist abuser groups seem to share; nor on the uniformity of their respective garments (excepting the 'leader' who, in each case, usually wears distinctive clothing); nor on the 'symbols' or 'insignia' that such garments sometimes display. I take it that any 'formally constituted' group (even an 'alien' one) is likely to have some kind of hierarchy, some kind of uniform, some kind of graphic design indicating the group's purpose. So these parallels are mentioned only in passing. They may contribute to an emerging pattern, but do not in themselves suggest any remarkable correspondence.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE AND ABDUCTION

The experience of abductees and satanist abuse victims is not, by any means, identical. If it were, this fact would already have been noticed,

and one would not be obliged to write of 'parallels' or 'similarities'. So far as I am aware, no abductees have witnessed, or been compelled to participate in, human or animal sacrifice. Equally, no victim of satanist abuse has reported that satanist abuse perpetrators communicate through 'telepathy' rather than speech. However, it is still possible to discern some remarkable correspondences between the two types of experience.

One of the primary features of both satanist abuse and abduction is sexual abuse, although in neither case does sexual activity take place on every occasion. Jacobs (1993) notes that 'sexual episodes, despite how lurid and unbelievable they might appear, seem to be an important, albeit confusing, part of the abduction experience' (p. 198). Although there are some reports of abductees being coerced into what, on the face of it, is a sexual encounter with an alien, the more usual experience is enforced sex with another human being, who very often seems to be in a drugged, confused or otherwise psychologically passive state. The majority of such reports are made by women; but men also describe situations in which they are compelled to engage in sexual activity with a human female, in a manner reminiscent of accounts by adult male survivors of satanic groups. These sexual encounters are always witnessed by a group of aliens, and sometimes by groups which include other abductees. Again, the parallel with accounts offered by satanist abuse survivors hardly requires elaboration.

It is worth noting that some reports of abduction include sexual arousal of the abductee, by apparently artificial means, whilst the abductee is simultaneously undergoing an emphatically non-sexual experience—usually a set of gynaecological and urological procedures. This is, arguably, parallel to a familiar feature of satanist abuse in which sexual arousal is stimulated in equally inappropriate situations, in an apparent effort to associate it with blood, excreta, sacrifice, or other forms of violence and torture.

However, it is clear from abduction reports that the main focus of abduction is not sexual activity, *per se*. This matches the claim that, in satanist (as opposed to ritual) abuse, the abusing group's primary objective is not sexual; rather, sex is part of a wider range of satanist activity whose principal function is religious or quasi-religious. Thus, as I suggested at the beginning of this paper, a distinction is often drawn between 'genuinely' satanic groups for whom this is true, and child sex rings who may use the trappings of satanic ritual as a fetishism, or as a device for confusing and intimidating the victims. There is perhaps less scepticism about the existence of the latter kind of group than there is about the existence of the former (Lanning, 1992).

According to both Jacobs and Hopkins, abduction reports imply that the aliens have instituted a 'breeding programme', and it is this pro-

gramme which appears to be the abductors' central concern. Jacobs (1993) describes a cycle of egg harvesting, embryo implantation, and embryo or foetal extraction which women abductees undergo (while, for men, 'the expression of sperm is a central part of the abduction experience', p. 122). During 'egg harvesting', one of the aliens inserts a variety of instruments into the woman's vagina. 'Most women in some way know that he is taking an egg' (p. 107). Similar procedures are used for the implanting of a fertilized egg, in such a way that the victim 'receives the impression that she is now pregnant' (p. 108). Later in the cycle of abductions, the victim undergoes a foetal extraction procedure in which, usually, the foetus is unmistakably displayed. It appears that some women experience several repetitions of this cycle over a number of years.

According to Jacobs, genuine pregnancies arise as a result of the abduction cycle, even though the women concerned—thanks to amnesia—may not at first be aware of the fact. 'Her breasts swell and retain water, she may have morning sickness, and she may have a "pregnant feeling". She may take home a pregnancy test that shows positive, and then she may go to a physician for a blood test that confirms her suspicions—she is pregnant. But about six to twelve weeks later her periods begin again. She is inexplicably not pregnant. She has no miscarriage, no expulsion of foetal material . . . She goes to her physician, who confirms that the foetus has suddenly disappeared' (Jacobs, 1993, p. 114).

These accounts are matched by reports of women satanist abuse survivors. As Lanning (1992) notes, 'women called breeders claim to have had babies that were turned over for human sacrifice' (p. 128). As with abduction, satanist abuse groups also perform foetal extractions, while pregnancies are induced both by 'normal' sexual activity and by artificial insemination. According to Boyd, several investigators report that certain satanist abuse victims are used as 'brood mares'. These teenage women are made to produce children, 'some of whom would be aborted before they were born and used in sacrifice. Some are allowed to be born and raised without anyone else's knowledge. They have no birth record. Their schooling is all done in the group. They don't exist on paper' (Boyd, 1991, p. 65). These claims are typical of the literature on satanist abuse (Spencer, 1989; Mayer, 1991; Coleman, 1994).

On the face of it, then, large numbers of children are being bred whose existence is not publicly recorded. In the one case, there are 'children of Satan'; in the other there are 'hybrids', children who are apparently the product of a genetic exchange between alien and human being (although there are no reports of abduction victims actually giving birth to such children).

In addition to sexual abuse, both satanist abuse and abduction victims report various forms of physical abuse, carried out while the victim is tied up, strapped down, or otherwise restrained. For abductees, no matter how terrifying the experience, pain is not usually a feature of the highly intrusive 'medical examinations' which they are compelled to undergo. However, many abductees do describe being subjected to 'pain experiments'. Jacobs (1993) refers to one man who was repeatedly exposed to such experiments over a number of years, beginning in childhood: 'the aliens touch various parts of his body with a special tool that causes excruciating and unremitting localized pain' (p. 193). Similarly, satanist abuse victims report the use of 'Satan's rods', violently and painfully thrust into each body orifice. Spencer's (1989) account is particularly graphic.

It is also worth noting that both satanist abuse and abduction victims frequently claim that foreign bodies have been 'implanted' inside them. Streiber (1987) is typical of abductees in reporting that a device of some kind was implanted in his sinus cavity, although in other cases the ear is used. Similarly, satanist abuse victims often report the conviction that there is something inside them, normally in the chest or stomach. The 'implant' in this case may be Satan's heart, a demon, or a monster; but artificial devices are also described—commonly a 'bomb', which may be triggered if the victim divulges her experiences to anyone else (Coleman, 1994).

There is no direct parallel in abduction cases for the human and animal sacrifice carried out in satanic groups. However, there is a very common abduction procedure, which Jacobs (1993) calls 'visualization', in which the victim is exposed to various scenes which evoke a strong emotional response. Death is a prominent theme in this procedure. 'The scene is often abhorrent and disturbing—death and destruction, calamity and war'. The abductee 'may see familiar people in it, such as her family suffering from the effects of nuclear war' (p. 136). In one case, the victim was taken to a room 'where she watched a frightening devillike face on a screen. . . . Before she knew it, three "soldiers" were shooting "machine guns" at the screen. She was terrified' (p. 150). Meanwhile, in satanist abuse, 'human sacrifice' is (on the face of it) common. Boyd (1991) suggests that the carers he interviewed can, between them, cite 'more than 160 individual clients who had told them they had witnessed or participated in human sacrifice. In many cases they claimed this had been more than once; in some cases it had been often' (p. 64).

Victims of both satanist abuse and abduction undergo their experiences in a dazed or confused state. Describing the typical abductee's experience, Jacobs (1993) observes that: 'her mental state is altered.

She has no concern for what she was doing before the abduction. If she is abducted with her son or daughter and they are no longer in sight, she may quickly forget about their plight. . . . Although the victim may have had many abductions before, she has only a limited sense of familiarity with the situation she finds herself in' (p. 90). The use of 'visualization procedures' adds to the confusion, in that the aliens seem able to flood the victim's mind with a wide variety of images and scenes. By comparison, Boyd (1991) comments on the seeming inability of satanist abuse survivors to describe certain details of what has happened to them. This condition is normally attributed to drugs (although it appears that hypnotic techniques are used as well) as, according to their therapists and counsellors, most victims report that drugs are used as a method of control. Gould (1992) claims that the 'drugging of children comprises a virtually ubiquitous aspect of satanist abuse', and that the most significant drugs are those 'that have particular mind-altering properties' (p. 236).

In both literatures, there is much reference to 'mind control'. In satanist abuse, this is held to be a form of 'brainwashing—literally programming them to behave and respond in a way that guarantees their submission and silence' (Boyd, 1991, p. 81). The techniques used include sensory deprivation, hypnosis and the deliberate inducing of amnesia or MPD. One of the main functions of these techniques is to establish powerful inhibitions in the victim against describing her or his experiences. As one of Boyd's informants notes, 'very often you'll hear a victim saying, "I can't say; I can't say that", which is very specifically *not* saying, "I don't know" ' (p. 83). Similar inhibitions are experienced by abductees. While there is no explicit evidence that aliens use hypnosis or post-hypnotic suggestion, it is usually claimed that the victims' amnesia is 'programmed', and that their initial inability to recall their experiences is a result both of amnesia and a manifest sense of guilt and betrayal: 'they feel they should not be telling anyone about these experiences' (Jacobs, 1993, p. 219).

## THE AFTERMATH

All victims of satanist abuse and abduction suffer from a range of intense (and, prior to diagnosis, apparently irrational) fears and anxieties. Fears common to both satanist abuse survivors and abductees include the fear of: being alone, visiting the doctor, particular places, lifts, burglary, animals, sleep and dreams. Numerous sexual and psychosexual dysfunctions are also reported. For satanist abuse victims, these fears are frequently constellated within a form of post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), almost always of a dissociative kind (Young, 1992). In extreme cases, victims develop multiple personality disorder (MPD). While there are no documented cases of MPD among abductees, abduction victims do appear to suffer from a form of PTSD, and Westrum has suggested that it is possible to identify 'post-abduction syndrome', a variant which bears a close resemblance to PTSD with dissociation (quoted in Jacobs, 1993). Definitions in this area are notoriously problematic, but it is clear that both satanist abuse and abduction victims are traumatized by their experiences, and that the majority of them suffer from amnesia, even when the more extreme forms of dissociation are not evident.

In addition to the psychological scars, many satanist abuse victims and abductees are said to bear the physical marks of their experiences. Mysterious scars—'mysterious', that is, to the victim still in amnesia—are found on the bodies of abductees, and severe bruising is often discovered on the arms, legs or genitals (Jacobs, 1993). In some instances, abductees find artificial marks on their bodies, usually in the form of geometric patterns. Nosebleeds are also common, as are 'holes' in the nasal passage and ruptures of the eardrum. These conditions are associated with the implanting of devices, which most abductees report. Allegedly, medical practitioners who have examined the abductees are unable to offer an explanation of their injuries. Similarly, many adult satanist victims bear the signs of physical injuries consistent with their accounts (Spencer, 1989). According to Boyd (1991), therapists argue that cases exist 'where it would have been impossible for the wounds to have been self-inflicted, where the psychological symptomology is incapable of being simulated, and where the possibility of the client lying has been ruled out' (p. 251).

The most remarkable physical evidence of abduction is unexplained pregnancies, which terminate suddenly in an equally inexplicable manner. In the same way, ruptured hymens, unusual vaginal discharges, and other vaginal problems, are apparently common among female abductees, just as they are among child sexual abuse victims. Similarly, there is evidence of teenage pregnancy in some adult survivors of satanist abuse. Of course, where evidence of this kind exists, it cannot be taken to demonstrate that either abduction or satanist abuse actually took place.

In both types of case, the lack of conclusive physical evidence is the main reason for scepticism. One of the sceptics, Lanning, an FBI specialist in child sexual abuse, originally believed the stories he began to hear in the early 1980s. As the number of reports escalated, however, he began to question their reliability (while not doubting the existence of organized abuse in general). 'In none of the multidimensional sex

ring cases of which the author is aware have bodies of the murder victims been found—in spite of major excavations where the abuse victims had claimed the bodies were located' (Lanning, 1992, p. 130). There is no other evidence, either. 'Many of those not in law enforcement do not understand that, while it is possible to get rid of a body, it is much more difficult to get rid of the physical evidence that a murder took place' (p. 130). The sheer scale of satanic ritual abuse—given the proliferation of reports—suggests that evidence ought to have been produced by now. But it has not. This point is made repeatedly by sceptics. As Lanning (1992) observes: 'Two or three people murder a couple of children in a few communities as part of a ritual, and nobody finds out? Possible. Thousands of people do the same thing to tens of thousands of victims over many years? Not likely' (p. 131).

The problem of corroborating evidence in the case of abduction is shared with close encounters generally. Nothing has changed materially since Jung (1959) observed that 'for a decade the physical reality of the Ufos [sic] remained a very problematical manner which was not decided one way or the other with the necessary clarity, despite the mass of observational material that had accumulated in the meantime' (p. xiii). Hard evidence for close encounters of the 'fourth kind' is virtually non-existent and, in the absence of convincing evidence for the physical existence of UFOs, the evidence for abduction turns entirely on the accounts offered by the abductees.

There is one final parallel between satanist abuse and abduction that is worth commenting on. This concerns the threats and warnings issued to victims, and others, following their experience. It is not a complete parallel because, in the UFO case, the most notorious—certainly the most bizarre—warnings follow UFO sightings rather than abductions. These warnings are delivered by sinister figures—the 'men in black' (MIBs)—who visit witnesses and investigators. Such encounters are, by report, very frightening even though the MIBs often behave in odd ways (using stilted and clichéd language, for example) and even though nothing ever seems to come of their threats (Steiger, 1989). It is worth noting that MIB stories are predominantly an American phenomenon; as Moore (1993) notes, there are comparatively few documented visits in the UK. A comparison can be made with the threats received by victims of satanist abuse, and by their relatives, carers and counsellors (Boyd, 1991). In this case, contact is usually made by letter or telephone, although some therapists and counsellors claim to have been confronted personally, and the warnings are frequently accompanied by curses or even death-threats (Core, 1991). As with the MIBs, many warnings are couched in highly clichéd terms. Boyd comments on the 'comic-horror, sub-Wheatleyesque portentousness of it all' and quotes

a passage from one letter which begins: 'You have squeaked one too many times . . .' (p. 91). He is unable to point to any death threats which have actually been carried out, although a British counsellor reports physical attacks and burglaries. Burglaries, and threatening letters and phone calls, are also reported by UFO witnesses and investigators.

The box overleaf summarizes the parallels outlined above, using the same headings. I have used the term 'perpetrators', unusually but conveniently, to refer to both abusers and 'aliens'.

### THE FOLKLORE CONNECTION?

In ufology, there is a school of thought which distances itself both from the 'believers' and the 'unbelievers'. This school of thought was inaugurated by Jung (1959), and other writers taking the same sort of view include Clark and Coleman (1975), Keel (1978), Bullard (1982), Vallee (1989), Thompson (1991), and Schnabel (1994). Broadly, these writers place UFO phenomena in a wider class of strange events, reports of which reach far back into history. This class encompasses tales of elves, fairies, trolls, dwarfs, angels, demons, and other non-human beings, whose encounters with ordinary people have been described for centuries. Such encounters frequently include abduction, especially of children, sexual activity, and the torments familiar from both satanist abuse and abduction reports. 'The piercing instruments used by aliens in their examination bear a similarity, albeit genteel, to the piercing tortures which devils inflict on sinners in Christian art and fundamentalist belief' (Bullard, 1982, quoted in Thompson, 1991, p. 147). Meanwhile, precedents for overtly sexual encounters can be derived from the activities of incubi and succubi, demons who copulate with human beings as they sleep.

In pointing out these similarities, Vallee and the rest are not dismissing UFO sightings and abduction experiences as 'merely' modern folklore, or 'only' urban myths. They are persuaded that the experience of abductees is subjectively real and objectively traumatizing. But they do reject the extraterrestrial hypothesis (for several reasons, of which the apparent continuity with folklore is only one). There is, as we might expect, no firm agreement as to the most plausible alternative explanation, and no individual writer of this persuasion is prepared to do more than ask questions. Are we dealing with some non-extraterrestrial intelligence, which has shared the planet with us all along? Or is the UFO phenomenon part of an evolutionary 'control system', an idea with which Vallee toys? Or, again, is it some sort of 'cosmic shaman . . .

TABLE 1. *Parallels between reports of satanist abuse and accounts of alien abduction*

Area	Parallel
<i>Context</i>	<p>A common chronology with escalation of reports during the 1980s.</p> <p>Escalation, in each case, following the publication of a key text.</p> <p>Appearance, latterly, of 'retractors', i.e. those withdrawing previous claims.</p> <p>Virtually identical series of 'alternative explanations' canvassed.</p>
<i>Victims</i>	<p>A clear majority of the victims of both satanist abuse and abduction are female.</p> <p>Both are repetitive, with most victims reporting many experiences, not just one.</p> <p>In both cases, the experiences almost always begin in childhood.</p> <p>There may be a 'clustering effect', with periods during which abuse/abduction stops.</p> <p>There may also be a cross-generation effect, with parents and children both involved.</p>
<i>Retrieval</i>	<p>Characteristically, (apparent) memories have to be retrieved over a period of time.</p> <p>Amnesia is common for both abuse and abduction victims.</p> <p>Reports frequently claim that aliens and abductors induce amnesia.</p> <p>Many reports suggest that perpetrators deliberately induce screen memories.</p> <p>Hypnosis is often used as a memory-retrieval method, through regression.</p> <p>Accounts often contain contradictions, inconsistencies and apparent impossibilities.</p>
<i>Perpetrators</i>	<p>Both phenomena are characterized by multiple 'offenders'.</p> <p>Equally, they usually involve multiple victims.</p> <p>A significant proportion of aliens and abusers are (judged to be) female.</p> <p>Facial characteristics can be distorted ('aliens' naturally, abusers using masks).</p> <p>Perpetrators have a hierarchy, and sometimes wear special clothing and insignia.</p>
<i>Experience</i>	<p>Victims frequently report themselves to be in a drugged, or drug-like, state.</p> <p>Sexual activity is not the main focus of either abduction or satanic ritual.</p>

TABLE 1. *Continued*


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<i>Aftermath</i>	<p>In neither abuse nor abduction does sexual activity take place on every occasion.</p> <p>Sexual encounters, when they occur, are forced on the victim. Sexual encounters may be with either perpetrators or other victims.</p> <p>Sexual encounters are usually witnessed by a group of perpetrators.</p> <p>Sexual arousal is frequently stimulated by artificial means. Sexual activity is often associated with non-sexual and highly unpleasant experiences.</p> <p>Perpetrators frequently use women as 'breeders'.</p> <p>Female victims often experience pregnancy and foetal extraction.</p> <p>Babies and foetuses are apparently used by perpetrators for their own purposes.</p> <p>Victims report extreme physical abuse.</p> <p>Physical abuse often includes devices being thrust inside the victim's body.</p> <p>Victims frequently claim that foreign bodies have been implanted in them surgically.</p> <p>Victims witness horrifying and repellent scenes.</p> <p>Perpetrators are said to use 'mind control' techniques.</p> <p>Victims suffer from a range of intense (and apparently irrational) fears and anxieties.</p> <p>Variations of post-traumatic stress disorder are common.</p> <p>Victims often bear physical marks and scars.</p> <p>Female victims frequently claim to have become pregnant. Some (abuse) or all (abduction) pregnancies terminate inexplicably.</p> <p>Female victims often suffer ruptured hymens and unusual vaginal discharges.</p> <p>Sinister threats and warnings are often delivered to victims, therapists and researchers.</p>
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guiding the individual and collective soul at times of initiation and transition'? (Thompson, 1991, p. 232; a similar idea is entertained by Ring, 1992, and Mack, 1994, among others).

Thompson (1991) has suggested that accounts of abductions (together with UFO reports generally) should be considered as 'texts', and that they can be read in much the same way that a literary critic might read them. The critic, he argues, would use a number of frames of reference, one of which might well be 'allegory'. He would also point to the common narrative structure that such accounts share with stories of

abduction by 'little people' in a wide range of folk traditions, as well as stories of numinous encounters with divine and demonic figures. We might well ask whether this idea can be generalized to accounts of satanist abuse, the implication being that they belong to a wider category of 'strange episodes' which could, possibly, have a common origin.

### THE TEMPORAL LOBE CONNECTION?

In one sense, I find myself embarrassed by this discussion. I first began to research reports of alien abduction for non-academic reasons, which had nothing to do with satanist abuse; but the parallels I have described forced themselves on my attention. I am aware that the comparison will be found cranky by some, scandalous by others. However, if we accept that the parallels exist—and anyone who does not accept this could spare themselves the trouble of reading the rest of the paper—then we can hardly avoid the question as to what accounts for them. In this section, therefore, I will review some psychological and neurophysiological research which may help to answer this question, drawing particularly on the work of Michael Persinger, who has already proposed an explanation of the abduction experience. I will suggest that a similar account is worth considering in the context of satanist abuse.

We can begin with a series of experiments reported by Wilder Penfield, a Montreal neurosurgeon. During the 1950s, Penfield explored the cerebral cortex of epileptic patients, stimulating various regions with electrodes. In particular, when parts of the right or left temporal lobe were stimulated, patients reported auditory and visual effects—voices, people, music, scenes—as well as memories of past experiences, thoughts and visual flashbacks (Penfield and Perot, 1963). The apparent memories had a hallucinatory or dream-like quality, often beginning with indistinct images but eventually, with further stimulation, resolving into relatively well-defined narrative episodes. Penfield regarded these results as evidence that memories were localized in the temporal lobe, and that they could be evoked by stimulating the appropriate region. However, most authorities now question the view that Penfield's electrodes elicited 'real' memories, and believe it more likely that they evoked some form of confabulation (Horowitz and Adams, 1970). Rose (1993) has observed that 'the Penfield studies remain fascinating, challenging, but ultimately uninterpretable'.

The phenomenology of the effects experienced by Penfield's subjects is reminiscent of certain features of satanist abuse reports—as well as accounts of abduction—which characteristically begin as 'flashback

memories' (Mollon, 1994). Mollon observes that 'the memories of satanic abuse do not emerge in clear and coherent form. Rather, the fragmented experiences reappear in the form of scattered clues, bits and pieces of memory that only gradually gather together to form a coherent picture' (p. 140). However, it would appear that flashbacks are not always recognized as such. According to Young (1992), memories often return in the form of 'hallucinations compatible with the original experience. Typically, the patient may experience an entire event or a portion of an event as though it is current'. He adds: 'The patient's task is to gain increasing mastery over the ability to recognize that such a flashback experience is a reliving of a past memory, and to assimilate it' (p. 261); but he does not say what clinical test is used to decide that the 'flashback experience' is an hallucination *compatible with the original experience*—a past memory revisited—and not, merely, an hallucination.

The revision of Penfield's hypothesis reflects a deeper understanding of temporal lobe function, acquired by neurophysiologists during the last thirty years. In part, this understanding has been derived from studies of temporal lobe epilepsy, which have provided clues as to the significance of deep temporal lobe structures, especially the amygdala (Gloor, 1972). The stimulation of these structures may be exogenous—that is, surgical, as in the Penfield experiments—or endogenous, as when a temporal lobe lesion provokes limbic seizures. It is to the phenomenology associated with these seizures that we can now turn.

People with partial complex or limbic (temporal lobe) epilepsy frequently report experiences of levitation, voices, anxiety or panic, odd odours (Ervin, 1975), strange sensations around the genitals and anal sphincter, erotic experiences (Remillard *et al.*, 1983), shadowy figures, out-of-the-body journeys, and a great variety of visual, auditory and tactile hallucinations (O'Donohoe, 1994), including 'complex animated sequences that are dominated by surrealistic or dream-like features' (Persinger, 1989, p. 56). There is a tendency to report experiences of psi phenomena, such as telepathy and precognition, whilst sudden religious conversions (Dewhurst and Beard, 1970), emotional disorders and changes in sexual behaviour are all common. Temporal lobe seizures are also associated with amnesia, a sense of missing time, and the feeling that something profound has happened (Persinger, 1989).

Walsh (1978) describes the case of a woman who only suffered attacks when applying eye shadow, her face close to the mirror. On these occasions, she would see a scene—experienced as a memory—featuring her parents and grandparents, which was accompanied by a general sense of sexual excitement. In another case, seizures were associated with a human face and shoulders, wearing a red jersey, identified as the patient

herself. The seizures were accompanied by intense fear, which had an 'unnatural' quality to it, and were followed by amnesia. The various permutations of visual imagery, apparently related to past events, amnesia, sensory and emotional experiences, and implied sexuality are typical of the symptomatology.

It is evident that, phenomenologically, many of these effects overlap with accounts of satanist abuse and abduction. The overlap is sufficient, perhaps, to prompt the thought that the temporal lobe structures may also be implicated in these phenomena. Of course, this is *not* to say that apparent victims of either satanist abuse or abduction are, in reality, temporal lobe epileptics. However, there is evidence that complex partial epilepsy represents one end of a spectrum. It appears that degrees of temporal lobe 'lability' vary considerably across the population as a whole, with some people displaying more temporal lobe alpha activity than others. Moreover, Persinger (1984) has shown that those with a high degree of lability are prone to experiences which are qualitatively similar to (though less intense than) the phenomena reported by people suffering from limbic seizures.

In other words, there are subjects who have no clinical history of temporal lobe epilepsy—and who do not display the electroencephalographic profile associated with the condition—who nevertheless have a measurably higher degree of temporal lobe lability than average. These subjects also report what Persinger describes as 'benign limbic experience'; that is, the feeling of presence, vestibular sensations, odd smells, depersonalization, exotic beliefs, and flashback imagery (especially images related to what they take to be events in childhood). Standard personality inventories suggest that they are inclined to be anxious and emotionally volatile, and there is a tendency to bouts of mild to moderate hypomania against a background of mild to moderate depression. Since there is an association between clinical mania and temporal lobe epilepsy (Post and Uhde, 1986) this, too, can be taken as evidence for a continuum of temporal lobe activity.

It is possible to imagine that, in certain circumstances, a 'benign limbic experience' could be interpreted as evidence of sexual abuse in childhood. A therapist sensitized to the possibility of abuse might construe flashback imagery, associated with sexual arousal, as a significant indicator, inviting further enquiry. An over-zealous therapist might take an additional step, and construe the experience as grounds for an hypothesis—inviting, not enquiry, but confirmation. It is even conceivable that, in the latter case, a suggestible client might come to believe that sexual abuse had taken place when, in reality, it had not. So it is worth adding that people with a high degree of temporal lobe activity are, in fact, suggestible (Persinger and DeSano, 1986). An indefinable propor-

tion of false accusations *may* be explicable in this way. If the climate is saturated with awareness of sexual abuse, and if it is well known that abuse is not the rarity it was once supposed to be, we do not need to invoke paranoia—as some writers (for example Gardner, 1992) do—to see why a therapist or a client would find the sexual abuse hypothesis plausible, given an experience of this kind. If such cases do occur, however, they presumably fall within the penumbra of the ‘anomalous memories’ phenomenon, part of what would popularly be termed a ‘bandwagon effect’. The core of the phenomenon is populated by cases in which the basis for suspicion is more persuasive than memory fragments, sensory flashbacks and ill-defined emotional disturbance.

Besides, we are still some distance from an account that would explain, not only the satanist component of some apparent memories of abuse, but also the remarkable similarity between accounts of satanist abuse and reports of alien abduction. The remaining explanatory gap could be bridged by, first, an understanding of the common neurological source from which the two types of report spring and, secondly, the identification of a ‘trigger’ experience capable of generating a more intense phenomenology than that associated with people who ‘merely’ display a high degree of temporal lobe lability. Persinger’s recent work gives some indication of what this explanatory bridge might look like.

The ‘common source’ may be material which is accumulated in the right temporal lobe. A functional discrepancy between right and left hemispheres is well established in both clinical and theoretical writing, the right hemisphere displaying a much wider band of receptivity, even in borderline arousal. Following Miller (1986), Persinger (1989) suggests that material consistent with the ‘visitor experience’ (his term for encounters with aliens, apparitions, beings from other dimensions, and so on) could accumulate in the right temporal lobe through incidental learning in ‘twilight’ states. Whilst, in general, this may be true for most people, it would apply particularly to those with enhanced temporal lobe activity, and especially to those whose experience was such as to reinforce ‘compartmentalization’ between the two hemispheres. Such compartmentalization might be occasioned by certain religious and cultural traditions, or by the repression of childhood trauma (a point to which I shall return). It could also be associated with other factors suggestive of a discrepancy between right and left temporal lobes, for example left-handedness and creativity (an expression of the right hemisphere function). At any rate, the vulnerable population would consist of people with enhanced temporal lobe activity, and with a particular accumulation of the relevant material stored in the right hemisphere, thanks to social-historical factors and/or idiosyncratic neurological characteristics.

The 'trigger' experience would be a transient neuroelectrical imbalance between the temporal lobes, created by exposure to situations capable of stimulating the limbic structures directly. Such situations would prompt a micro-seizure, akin to the seizures experienced by temporal lobe epileptics, during which the material accumulated in the right side of the brain would intrude fantastically upon the left side.

In the case of abduction experiences, Persinger thinks that the appropriate stimulation is achieved by the magnetic fields associated with intense tectonic strain. His earlier studies demonstrate that UFO phenomena are linked to geological conditions such as fault lines, and that they are frequently precursors of earthquakes. A tectonic strain field would be capable of producing both light phenomena—interpreted as flying objects (Devereux, 1990)—and localized geomagnetic disturbances, which would generate the necessary electrico-chemical activity in the temporal lobes of those exposed to it (Persinger and Lafreniere, 1977; Persinger, 1990). For a member of the vulnerable population, a micro-seizure of this kind would be enough to trigger the 'visitor experience', usually in the form of alien abduction—given the cultural connotations of strange lights in the sky—but perhaps occasionally in some other guise (for example, a revelation of the Virgin Mary: see Evans, 1984; Thompson, 1991). This hypothesis has received a measure of experimental confirmation, in that similar experiences, with partial amnesia, have been induced in the laboratory by the application of exogenous magnetic fields focused on temporal lobe tissue (DeSano and Persinger, 1987). Other experimental evidence suggests that a single exposure could have long term consequences, since brief seizures can generate activity in the hippocampus which generalizes to the neocortex (Morgan *et al.*, 1987).

However, Persinger has suggested another mechanism which might also 'trigger' the visitor experience in people with enhanced temporal lobe activity—specifically, personal crisis and trauma. The mediating agent in this case would be adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) and glucocorticoids, which are released by stress, and to which the deep temporal lobe structures are highly sensitive (Persinger, 1989). In the absence of other cues, such as UFO-related phenomena, the material in the right hemisphere, intruding into the left as a result of this stimulus, would be free to take other culturally determined forms.

In view of the parallels described above, it is tempting to speculate that apparent memories of satanist abuse can be included among the 'visitor experiences' which are (or may be) explicable in this way. The trigger would presumably be stress of the kind that prompts subjects to resort to therapy; and it is entirely possible that, in many cases, the predisposing compartmentalization is (at least partially) a consequence

of genuine trauma, including abuse, in childhood. In such cases, the apparent memory of satanist abuse would be an indicator of actual abuse, without the satanist trappings. It is important to emphasize, however, that there is no necessary connection here. An apparent memory of satanist abuse could also arise as a result of other factors inducing compartmentalization, once the stress trigger had created the appropriate temporal lobe stimulus. It is also possible that hypnotic procedures help to elaborate, and perhaps amplify, the ordinary experience, even where they are not implicated in its production.

None of this implies that people with apparent memories of satanist abuse suffer from any form of psychopathology—a point I should perhaps emphasize in order to avoid any misunderstanding. What is problematic is not the experience itself—on this view, people who report it remain clinically within the normal curve—but the fact that it is interpreted as a memory of something that really happened.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SATANIST ABUSE DEBATE

The structure of argument underlying this paper can be summarized as follows. There is a series of remarkable parallels between accounts of satanist abuse and reports of alien abduction. These parallels, almost inevitably, prompt the question as to whether they might have a common cause. The most convincing explanation of the abduction phenomenon is to be found in neuropsychology, and specifically in Persinger's work. In view of the parallels, it is worth asking whether a version of this 'ready-made' explanation might also apply to apparent memories of satanist abuse.

This, it must be emphasized, is no more than a question, though one which deserves a serious attempt to find an answer. Its potential significance will be evident to anyone familiar with the current trajectory of debate, in which there is a choice between two dominant positions. According to one, the numerous reports of satanist abuse are evidence for the existence of satanism on a large, and hitherto unimagined, scale. The consistency and persuasiveness of victims' accounts admit of no other interpretation. According to the other, apparent memories of satanist abuse can only be artefacts of the therapeutic, and often hypnotic, retrieval process (where they are not deliberate fabrications, or the product of an independently identifiable psychopathology), since there is no forensic evidence. The 'satanist abuse phenomenon' is a consequence of inadequate interviewing proto-

cols and amateurish hypnosis; and, on some views, it is compounded by hysteria, fanaticism, or paranoia.

Recently, there have been signs that battle-lines are being drawn up in this country, as they have already been in the United States. Perhaps I may be permitted another personal comment at this point. In June 1994, I attended a conference on 'The Status of Evidence in Child Protection' (Birkbeck College, 30 June 1994) at which Professor La Fontaine was a speaker. In print, La Fontaine has scrupulously confined her comments to the 84 cases she studied; but at this conference, unlike the other contributors, she was treated with unambiguous hostility by a certain portion of her audience, some of whom accused her of: assisting the media in their scapegoating of social workers; giving aid and comfort to abusers; ridiculing foster parents and social workers; ignoring evidence. Whilst other sections of the audience clearly disapproved of what one person described as 'unprofessional animosity', it was evident that La Fontaine was, despite her own protestations, caught in a war of words between the 'believers' and the 'non-believers', the one side passionate, the other dismissive.

My final thoughts are as follows. It is clear that there are examples of what we are justified in describing as 'ritual abuse'. At the same time, it is very likely that there are cases in which an apparent memory of satanist abuse is an artefact of the 'retrieval' process. But there might also be an important group of cases in which accounts of satanist abuse are based on a subjectively real experience that is independent of poor interviewing protocols and hypnotic retrieval. The neuropsychological evidence outlined above suggests that this possibility should be closely examined. If support for it could be found, then we might be able to draw a conclusion capable of vindicating both sides in the debate, a conclusion which makes sense of the evidence to which 'believers' and 'non-believers', respectively, appeal. That conclusion would be: satanism is not rife, but apparent memories of satanist abuse are more than just an invention of over-zealous therapists.

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## NOTES

1. I have referred to 'Multiple Personality Disorder' throughout, since this is still a more familiar term than 'Dissociative Identity Disorder', the DSM IV classification.