

May/June 1988

The British & Irish *SKEPTIC* Volume II, No. 3

Articles

- 5 Findhorn: The Foundation Built on Sand
(Steuart Campbell)
- 8 Interview: Paul Kurtz (Wendy M. Grossman)
Part Two
- 12 The Case Against ESP (Anthony Garrett)
- 14 Telepathy: a Mechanism? NO! (Stephen Donnelly)
- 16 Recognizing Pseudoscience (Sven Ove Hansson)

Departments

- 2 Skeptics in the News
- 3 Hits & Misses
- 6 European Report
- 7 In Progress
- 19 Psychic Diary (Toby Howard)
- 20 Reviews: Peter Casson in Sheffield (Michael Heap);
"Mysteries of the Pennines" (Chris Wright); Dr Susan
Blackmore on "Antenna" (Steuart Campbell); The
Roving Mind (Wendy M. Grossman)
- 24 Letters
- 26 The Press Gallery

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SKEPTICS in the NEWS

Friday, April 29, 1988

Search for spook hunters

A BAND of spook-hunters who take their spirits with a pinch of salt are on the look-out for new recruits.

The recently formed Manchester Skeptics Group aims to investigate all aspects of the paranormal — including telepathy, the tarot and UFO sightings.

But they say supernatural claims should not be taken at face value.

Leading the group is computer researcher Toby Howard, based at Manchester University. He said: "We do not dismiss claims of paranormal phenomena out of hand.

"We remain very open-minded, but we believe such claims should be examined and carefully tested. Uncritical acceptance can lead to error, fraud and harm."

Now the group is aiming to set up a local network of people keen on investigating claims of close encounters of the spooky kind.

They are also planning to conduct a series of meetings and seminars on the fascinating subject.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Skeptics should contact Toby Howard on 748 4628.

MANCHESTER METRO NEWS

Outrage at Jesus postmark

Walter Schwarz
Religious Affairs
Correspondent

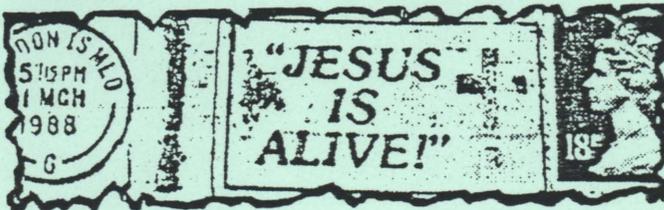
BRITISH humanists said they were outraged yesterday on hearing that the slogan "Jesus is alive" is to appear as a postmark on almost every letter posted in Britain for the next six weeks.

Mr Martin Horwood, spokesman for the British Humanist Association, said members had "been phoning in all morning" after reading yesterday's Guardian report that a Christian bookseller, Mr Paul Slennet, had paid £50,000 for the service — in which 68 of mainland Britain's 69 main sorting offices will take part — as part of a prayer campaign.

The association said the scheme was "absolutely outrageous," and has written to Sir Bryan Nicholson, chairman of the Post Office, asking him to cancel it.

The association added: "Imagine the furore if we had asked that 'Jesus is dead' be post-marked on hundreds of millions of letters. We might think such things privately but they should not be forced on everybody else in such an insensitive way."

A Post Office spokesman said last night that the postmark slogan "was not considered to be contentious but a fair and reasonable message generally acceptable to the public."



California Skeptics' Next Hurdle: The Nostradamus Quake

By Robert Reinhold

New York Times Service

LOS ANGELES — As newcomers soon learn, Southern California is world headquarters for all manner of the New Age paranormal and the unorthodox: channelers to past lives, the healing power of quartz crystals, not to mention colonic hydrotherapy.

It is not an easy place for the scientifically minded to get along, never mind reverse the metaphysical tide. But some are trying, among them Southern California Skeptics. With 2,000 members, the group was started by "people who found themselves going crazy living next door to someone trying to fix their cars with crystals," according to its director, Al Seckel, a physicist in Pasadena.

The latest rationality crisis involves the hysteria over Nostradamus, the 16th-century French astrologer. If one believes the film based on his writings, "The Man Who Saw Tomorrow," Los Angeles is to be destroyed by an earthquake in May.

As it happens, the film makers got a little confused and this is not the year Nostradamus had in mind, and anyway it seems he was thinking about a

hailstorm not an earthquake. But the word did not get out in time to prevent a run on video stores for the film by panicked Angelenos. In the last week of March, more than 2,000 orders for the tape came in to its distributor, Warner Home Video, which was happy to fill them. Nearly all the orders were from California stores.

The scientists sprang into action. The Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles issued a "press kit" explaining that there will be no planetary alignment or conjunction in May and that, though earthquakes are a real concern on the West Coast, they are caused by "motions within the earth" and not by the small gravitational forces exerted by distant planets.

Both the California Institute of Technology and the observatory fielded a dozen or so calls a day from jittery residents.

Although astrology, the occult and untested remedies are worldwide preoccupations, why do they find such fertile ground in Los Angeles, the second-largest city in the United States?

To Mr. Seckel, the answer is rooted in the climate and the Los Angeles way of life.

"On the East Coast people try to make life

interesting," said Mr. Seckel, an erstwhile New Yorker. "On the West Coast they try to make it comfortable. The emphasis here is on fancy cars, how one looks, less on the mind per se. It's also due to the failure of the school system. There are a lot of people with their umbilical cords out looking to stick it into something, to remove responsibility."

The Skeptics' goal is not just to debunk myths but to urge people to judge information better. "There is a dearth of thinking skills — people are taught what to think, not how," he said.

The Skeptics made much hay some time ago in debunking Anthony Robbins, who sells "seminars" that promise to unlock "the unlimited power of your brain through the science of Neuro-Linguistic Programming."

One of the powers was said to allow buyers to walk barefoot over burning embers. The Skeptics showed that anyone could do this grats because oak embers, however hot, are poor conductors of heat.

The Nostradamus flap grew out of the 1981 film, narrated by Orson Welles, a credulous account of the old seer's works. His adherents maintain that

his vague verse, called quatrains, predicted such events as the rise of Napoleon and Hitler, World War II and the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

According to the film, an earthquake will strike "New City," which Mr. Welles says almost certainly means Los Angeles or San Francisco, with "Saturn, Capricorn, Jupiter, Mercury in Taurus, Venus, also Cancer, Mars in Zero."

Retranslating from the French, the Griffith Observatory found this to be gibberish, and could find no alignment of planets in May by any astrological reckoning. Before this word got out, there was much trembling in the Los Angeles basin.

The film makers are unrepentant. The producer, David L. Wolper, said he would be out of town in May but not because of the prediction. "If the quake does happen, we'll sell a lot more copies, maybe enough to rebuild my house," he said, laughing.

According to the film, the world will end in the year 3797. So unless the film was right and Los Angeles slips off the continental shelf next month, Mr. Seckel and his intellectual heirs have their work cut out for them for some time to come.

HITS & MISSES

RANDI TO TOUR

CSICOP HQ have sent out a letter to all the European groups announcing Randi's tentative plans for a European tour, which would take place mid-September to mid-October.

Watch this space for developments.

BENT ASTROLABE FOR BROOKE BOND

Ian Ridpath, editor of Popular Astronomy, announced in their January issue that "this year's Popular Astronomy Bent Astrolobe Award for the biggest astronomical blunder of 1987... goes to Brooke Bond Tea for their series of picture cards titled 'Unexplained Mysteries of the World...' The series was reviewed in B&IS I.2 and includes a wide variety of "mysteries" which, as Ridpath says, "have...been investigated and explained many times over..."

"The Bent Astrolabe Award will be delivered to Brooke Bond on the next flying saucer."

Congratulations to all concerned.

HER LAST BOW

The Sun reported on 11 May that Doris Collins has announced that her upcoming tour of Britain will be her last, and "exclusively for Sun readers." She will be accompanied on the tour by "singing star Julie Rogers." The tour runs roughly north to south, and includes dates in Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Folkestone, Wembley, Worthing, Wimbledon, Nottingham, and Margate.

Collins is moving from Richmond, Surrey, to Bedfordshire, where she plans to open a healing centre in August. She will be available there for personal consultations. And, of course, she will continue to write her column for the Sun.

Collins also has a new book out, The Power Within. Research, anyone?

THE LOCH NESS MONSTER FISH FARM

Stewart Campbell writes from Edinburgh:

Recent plans to site a fish farm in Loch Ness have met strong opposition from a group of bodies including Inverness, Loch Ness and Nairn Tourist Board, Loch Ness Preservation Association, and the Caledonian Canal Pleasure Craft Operators Association. They feared that the farm would 'reduce the credibility' of the monster ('myth or mystery') on which they all depend. This fear must be based on the

surprising expectation that the farm's cages will be unmolested (strengthening belief that the monster does not exist!)

So strongly did the objectors feel about this perceived threat to their livelihood that they brought a petition for judicial review of Highland Regional Council's planning permission for the farm. The petition was heard before Lord Clyde in the Court of Session in Edinburgh in December 1987. On 15 January 1988 Lord Clyde announced that he rejected the petition. Two days earlier the first two fish cages were lowered into Loch Ness off Dores and stocked with 20,000 salmon parr. In three years there will be 30 fish cages, a monster fish farm!

NO CONTEST

A publication issued by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland announced that the B&IS was handling a £100 challenge by Colin Wood. This is in error. We were asked to adjudicate such a challenge and hold the cheque--and we declined. Please note.

AETHERIAL NEWS

The Aetherius Society has published a bulletin warning about 1988's "magnetisation periods." The (inclusive) dates given are: March 7-12 ("Emergency Period"); April 18th-May 23; July 5-August 5; September 3-October 9; November 4-December 10. The Society explains its concern: "The lack of true knowledge of the science of prayer, together with the march of paralyzing materialism, has led over the centuries to a lack of Spiritual Energy on this Planet...this is the most dangerous shortage of energy on this Planet today...During the above dates a giant Spacecraft from Mars will be in orbit, 1,550 miles above the surface of the Earth. On board this craft are highly advanced Astrometaphysicians under the command of The Cosmic Master, Mars Sector 'Six...[They] are able...to condition the life-giving energies radiated by The Mighty Sun in such a way that all unselfish thought and action is potentised 3,000 times." The leaflet warns that magnetisation periods commence and end at midnight GMT on the dates shown.

We also have a leaflet listing the courses offered by the Aetherius Society April-June; these include Colour and Spiritual Healing, Kinesiology & Pendulum Dowsing, Psychometry, Yoga Breathing, Alternative Medicine. Costs

range from £20-50, and are offered in centres in London, Bristol, Hull, Barnsley, Derby, and Manchester.

Thanks to Stephen Moreton in Edinburgh for sending in the leaflets.

CALLING NESSIE

On 7 December 1987 the Scottish Tourist Board announced the establishment of a 'special hot-line to the Loch Ness Monster.' GB2LNM (Great Britain Two Loch Ness Monster) would be the call sign for a temporary special events station devoted to Nessie. It was set up by a radio ham from Airdrie with help from the STB.

In the wake of the world-wide publicity for Operation Deepscan a few months ago (see B&IS I.6), radio hams in Scotland received calls from their colleagues overseas asking for more information about Nessie. Radio amateur Danny Macrae, of Longriggend near Airdrie, proposed to operate the station for a month from 14 December to 11 January, and the STB produced 10,000 information cards about Nessie which Danny and his fellow operators from Mid Lanark Radio Society were to send out in answer to every call they received.

GB2LNM was launched at the Loch Ness Centre at Drumadrochit on 14 December in the presence of Alan Devereux, Chairman of the Scottish Tourist Board, who is himself a radio ham (GM8VEV). Thereafter Macrae handled enquiries from his home. He tell me that he had about 8000 contacts, of which well over half were from the USA. In his spare time (*sic*) Macrae is a poet; he used the occasion to give the first public performance of his poem 'Big Nessie, the champion of the world'!

REGAN'S REVENGE

The US story of the month seems to be ex-Reagan aide Donald Regan's new book, which contains allegations that some of Ronald Reagan's decisions about scheduling and policy were made for him by Nancy Reagan under the influence of an astrologer. We note that the astrologer did not foresee Donald Regan's revelations, which may yet prove to be well-timed...for the Democrats in November.

GRAPHOLOGISTS ORGANIZE

The Evening Standard reported on 21 March on the opening of a new graphology centre in London, "offering a service for companies

wanting to screen job applicants". According to reporter John Preston, the merchant bankers S G Warburg use graphology "in vetting senior job applications." The graphology centre "is being launched by Anna Koren, who runs similar centres in New York and Israel."

The article comments on the range of attitudes to graphology, from skeptical to claims of scientific accuracy, to party or fairground entertainment.

In response, in a letter to the Evening Standard on 30 March, Lorraine Herbert, the Honorary Secretary of the new Academy of Graphology, reports that it "has been set up to act as a qualifying body for graphology. It aims, among other things, to place graphology where it should be—in the curriculums of British universities, as it is in France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland."

The Academy has already granted 10 diplomas to graduates of the three-year course offered by the College of Graphology.

Mrs Herbert says the graduates "are trained to write concise analyses based on painstaking observation and using methods which have a sound scientific pedigree."

As a further note, graphology is one of the announced topics for the November, 1988, CSICOP Conference in Chicago.

NOSTRADAMUS IN CALIFORNIA

The other US news story of the month concerns Nostradamus' prediction that the "New City" will be struck by an earthquake in May, 1988. This prediction was given wide publicity by the 1981 film "The Man Who Saw Tomorrow," which was narrated by Orson Welles. Apparently the effect has had a slight similarity to the effect of Welles' 1938 Mercury Theatre production of "The War of the Worlds," which sent people racing from their homes in a panic when they heard on the radio that the Martians had landed in New Jersey.

On the day of the predicted disaster, the BBC News showed pictures of Los Angeles, the city most people assume is the one Nostradamus meant, still standing. The press generally covered the story of Los Angelesans hurrying out of town "just in case"; the International Herald Tribune on 9-10 April, in "California Skeptics' Next Hurdle: The Nostradamus Quake", covered the responses of scientific organizations, including the Griffith Observatory and the Southern California Skeptics.

Thanks to Frank Chambers for sending in the clipping.

SPECIAL REPORT: FINDHORN Steuart Campbell

In 1962 Peter Caddy, a former RAF officer and hotel manager, came to Findhorn, on a peninsula by the Moray Firth in Scotland. Together with his wife Eileen and Dorothy Maclean from Canada, he established the Findhorn Foundation in a corner of a caravan park a mile from the village, at the end of the runway of RAF Kinloss. Also associated with the Foundation were David Spangler from the USA and Robert Ogilvie Crombie, an Edinburgh eccentric who died in 1975. Maclean and Spangler returned to North America in 1973, forming (with others) the Lorian Association of California.

From the beginning, the Foundation adopted Crombie's belief in nature spirits (devas), one for each kind of plant. It is believed that good growth and health can only be achieved by co-operating with the devas, whom some claim to be able to see and to whom some claim to talk. The Foundation is vegetarian (or vegan) and against the use of 'chemicals'. Adherents talk of the New Age, the Kingdom of Heaven and God's Laws. Originally only a garden, the Foundation has expanded to incorporate a full programme of activities, especially holidays for transcendentalists. The News of the World once alleged that Caddy cleared an area for 'Martians' to land! Eileen Caddy claims to receive messages from God.

The Foundation's main claim to world-wide fame rests on the general belief that plants in its garden exhibit prolific growth and that this phenomenon is due to some spiritual influence. Apparently, when the garden was started (with intensive composting and liberal applications of animal manure) results were spectacular, causing local comment and wonder. Vegetables were larger and in better condition than other locally produced ones. It is alleged that in 1965 the County Horticultural Adviser inspected the garden and took samples. Caddy claims that the samples show 'no deficiencies' (to the surprise of the adviser). It is also alleged that in 1969 Professor R. Lindsay Robb, consultant to the Soil Association, inspected the garden. Caddy claims that Robb was amazed that anything grew there and quotes him as saying, 'the vigour, health and bloom of the plants in this garden at midwinter on land which is almost barren powdery sand cannot be explained by the moderate dressings of compost, nor indeed by the application of any known culture methods or organic husbandry. There are other factors and they are vital ones.' The Caddys believe that the results were due to the help of the devas (and/or God), but today the weight and size of the produce is normal.

It is not clear whether or not the Foundation is claiming that its allegedly phenomenal results received scientific endorsement, but if so

the attributed expert views are unconfirmed and somewhat unlikely. We do not know the name of the local adviser and I could get no reply from the Soil Association. Local businessman Lamber Munro, chairman of Findhorn Community Council, points out that the site was not a sand dune (as the Foundation often claims); it was 'farm land'. In any case it is not at all unlikely that such land, given liberal dressings of compost and manure, would produce vigorous growth in its first few years.

Perhaps aware of the weakness of its claims for plant growth, the Foundation has developed as an education, recreation, and business centre. It attracts up to 50,000 people a year, half of them from the USA. Some are day visitors, but over 3000 come to study on one of the £200-a-week courses which are the Foundation's main source of income. These courses have names like Exploring the Inner World, The Game of Transformation, Playing with Spirit, and The Laws of Manifestation. Apparently demand is now so great that people are being turned away and courses may have to be run through winter.

Around 300 people live permanently on the site, staying on average about four and a half years. Some have been there for 20 years! Those who are not paid £10-a-week as cooks, gardeners and teachers have set up independent businesses. One, Alternative Data, with an associated company in Sweden, has an annual turnover of a quarter of a million pounds and employs ten people.

The Foundation has no formal creed or doctrine. It is based on the idea that humanity is involved in an evolutionary expansion of consciousness which will create new patterns of civilisation for all society and promote a planetary culture infused with spiritual values (sic). However, the Foundation is regarded with suspicion and fear by the locals, who resent its presence and the way it has hijacked the village's name. They question its charitable status and its aims and point out how it is trying to buy up the whole peninsula. Recently the Foundation bought the whole Findhorn Bay Caravan Park, on which it plans to build a 'planetary village' based on the spiritual and ecological values central to its philosophy. The Foundation also supports The Moray Steiner School Project, which opened in September 1985.

Not content with insinuating itself into the local community, the Foundation has hosted meetings of 'community activists' from throughout Great Britain (The Terra Nova Gathering) and all over Europe (The European Humanity Gathering). In October 1986 it organized a gathering called 'One Earth--A Call to Action'. Today Findhorn; tomorrow the world!

ASTROLOGY IN SCOTLAND

A couple of letters appeared in the Scotsman in April deploing the newspaper's decision to carry horoscopes beginning on March 19. Both letters pointed out the discrepancy between the positions of the planets as used by astrologers and their actual positions in the sky in the 20th century. CSICOP sent out a mailing to American newspapers a few years ago suggesting they label horoscope columns "for entertainment only". A few did; perhaps this practice should be suggested to the Scotsman.

MEDICAL ASTROLOGY

The BBC's new daytime programme "All Well and Good" is presented as a popular potpourri of medical and health facts. On 28th April, they presented "medical astrologer" Glenys Massie, who had cast a chart for one of the show's hosts, Christopher Lillicrap. The Lillicrap began by asking the audience how many of them read their daily horoscopes; most of them raised their hands. Then he asked how many of them believed their daily horoscopes--and not one hand went up.

Massie declared herself happy with the results of this informal poll, explaining that newspaper astrology columns are too general. She then explained that the planets rule different parts of the body, using Taurus, which she claimed ruled the throat/neck, as an example. This might, she said, not necessarily mean anything bad; if you were a Taurus it might mean you were a good singer.

She made two predictions on the air based on her reading of Lillicrap's chart. The first was problems with the head, and she suggested injuries, scars, accidents, or an operation of some kind. The host explained he had had an eye operation. She commented compassionately that it was normal to find this kind of hit a little "spooky". Her second prediction was some problem having children, to which he replied that he and his wife had had to wait ten years.

Christopher Lillicrap seemed impressed, and the programme went on to its next topic. Ms Massie was therefore presented more or less on a par with the show's presentation of more verifiable information about human physiology.

Radio Times 7-13 May advertised "All Well and Good" for that week: "Suzanne Dando and Christopher Lillicrap take another crack at 'wellness', and ask if colour can heal." We can only hope they investigated the subject thoroughly.

EUROPEAN REPORT

SPAIN

Luis Alfonso Gamez Dominguez reports a flurry of interest in the Spanish group, La Alternativa Racional a la Pseudociencia, following the February publication of an article about Randi in the magazine Algo.

FRANCE

The Grenoble skeptics' group sent a copy of a report of their last meeting and their internal "Liaison bulletin". Among topics discussed were the Gauquelins' work referred to in the interview with Paul Kurtz elsewhere in this issue, the Shroud of Turin, and the use of astrology and graphology by companies considering candidates for employment. The ten committee members present decided to issue warnings about these practices.

In regard to the Shroud of Turin, M Pecker, one of the committee members, had contacted the French laboratory involved in the testing, hoping to influence them to make a press statement about the Vatican's change in the testing protocol, which has been protested in the American press. There is a great deal of concern about the reduction of the number of laboratories from 7 to 3; the French report points out that a laboratory dating an Egyptian mummy had erred by 1000 years. M Pecker reported no success with the laboratory; he reported, however, that according to another laboratory specialising in carbon-14 dating, the process is reliable only to within about 200 years on an object in the region of 2000 years old; therefore, even after the tests are carried out, there will still be some doubt as to the exact age of the Shroud.

The French group also report that the Time-Life series Mysteries of the Unknown, is being published in French amid expensive publicity.

The bulletin contains a long report on the group's treasurer's visit to "Parapsy 88", a festival held in Paris at the beginning of February each year, which sounds very much like the British psychic fairs: astrologers, dowzers, entrepreneurs selling crystals (and other very expensive gadgets), and fringe practitioners, whom, M Kevorkian reported, he couldn't get near because the crowds were so large.

This is the first news we've had from the Grenoble group for some time; they seem to be becoming more active. Good luck to them.

ERRATA

By mistake, when we published David Berman's "Knock: some new evidence" in B&IS II.1, we left out the information that this article had previously appeared in New Humanist.

Chris Wright also writes from Sheffield to say that in his report on the UFO talk given at the Sheffield Society for Research into the Paranormal (B&IS II.1), he incorrectly identified the speaker as Philip Mantle. The speaker was in fact Andy Roberts, editor of the magazine UFO Brigantia.

Geller plays it safe in his British fortress home
KGB DEATH THREAT TO URI THE SPOON-BENDER

URI GELLER has been to the residence of...
By LAWRENCE STONE
The magazine...
SUNDAY MIRROR 7 II 88

IN PROGRESS

PRODUCTION

This is the last issue that will look like this. Beginning with the next issue (II.4), the typesetting, layout and design chores will be taken on by Toby Howard and Steve Donnelly in Manchester. They have promised to make it look terrific.

Also, we are saying goodbye to the era of black streaks, grey copies, and generally lousy reproduction. Beginning with this issue (II.3), our printing will be handled by Emjay Reprographics in Nottingham, the same people who print Magonia. They specialize in tiny magazines like ours and mail-order services.

These changes mean other changes. First of all, in order to keep the B&IS arriving on your doorsteps at about the same time every two months, we will need to get the magazine pasted up and to the printers about two weeks ahead of the mailing date. This means the copy dates will have to be earlier, and therefore that the B&IS will be a little bit less up-to-the-minute. Copy dates are therefore now the first of the month before mailing: that is, July 1 for the July/August issue, and so on throughout the year. But please...don't feel you have to wait for the copy date to send stuff in: the earlier the better.

Commercial printing also means that for now we can only afford to publish 28 page issues; we intend to make up for that by packing more onto each page, as we have done this issue (measure the margins if you don't believe me). If we can substantially increase our subscription list, we will be able to afford larger magazines again. We will be delighted to hear from anyone with sound

ideas for this latter project; please bear in mind, funds are very limited.

INFORMATION SHEETS

We have copy in hand for information sheets on three major topics of interest: astrology, dowsing, and creationism. Once they are typeset and printed, we intend to distribute them to subscribers, and to researchers and journalists as needed.

COPY ALWAYS WELCOME

Help keep filling the pages of the B&IS! We are glad to receive letters, articles, reviews. Are there paranormal (or other) events going on in your area that the rest of us should know about? Articles in hand for future issues include: an article on parapsychology by H B Gibson; a piece comparing the New Year's astrology columns by Stephen Moreton; reviews of a Washington skeptic-run séance, of Rupert Sheldrake's new book, and we have promised reviews of Philip Klass' new book on abductions, Terence Hines' textbook on the paranormal, and Hilary Evans' recent book on apparitions. Please keep stuff coming--and the sooner the better.

Also, most of our news items (and clippings for the Press Gallery) are culled from the clippings sent in by our readers. Please mark all clippings with the name of the periodical and the date. All clippings go into the files for future reference--real files, not the wastebasket.

THANKS!

INTERVIEW: Paul Kurtz

Wendy M. Grossman

Part Two

Paul Kurtz is chairman of the Buffalo, NY-based Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), editor of the humanist magazine Free Inquiry, President and editor-in-chief of Prometheus Books, and a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is author of 27 books, the most recent of which is The Transcendental Temptation (reviewed in B&IS I.2). I interviewed him at his home on September 21st, 1987. In Part One, published in our last issue (B&IS II.2), Paul Kurtz discussed his relationship with Britain, where he is a vice-president of the Rationalist Press Association. In this second and final part, he talks about the Gauquelins and the role of imagination.--wg

WG: There were a number of write-ups about the Parapsychology Association Conference, mostly about Bob Morris, who is reported now to be doing things--looking for people who've had trouble with machines, you know, "are you a computer jinx, write to us" that sort of thing, and the other thing is he's looking through Scottish folklore, and he's looking through the files at the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, looking for patterns that might be worth researching.

PK: What kind of patterns?

WG: The articles didn't really say.

PK: I think Robert Morris is a good man, he was at the University of Syracuse, we've had him at our CSICOP conference, and I think he's fair-minded in his approach, and objective. We've indicted many of the psychical

researchers in the past for being biased, and wanting to help the facts, and being willing to interpret some of the results positively, but I think that the parapsychologists have learned from our criticisms and that many of them do want to abide by the stringent rules of scientific objectivity, and I think Bob Morris comes under that category. I think he was one of the best choices that Edinburgh could have made.

WG: They had a lot of trouble, didn't they, finding a university to take the Chair in the first place?

PK: Yes. I think it's terrible. I think that any field of investigation ought to be pursued, and the fear of pursuing parapsychological research, considering it to be less than respectable, is an expression of unfortunate timidity. I welcome any kind of research in parapsychology or psychical research, I'd never want to cut that off. I'm unconvinced as yet that they've found anything that stands the test of scrutiny. But of course what's going on in the parapsychological laboratories is far different from the media, the popular imagination, and how that has been exploited.

WG: Hilary Evans has just been saying [B&IS I.5] if UFOs are really landing and taking people away, this is one of the most important things that has ever happened to the human race, and how do we learn about it? From popular books sold in neighborhood bookstores.

PK: Exactly. Philip Klass has said that if UFOs are landing and abducting people, then this is of cataclysmic significance. If there are

intelligent civilizations elsewhere, then a large share of government money and research ought to be spent on this inquiry. But generally it's on the fringes that you get the claims made, and reputable scientists and news organizations have not been able to confirm them. That's why we're skeptics.

WG: As a folksinger, I know some of the folk tales Hilary's referring to, and it's fascinating to watch the patterns. People used to be abducted by the fairies. Steuart Campbell says that every loch in Scotland at one time had its kelpie, which took people away and this was an explanation for drownings that nobody understood. And now people disappear on UFOs.

PK: It's very similar. Because in the whole history of the race there were monsters. I mean, there were gorillas, tigers, wild wolves, and bears. It's only been in the last fifty years that we've tamed practically every corner of the globe. So this fear of monsters was meaningful historically. It cuts deeply in the primeval consciousness of man, and I suppose that's a residue left over.

WG: It's the same pattern, would you say?, the replacement of fantasy by science fiction, the replacement in the popular myths of the fairies with stories of UFOs...

PK: Well, the paranormal I think is fed by human imagination, and imagination is wonderful, we couldn't live without it, it's creative, it is expansive, it's exciting, it's the realm of the possible spun out of our own creative insights and fantasies. You can't and don't want to cut off imagination, the problem is when you fudge the difference between imagination and reality and that's what's happening today, so science fiction, the realm of the possible, is taken as true. If something is possible, therefore believers think it is actual. That's the great mistake, to take it as truth.

WG: Well, Whitley Strieber, who wrote Communion, was a novelist.

PK: There are various interpretations of Whitley Strieber, but one interpretation is that he's concocted it out of his imagination.

WG: Well, if he was a novelist first, he'd have had some practice, I suppose.

PK: He did--his other books are similar. Wolves in Central Park. In one of his books, he walks into Central Park and he reaches a den of

woives. So you could interpret that as the pure poetic license of a novelist, and I think that is how I would interpret Communion, that it was spun out of his imagination. You don't want to dampen imagination, all the great novelists, playwrights, dramatists, poets, scientists have to create new worlds. But it is important to distinguish between fantasy and actuality. That is the problem that we face today with the growth of the paranormal and the New Age and how deep a hold it has on the public imagination.

WG: I thought the point of the article in the last SI about children's literature and fantasy was very well taken--there is such a thing as healthy fantasy.

PK: We can't live without fantasies--it makes life exciting. You fantasize a beautiful woman that you make love to and you fantasize what's going to happen when you save your money and build a nice home somewhere in the countryside, and so the rich poetic weaving of your imagination is important. The inventor thinks about something he'll bring into being and lo and behold he does, that's the imagination at work. But you know, the other factor--I use the term The Transcendental Temptation, which is the title of a book I've written recently--

WG: Which was reviewed in the British & Irish Skeptic [I.3]...

PK: I think that there is a tendency for the human mind to leap into the unknown by means of imagination and to postulate or to create hidden universes and this is how I think that gods are spun out of human fantasy and longing. And so the paranormal is the new fabric being woven out of the imagination and idle fancy. But it must satisfy a need, that's why I think the paranormal is so difficult, because it's a religious phenomenon. Belief in the paranormal is not simply reducible to scientific hypotheses, though that's part of it. It's really a quasi-religious expression of a deep longing for a transcendental universe which we can be put in touch with. And I think that's why, incidentally, it's mounting. The year 1987 in America has seen an astounding revival of the paranormal. I think in one sense stronger waves of belief have manifested than we've had in a long time with UFO abductions, trance channeling, etc.

WG: Of course, in Britain what we've had is Geller going up in a helicopter.

PK: In America, too, Geller returned. We also have the reincarnation regression, Shirley MacLaine, harmonic convergence, much of it fanned and sold by the media. But the media wouldn't get anywhere unless the people were interested.

WG: Well, the Sun published the whole Geller thing because people would flock to buy it.

PK: Yes, so there are consumers out there. There's a perennial human interest in the idea that there's a "transcendent universe." Now I find it difficult to understand what is meant by the transcendent, not only in paranormal terms but in philosophical terms. Surely there are large areas of the universe we do not understand, and it transcends the present dimensions of knowledge. So we're always breaking new frontiers. But they're reading more than that in, they're reading into the unknown some mysterious, occult, puzzling reality and that they're not entitled to do. You can say that what we don't know is beyond what we now know, and transcends present knowledge, that's almost a truism, but to say that what we don't know therefore includes some supernatural, paranormal, or occult reality is already to read into what's not been tested, and that's the leap that they make.

WG: I tend to look at things in very simple, practical terms, and it often seems to me that a lot of people are desperate to believe that there's someone around who knows what's going on, and as people lose confidence in politicians, particularly in this country, and as scientists are showing all the time, well, there's this planet, and that planet, and if God exists, where is he? they start thinking about things that might just be possible.

PK: True. And it's always interesting to think about that, you always have to keep your mind open to that. But, the real problem is that they convert what may be possible into what they really demand and make real, so the possibility's converted into some existential reality, and that's a mistake.

WG: The question that comes up a great deal in Britain does concern what I gather is old history. But when Mark Plummer was in London in May, he got asked about the so-called Star-Baby business and the Gauquelins, and also about the two Fellows who split off from the Committee. He didn't really say much, and I think people would like to know a little more about it.

PK: "Star-Baby" was published first in Fate magazine, which is something like the Daily Mail, or the Sun in Britain, an extremely unreliable magazine. It's one of the leading paranormal magazines, and if you read it, it sells fortune crystal balls, and...

WG: It sounds like Prediction magazine, or Psychic News...

PK: Exactly. Fate is exactly like Psychic News.

WG: Probably a larger operation.

PK: Circulation of well over 150,000. It panders to the whole realm of the paranormal, so it hardly can be taken as an objective basis for criticism. In fact Fate magazine attacks CSICOP and leading scholars and skeptics in almost every issue.

WG: OK, but this particular...

PK: But this particular attack by Dennis Rawlins, who had been associated with CSICOP in the early days, I think was unfair, and was an ad hominem attack.

WG: What exactly was the attack?

PK: I'll go into that. It was largely made up of gossip, innuendo, and conjecture, who said what, where, when, and it's been used by the critics of CSICOP, who've had great difficulty in finding something that they can attack that's more recent. But the whole point was this, that Michel and Françoise Gauquelin, two French researchers, began investigating astrology, and Michel Gauquelin became very critical of classical or popular astrology. But he thought that he detected "astrobiological" patterns between the time and place of birth of various individuals and the planetary positions. So he correlated Saturn or Jupiter with the various professions. The strongest correlation he found was with Mars and sports champions. Now the PARA committee, which was formed in Belgium many years ago, attempted to replicate Gauquelin, but the results were disputed. Gauquelin said they had replicated, and they refused to accept his interpretation. We came on the scene in 1975, before the creation of CSICOP. Marvin Zelen, who was a statistician at the State University of New York at Buffalo and later became Chairman of the Statistics Department at Harvard, a very distinguished statistician, proposed a test to break the impasse between the Belgian interpretation and

the Gauquelins, "the Zelen test," and this we published at that time in the Humanist magazine, when I was editor. In fact I think I published about eight articles by or about Gauquelin over the years. Now there was some dispute whether Marvin Zelen who did that test had properly interpreted the results. "Star-Baby" was Rawlins' critique of Marvin Zelen's interpretation which was endorsed by George Abell, an astronomer, and myself, as co-author. Zelen may very well have been wrong in his test and in analyzing the data. He was disturbed because all of the sports champions who were examined were French, but the results depended primarily upon Paris. But the Parisian data had been lost in a fire, and Gauquelin had focused on Paris, and Zelen didn't know whether the Parisian sports champion was typical of everything else. So we argued about the data, how do you interpret the data, and Rawlins disagreed. Rawlins is a very strong skeptic, probably stronger than anyone else on the Committee since or before, and he always expressed to members of CSICOP that he thought that Gauquelin was a fraud, that he fudged the data from the beginning. We refused to ever say that, for we had no proof of fraud. But he thought that Zelen's analysis was mistaken, so that became Star-Baby, because he wanted us to admit that we made a mistake. We did have errors, and we published that admission. One makes mistakes in science. Let's say the errors were open to dispute. We then went on to an American test, and Rawlins was the one who helped determine the position of Mars. Rawlins never attacked the American tests. So the so-called "Star-Baby" controversy was differences of interpretation of one test. Where we stand now, we don't believe that Gauquelin's data or findings in France and Europe have been replicated anywhere in the world, least of all in America. Again differing about how to interpret the American test, Gauquelin thinks they have been replicated, we do not. So Star-Baby is as far as I can see, an exaggerated attack on one test that was proposed before CSICOP came into effect through the people who were involved later associated with CSICOP, including myself. As far as I can see the issue is finding a mountain in a molehill signifying nothing. But it's used by our critics, who very rarely understand.

WG: Brian Inglis brings it up all the time.

PK: Inglis brings it up all the time, but CSICOP has published everything that Gauquelin has ever sent us, and we've published all the data, and we've published all the disagreements on

both sides of the question. So that there was never, as it was claimed, an effort by CSICOP to fudge the data or to cover up. The charge is totally false. We have an open mind about Gauquelin, we still don't think he's been replicated, and we're still urging scientists in other countries in the world to see if they can do an independent replication, and that's where it stands. Does that explain it?

WG: It sounds like a very clear explanation.

PK: That's exactly what happened.

WG: The question that was asked at the same time was, what about these two Fellows that spilt off from CSICOP, and...

PK: Which two Fellows? Truzzi and Rawlins?

WG: Presumably. Were there more than two, or were those the only two who've ever left?

PK: Any organization anywhere in the world has some difference of opinion, and that's only normal and natural. So what happened was that Rawlins was not re-elected to the Executive Council because he didn't show up to place his name in nomination after--the terms of office are three years--he did not place his name in nomination, he was not present, so he was not re-elected. Truzzi had resigned from CSICOP in the first year because there was disagreement about the editorial policy of the Skeptical Inquirer, and the board of editors disagreed with his view. And that happens in many organizations. And there were two or three other scientific consultants or Fellows who without any prejudice no longer continued on CSICOP, but it's remarkable we've had so few resignations.

WG: So it sounds like three or four, perhaps.

PK: Three or four. One of them who did resign came back later. But there's been really no "major split in CSICOP," it was between Rawlins and Truzzi.

WG: It's made to sound like that.

PK: They've built it up, because they can't find very much else to attack in CSICOP. But I'm sure this is true of most institutions anyway. We are human beings, we have disagreements. We're attempting to be fair-minded, our critics don't agree with our conclusions, but we're committed to open and objective inquiry and investigation.

THE CASE AGAINST ESP

Anthony Garrett

If the world divides up on a particular issue into the 'yes's and the 'no's, it might seem most reasonable to allot equal weight to either side. Certainly, in the absence of any further information, that would be the best thing to do. But if serious information continues to flow in which strongly favours one stance over the other, that information must be utilised. We must favour that stance. To do otherwise, while apparently fair to dissenters, is unfair to the stance's supporters.

So, what is the position with ESP? There is a great deal of evidence against it. I shall present some of this below as a contribution to the debate; for in informed discussion lies the road to truth.

The problem with ESP, is not a scientific one, but one of fraud, humbug, and publicity. Strong words, but let me back them up.

In a talk given by Bill Williams on ABC radio Australia on March 8, 1987, we heard of a small group of scientists, "conventionally trained and eminently reputable," who concluded, after experiment, that there was something to ESP.

A major example given, Dr Soal of London, is now known not to have been at all reputable. Painstaking analysis of his number-guessing data by statistician Dr Christopher Scott and others revealed excesses of certain digits in his own handwritten checklists, particularly the digits which are easily formed by altering certain others, which were found to be lacking. A "1" is easily turned into a "4", for example. To put it bluntly, Soal cheated. He committed the cardinal sin of doctoring data to support his beliefs, rather than selecting his beliefs on the basis of the data. We all do this to a certain extent in real life, but in research it is unforgivable.

There are, of course, many experiments other than Soal's. Most have been performed by trained, reputable scientists. But are these really the best qualified persons to run such experiments? Such people are experts in particular fields: Thouless and Rhine, two scientists mentioned by name, were originally trained in zoology and botany. Do these eminently respectable disciplines provide a good training for ESP research, and if not, what does?

We can answer these questions by considering the nature of ESP research. Anyone who became accepted by the scientific establishment

as the possessor of such powers would be instantly feted; Uri Geller's prestige increased massively after he had successfully conned two American physicists, for example. So it is to the direct advantage of the subject to try and cheat. I am not saying that all subjects cheat, of course; merely some.

So the people we want in charge of ESP experiments are professionals in the cheating business, only we want them on our side.

Well, such people exist; they are stage magicians. They learn how to fool audiences, how to misdirect them into looking at point A while the serious business of the trick is going on at point B, and how to gain quite remarkable manual dexterity. To call them professional cheats is in no way an insult; some of their tricks take years of training to master. Unfortunately the magician is rarely in the position of having a laboratory handy to run ESP experiments, while the scientist finds it difficult to believe that a professional entertainer can be of any assistance. Scientists are trained to detect subtlety in nature, not fraud, and it should be recognised that the two are very different.

I do not know of a single experiment with a magician acting as consultant in which ESP was confirmed. Unfortunately, such negative results are difficult to get into print; the parapsychological journals far prefer exciting positive results to papers which state simply that nothing happened.

The best experiments conducted by scientists have been painstakingly analysed by Professor Mark Hansel, who found plausible ways in which fraud could have taken place in each. This doesn't prove fraud did take place, but it certainly forces us to place far less emphasis on the results. Moreover, whenever experimental protocol is tightened up, positive results diminish. It is logical to extrapolate and suggest that in perfectly tight experiments no effects will be found.

Parapsychological experiments are taking place in a great many Western universities. Active research is going on at one of Britain's oldest and most prestigious universities, Cambridge. There are now at least two Chairs of Parapsychology in Europe. The most recent, at Edinburgh, is occupied by Robert Morris, formerly of Syracuse

University in upstate New York. It was set up with a bequest from the will of the writer Arthur Koestler, after several other UK universities had declined the bequest. It is misleading to claim, as is often done, that there is a scientific "conspiracy" against parapsychology, for conspiracies have to be hidden.

Certainly the scientific community is openly sceptical of parapsychology; and rightly so, given its track record. Parapsychology was accepted into the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science many years ago, largely due to the active lobbying of the social anthropologist Margaret Mead, whose influential research on sexual and social behaviour in Western Samoa is now increasingly discredited. Former AAAS president John Wheeler, a distinguished physicist, pointed out that a hundred years of parapsychology had not produced a single replicable result, and agitated for its removal. The truth of his statement cannot be denied.

Parapsychology would be far better accepted by workers in established fields of science if its own internal standards were higher. Experiments nowadays are tending to be more complex, with the "hit level" due to random chance almost impossible to work out. Card guessing is easy; unfortunately for the parapsychological empire it doesn't work when done properly. On the other hand, how can you tell whether a sketch drawn by one individual is sufficiently similar to a scene set out by a second individual for an attempt at thought transmission? Believe it or not, this retreat into statistical obscurantism is the latest parapsychological craze, called "ganzfeld".

The best experiments are surely simple, and performed double blind. This means that the tester does not know in advance the result corresponding to a hit, and so cannot unconsciously cue the subject into it. There have also been intelligent suggestions, from both within and outside the parapsychological community, to concentrate the possible psychokinesis of many people looking at the results of randomly drawn national lottery results, in which thousands of people have a stake.

The necessity for magicians to be involved in the experimental protocol was highlighted in the most dramatic way possible some three years ago, when two of them posed as subjects in experiments hailed in advance as the best proving ground for paranormal effects, at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.

Effects were produced almost as a matter of routine; eventually the pair revealed what they had done. The tricks they used could never have been employed had a magician been involved in the testing.

What of the person--and perhaps some are

reading this--who has had an experience which he or she attributed to ESP? One individual I know was very struck by the fact that his cleaner returned to the house at an unusual time, precisely when he was in some physical distress. Well, that experience undeniably supports the hypothesis of ESP. Taken by itself, it supports it very strongly; and, of course, since first-hand experience counts for a great deal, my friend favours this explanation. But if more information can be found, then it, too, should be taken into account.

How often have people felt that something was wrong, and found it wasn't? Such experiences would lodge in the memory far less vividly than a positive "hit". Or how often has something been wrong, and no-one guessed it? To test for ESP we need to check whether there is any correlation between what happened and what was felt.

Now perhaps you can see why scientific experiments form the backbone of data on which scientific theories are based. I do not doubt my friend's experience, but it is vastly inadequate to prove the existence of ESP. And the best laboratory experiments do not confirm it either.

Finally, a certain amount of metaphysics is sometimes used in an attempt to begin the search for physical explanations of ESP. This is worth trying only when we are quite certain there is something to explain, which is not at all the case at present. Nor can the mysteries of quantum theory help. Even though it is now known that particles are in contact over large distances (Bell's theorem), the way they do this cannot be used, even in principle, to convey signals. This is a subtle technicality which has only recently been fully understood, and it rules out quantum theories of ESP.

In his book A New Approach to Psychical Research, Professor Antony Flew rightly concluded in 1953 that more serious experimental work was needed. Well, it has been done. As a result, Professor Flew is now extremely sceptical of the whole field.

Let me close by clarifying the position. I am not claiming that ESP certainly does not or cannot exist. I am claiming that it very probably does not exist, and that the evidence justifies a skeptical stance. I favour and hope for future experimentation, but please, let it be done properly, double blind, with simple tests, and magicians as consultants against the possibility of fraud. Even then I doubt that the results would satisfy everybody; but they should be far more conclusive than at present.

An earlier version of this article appeared in the Australian Skeptic, and was based on a talk given on ABC Radio's "Ockham's Razor".

TELEPATHY: a mechanism?

NO!

Stephen Donnelly

A problem which is familiar to any scientist who has attempted to communicate scientific ideas to the non-scientist is the elitist nature of science itself. A detailed understanding of physics, for instance, involves not only undergoing a considerable training in mathematics but also learning a whole new vocabulary of scientific jargon in which many words have meanings entirely different from normal everyday usage. Most people have, perhaps unfortunately, not had the time nor the opportunity to acquire either the mathematics or the jargon and, as a consequence, the vast body of detailed scientific information available in the world's libraries is relatively inaccessible to the general public.

This poses a particular problem for the skeptical scientist because when he attempts to provide routine scientific explanations for supposed paranormal events he may experience great difficulty in doing so without resort to his mathematics and jargon. Conversely, it is fairly easy for a writer with a limited knowledge of some areas of science to provide pseudo-scientific explanations of "paranormal" occurrences which sound entirely credible to the intelligent but non-scientific layman.

A classic example which comes to mind is a "scientific" explanation of UFOs which I read many years ago in a book about (I think) the Warminster UFO sightings. Unfortunately I no longer have the book and can't recall either its title or author. The author believed that many UFO sightings were real (that is, not just in the mind of the beholder) but rejected 'conventional' explanations such as visitors from other planets or from within the Earth in favour of a scientific explanation. The reasoning went approximately as follows:

The upper reaches of the earth's atmosphere are continually bombarded by a variety of energetic particles from the solar wind and other sources. One such particle is the alpha-particle which is simply an atom of helium with its two electrons removed; that is, a helium nucleus. Nuclei are, of course, extremely dense (I think the word used was actually "heavy") and as a consequence these particles fall down towards the earth under the influence of gravity. As they

arrive at the lower part of the atmosphere, however, these helium nuclei regain their two electrons from gas molecules in the atmosphere and are thus converted into helium atoms. Now it is well known that helium gas is extremely light and is used to fill fairground balloons, airships, and other lighter-than-air devices.

As soon as it acquires the electrons, the particle, thus, reverses its motion and floats upwards in the atmosphere. At some stage in this journey (on the way down, if my memory serves me well) the helium particle has an affinity for other helium particles so that instead of individual helium atoms floating upwards a large upwardly-floating bubble of helium is formed. ...And yes, you've guessed it...this mobile helium bubble, fluorescing by some almost plausible mechanism which I have now forgotten, is the cause of all those UFO sightings!

From a non-scientist's point of view I suspect that this hypothesis may seem fairly reasonable containing, as it does, undoubted truisms such as the fact that the atmosphere is bombarded by energetic particles, that nuclear matter is very dense and that helium gas floats upwards in the atmosphere. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons this picture is entirely unsound despite its superficial plausibility. For instance, helium nuclei do not have an affinity for other helium nuclei and, in fact, repel each other strongly and even helium atoms feel virtually no attraction for one another.

For all I know, though, this book may have caused a number of intelligent readers, interested in UFOs but skeptical of close encounters of the third kind, to feel that they had a rational basis for a belief in the physical reality of UFOs.

As skeptics we have a duty to do our very best to ensure that we do not add to the mountain of bad science that exists in the area of paranormal phenomena--which brings me to the nub of this article; the fact that we have, in a recent edition of the British & Irish Skeptic committed this (in my view) unpardonable sin.

In the January/February 1988 (II.1) issue of the B&IS "Telepathy: a mechanism" by Gordon Gray provided us with an apparently plausible basis for telepathy written with a healthy

skeptical outlook and incorporating a great deal of both the physics and physiology of the brain. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that the mechanism which this article describes could one day be thrown back at skeptics investigating telepathy as a plausible mechanism given respectability in our own skeptical journal.

The only problem with this is the fact that Gordon Gray's mechanism is entirely scientifically unsound!

The hypothesis which is presented in the article is that telepathy may take place via electromagnetic (EM) radiation in the gamma-ray waveband. Before examining the theoretical basis of this suggestion let me, first of all, assure all readers of one fact: my brain does not emit gamma rays! I can state this with some confidence because, as an experimental physicist, I have spent many a happy hour running experiments using detectors capable of detecting and counting single "packets" or photons of gamma-radiation. Such detectors are possible because gamma-rays are a very energetic and penetrating form of electromagnetic energy and can be detected even at the lowest intensities, that is, one photon at a time. I can also make the same categorical statement about many of my scientist colleagues. This could, of course, be simply an indication of the fact that scientists don't think a lot or are not telepathic, so let me outline the problems with the gamma ray theory.

For telepathic communication to take place the brains involved presumably have both to emit and receive gamma radiation, and Gordon Gray suggests that the phospholipid molecules in cell membranes are of the appropriate size to be tuned to gamma-ray frequencies. There is, however, a big problem with this idea. The wavelength of gamma rays extends from 0.14 nanometres (about half the diameter of a single atom) down to .0005 nanometres so that neither the lipid molecule (about 5 nanometres long) nor the carboxyl group (about .5 nanometres long) at the end of the molecule is likely to be well "tuned" to most gamma-ray frequencies. This is largely irrelevant, however, because the concept of a tuned aerial in itself is applicable really only to the radio part of the EM spectrum. Light, for instance, which lies between radio waves and gamma rays in wavelength is not emitted or received using tuned aerials in the radio sense. In fact, light is emitted and absorbed by a different type of 'tuned aerial'--the atom. Light may be emitted from an atom when an electron in an outer orbit changes to a lower level. The size of the atom (perhaps .3 nanometres) is very much smaller than the wavelength of the emitted light (500 nanometres, say). The idea of an antenna whose length is tuned to the wavelength of the

radiation simply does not work here.

Similarly, gamma-rays which are of much smaller wavelength than light, are emitted as a result of changes occurring within the atomic nucleus and are in fact a result of nuclear reactions. Although the mechanism of brain function is complex, I have not yet read any claims that nuclear reactions form part of that mechanism!

As a final nail in the coffin of the gamma-ray mechanism, it is possible, using mathematical expressions known as Maxwell's equations, to calculate the amount of energy radiated by any electrical process such as the oscillating voltage applied to a radio antenna, the sparking of a spark plug or the firing of a nerve impulse in the brain. I have done such a calculation for a typical nerve impulse (70 mV amplitude, 1 ms duration) and found (predictably) that the amount of energy radiated by a single nerve impulse is approximately a billion billion times too small to produce a single gamma ray photon.

I have a number of other difficulties with the model concerning, in particular, the idea of "imposing a pattern" on gamma radiation and the role of the relative refractory period in detecting the gamma ray messages but as the basic gamma-ray mechanism is impossible it would serve no purpose to continue with more detailed criticisms.

As a final general point, however, I would like to query the claim at the beginning of the article that a telepathic "transmission from one brain to another" would be the equivalent of cross-talk or interference. On the contrary, it seems to me that the ability to detect signals from another human or animal brain would be a very useful attribute for both detection of prey and avoiding predators. It is not at all obvious to me that the brain would have to "be protected against such effects."

The gamma-ray mechanism for telepathy must thus join the helium bubble UFO and float up into outer space and harmlessly disperse. And, come on, skeptics, let's try to ensure that articles appearing in the pages of our own journal, in future, combine a healthy skeptical outlook with a modicum of good science!

Editor's note: I will be the first to admit that I am not qualified in science. I am therefore unable to judge the science involved in some articles, e.g., both this one and Gordon Gray's original article, Stuart Campbell's astronomical mirage hypothesis, and so on. But this is not a scientific journal, and makes no pretense to be one. This is a magazine intended to serve the skeptical community; it seems to me that part of its job is encouraging debate.--wg

RECOGNIZING PSEUDOSCIENCE

Sven Ove Hansson

Historically man has sought to know the world through two diametrically opposed methods: introspection, and what we will here call "extrospection." By "extrospection" we mean drawing conclusions from what you perceive with your senses. This is the source of everyday knowledge and, carried out systematically, of scientific knowledge. Introspection, or the search for knowledge about the world inside yourself, is common to many different forms of mysticism. In the last few years, Fritjof Capra and other well-known proponents of mysticism have claimed that through meditation one can arrive at the important results of modern physics.

One major difference between introspection and extrospection lies in the ways they lend themselves to external agreement. When different people use introspective methods to seek knowledge, they may very well arrive at different conclusions. Since their sources of intuition are not communicable, the people have no common language with which to convince each other. In practice, then, the mystics have two alternatives. One is to fully accept their differences and make no attempt to arrive at a consensus. In our world of socially interdependent individuals, more often than not this is impracticable. The other alternative, and the one mystics more generally choose, is to regard one person's intuitions as the most accurate. Used this way, the introspective method leads to authoritarianism.

The extrospective method, on the other hand, yields essentially the same results when different people apply these methods. As a philosophical realist, I would say that this is because, though the "inner worlds" reached by introspection may very well differ, we all live in one and the same external world. If two people have different opinions about the weights or lengths of different objects, they can reach a consensus of opinion by weighing or measuring them. Differences of opinion about interpreting experiments can be settled by running new experiments.

This methodical confirmation by independent observers is one of the major characteristics of science. The only experimental results that are accepted are those which can be confirmed by independent researchers repeating the experiments. The only arguments that are accepted are those which are lucidly presented to others for criticism. The personal authority of dead or

living scientists is never a valid argument for accepting a hypothesis.

In this sense science is essentially egalitarian: no one has any special status as a source of knowledge. It is not by chance that science flourishes in open and democratic societies or that it is stunted in more authoritarian regimes. Democracy and science have common roots in the egalitarian, antiauthoritarian tradition of the Enlightenment. To me personally the ethical reasons for supporting them are very much the same.

Given this background it also seems natural to me to consider the ability to reach a consensus as the defining characteristic of science. For the purposes of this article, we will define science as follows: Science is the systematic search for knowledge which, not depending on any particular individual, can be established or controlled by anyone. Like most short definitions of complex concepts, this definition demands qualification and elaboration. There are, for example, individual differences in perception and communication. But rather than elaborate on these themes here, I will propose seven criteria for distinguishing science from pseudoscience.

Essentially, these criteria are seven different, though partially overlapping, ways of violating the above definition of science. Every instance of pseudoscience that I have encountered violates at least one of these seven criteria.

One: Personal Authority. The first criterion is that certain people are credited with such great ability to distinguish true and false that others should accept their verdicts. Such authoritarianism is common particularly in cultist pseudoscience. In most cases, these "authorities" are men.

One of the most extreme examples of this is the way Scientologists regard L. Ron Hubbard. For a Scientologist to question Hubbard's words is practically equivalent to leaving the movement.

Other examples of personal authority are Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in Transcendental Meditation, Guru Maharaj Ji in the Divine Light Mission, and Rudolf Steiner in Anthroposophy. Their followers believe these men speak unarguable truth, whether or not these authorities can present arguments to support their contentions.

Two: Lack of Repeatability. The second criterion is that unrepeatable experiments are trusted. Since scientific knowledge is divorced from individual perception, experiments must be repeatable by other experimenters. Scientists also

demand that experiments be reported in full, that is, in detail adequate for others to be able to duplicate the experimental conditions.

This principle is the same as that which applies to cooking. If I give you a recipe for muffins, and you follow the instructions but wind up taking floury lumps of dough out of the oven, you would probably feel dissatisfied if I told you, "Well, it worked last time I tried it, and that proves it works," or "It's your mental attitude--your negative vibrations destroy the muffins even if you do exactly what I do."

But explanations like these are very common in pseudoscientific literature. Swedish engineer Olof Alexandersson provides one example of this in his book The Living Water when he claims that the Austrian eccentric Viktor Schauberger succeeded in constructing a perpetual motion machine in the 1930's. According to Alexandersson, Schauberger made a working model of an airplane engine that needed no external energy sources. The fact that no one has been able to repeat the experiment does not seem to disturb Alexandersson. In another example, Cleve Backster "proved" with a lie detector that plants have feelings, but no one has since been able to duplicate his results.

Similar examples abound in the field of parapsychology, where there is a seemingly unending stream of experiments which yield positive results only in the hands of certain experimenters. This is in sharp contrast to studies of normal sensory phenomena carried out by experimental psychologists. Even subtle visual and auditory illusions can be verified by any experimenter who follows the appropriate procedures. Given the evidence we now have, therefore, from a scientific point of view we should accept these phenomena, though not the alleged paranormal ones.

Three: Biased Selection of Examples. The third criterion is that experiments are carried out on handpicked examples, even though random selection is possible. It is a common problem in scientific research that we want to study the characteristics of all objects or phenomena of a certain kind, but are limited to studying only a selection. How we make that selection is vital: if it is not random, the selection will reflect the personal choice of the investigator (experimenter bias). In the pursuit of consensus, random selection is essential.

This fallacy is, for example, common to most of the authors who have sought to prove the validity of biorhythms. It is easy to find plenty of individual examples which, taken together, seem to confirm the special significances of every 23rd, 28th, and 33rd day after birth. But applying this method of selection to different-length cycles, it would be just as easy to prove

that every 24th, 41st, and 53rd day after birth is exceptional--or any other days you like.

Similar reasons mean that even those fringe practitioners who use completely ineffective methods of treatment can point to an impressive number of "successfully treated" cases. Taken together, normal biological variation and wishful thinking are enough to convince any therapist--medically trained or otherwise--that his chosen treatment works. This effect can only be avoided by giving randomly selected groups different treatments.

The essential characteristic of scientific medicine, then, is that medicine only resorts to judging by experience when controlled studies are not available. Most fringe practitioners are happy to regard their "successful cases" as proof enough that their treatments work.

Four: Lack of Reality Testing. The fourth criterion is that although it is perfectly possible, no attempt is made to test the theory against our own sensory experiences (or, for the philosophical realist, against reality). If you evade attempts to refute or confirm a theory by such methods, you make the theory a matter of personal faith. In contrast, the public process of critical debate and decisive experimentation is a prerequisite of science.

One example of this is the apparent unwillingness of TM proponents to allow independent observers to test their claim to be able to levitate. A Danish ex-TM-teacher who left the movement has revealed that the photographs of levitating TMers which the movement uses to publicize their activities are fakes produced with the help of gymnastics equipment. Since TM teaches levitation techniques on a regular basis, one would think that there would be no lack of subjects available to demonstrate these techniques. But TM representatives have been less than helpful, to say the least, to independent researchers interested in studying their methods.

Five: Contradictory Evidence Ignored. The fifth criterion is that proponents claim their theory is valid even though it contradicts reliable, empirical evidence. Some of the most commercially successful pseudoscientific writers provide us with numerous examples of this principle. Charles Berlitz's Bermuda Triangle theory, for example, has been conscientiously examined by Larry Kusche, who showed it to be based entirely on misinformation. Erich von Däniken's books, too, abound in statements which are demonstrably false. Neither Berlitz nor von Däniken has altered his theory in the light of factual criticism.

The science shelves of many bookshops are dominated by unreliable literature like that promulgated by Berlitz and von Däniken. This is sad

but not surprising in the light of the different approaches taken to publication by scientists and pseudoscientists. Scientists, who submit their theories to the process of peer review for acceptance, generally publish their work in reputable journals and monograph series, which are generally unavailable to the public. These prestigious journals demand accuracy and revision in the light of new evidence, and are therefore closed to the pseudoscientists. These flock instead to the general book market, where what counts is a book's appeal to the general public. Here they rely on sensationalism, rather than accuracy, to guarantee their books' success.

Six: Refutation Not Accepted. The sixth criterion is that experimental results are accepted as confirmation--but not as refutation, so that testing the theory becomes a matter of 'either I win or it was not conclusive.' To take a simple example of this kind of thinking, let us suppose that I have proposed a theory that zinc accelerates the growth of roses. Let us also suppose that you have decided to test this theory with one hundred plants divided into two groups of 50: one with zinc added to the soil, one without.

If the plants in the zinc-impregnated soil grow faster, I would certainly say this confirmed my theory. You would probably accept that. However if the zinc-fed plants grew less than or the same amount as the others, you would probably expect me to accept that as evidence contradicting my theory. You would probably also think it unfair of me if I allowed only one of the possible results to affect my appraisal of my theory. Demanding that a theory be tested only under conditions that exclude negative results is another way of protecting oneself from others' arguments; it is precisely these arguments that one must face in the search for consensus knowledge.

This type of built-in subterfuge is visible in many of the most common pseudoscientific theories. If an astrologer's prophecies come true, a new triumph for horoscope-casting is proclaimed. If the prophecy fails, astrologers explain it away by saying that the stars only give "tendencies" and never tell us what the future will be. If water is found where a dowser recommended sinking a well, this is taken as proof of his powers. If no water is found there, you just didn't dig deep enough. If a patient recovers after he has been treated by a faith-healer, the healer claims this is new proof of his particular relationship with the Highest. If the patient dies through lack of medical care, countless explanations can be found, all of which have in common that those who promise miracles are blameless.

Seven: Lack of Replacement. The seventh criterion is that the theory displaces other tenable theories while offering no replacement for them.

This means that we lose some ability to describe accurately and predict phenomena; this is at direct variance with our common striving to enlarge our body of knowledge.

Immanuel Velikovsky's celestial speculations are a good example of this principle. Carl Sagan has thoroughly demonstrated that his theory is incompatible with fundamental physical theories. But Velikovsky offers us no alternatives to the mechanics with which his theories conflict. Acceptance of his theories therefore means renouncing the coherent description we have of such diverse phenomena as the movements of celestial bodies and the centrifugal force we use in washing machines. This is a high price to pay for a theory whose only contribution to our ability to explain the world we live in is a shaky allegation of common sources for ancient narratives.

To cite another example, one of the tenets of Scientology is that your personality has been vitally affected by words uttered in your presence when you were still in embryo, even during the very first weeks after conception. Accepting this theory makes it necessary for us to relinquish our present explanations of the mechanism of hearing (namely, that we hear with our ears, which are not yet developed at that stage), of memory (that it is located in the brain, also not yet developed), and of the acquisition of language (that it takes place after birth). We gain nothing by the exchange, for Scientology explains no human behavior for which we do not already have an explanation through conventional biology and psychology. Similarly, if we replace evolutionary theory with creationism, we lose the coherent biological and geological knowledge we have gained from the former and find ourselves facing a disconnected heap of facts.

I have endeavored to construct these seven criteria so that only clear cases of pseudoscience are rejected. Still it may be reasonable to ask: is there a risk that, using these criteria, we may dismiss new knowledge or new theories that we ought instead to accept?

My answer to this question is that we do not risk discarding true and well-founded assertions by using these criteria. Naturally, there is no guarantee that we would not fail to accept some true statements if they are insufficiently or fallaciously supported. Such cases will only come to light later when adequate evidence becomes available. At that time they, too, can be accepted.

I began by defining science as a process. It is the nature of Science to be an unending quest, just as it is the nature of Art never to be perfect. Seeking to understand the world we live in, searching for better knowledge; these are part of human nature. Science--rather than feeble imitations of it--should be available to everyone.

Toby Howard's PSYCHIC DIARY

Psychic News, the principal voice for enthusiasts of the paranormal in the UK, has, like most periodicals, its own style and feel. Certain topics appear regularly: extremist Christian groups try to ban psychic fairs, a family doctor endorses spirit healing, a medium presents incontrovertible survival evidence, and so on. But one particular feature I find intriguing is the emphasis placed on having famous people attest to the reality of the paranormal. If even a minor celebrity or media person expresses a positive interest in some aspect of the paranormal, we get grinning PR shots and banner headlines like "TV presenter praises his séance evidence," "Spirit healer wins local election for the Tories," or "We are all psychic, says 'Crossroads' star." (And look what happened to 'Crossroads'.) It strikes me as odd that these continual reinforcements are felt necessary, although I suspect one reason is that relatively few of those interested in the paranormal actually have solid experiences of their own to go on. Or if they do, it must be good to know that celebrities do, too. But once in a while there's a story that sets the alarm bells ringing. In the April 30th issue there was an item on Psychic Surgery. Extensive coverage was given once again to the psychic surgeons of the Philippines. It was a very dangerous article, not because it was almost completely uncritical, but because of the style in which it was written. There was no mention of the checkered history of the Philippino psychic surgery merchants, nor that some have been exposed as clumsy conjurers. On the contrary, a number of "operations" were reported, all with the expected style. In one, the healer claimed to remove fluid from a woman's abdomen: "He rubbed the woman's abdomen with fluid, and it changed colour. First it was colourless, and then yellow-brown. He massaged this into the stomach, and then scooped it away with a spoon." In others, teeth are removed without anaesthetic using dental pliers washed under a tap, and tumours excised bloodlessly. The testimony is that of Robert Dare, who runs his Natural Healing Centre in Middlesex, and who practises acupuncture, hypnosis and psychotherapy. It is disturbing to know that Mr Dare is planning to return to the Philippines, taking one of his own patients for treatment.

If you saw something described as "a new development in self-knowledge and lifestyle planning," what would spring to mind? A Filofax, perhaps? How passé. Today's New Ager needs more than that! For a "Pendulum Dowsing Profile" you'll need £10 to have a "highly trained" dowser waggle a selection of pendulums with you in mind, taking readings from the twenty-eight psycho-spiritual categories. The service is offered by the Sensonics Association of Oswestry, Shrop-

shire, and all they require is a hair sample...I hope to have more to report in the next issue.

Summer is nearly here, and President Travel of Manchester has two holidays aimed at paranormalists. The first is a tour of Lancashire and Yorkshire taking in "haunted" houses and "mysterious" sites. The tour publicity states unequivocally that ghosts have been seen in these places and are likely to be seen again, but includes the expected disclaimer in case the vibes aren't right. Even the cost is spooky--£666. Alternatively, they offer a Warwickshire psychic weekend of palmistry, clairvoyance, mediumship, astrology, and tarot. Talk will be given by people with names like Tabitha and Krystyna. Perhaps there's an enterprising skeptic out there with £95 to spare.

They are watching, guiding, and caring! They are a race of leonine beings living on another planet in another dimension of time! Their telepathic revelations will provide a "New Intercosmic Philosophy for the Third Millennium!" They are... THE LION PEOPLE! Details are in a new book by Murray Hope.

1988 is UK Astrology year, and also the thirtieth birthday of the Astrological Association. The AA is currently trying to find an MP to sponsor a Private Member's Bill to make it mandatory to record the exact time at which birth occurs. David Fisher, head of the AA's data section, suggests that the introduction of such a measure would be an "especially useful expression of the Saturn-Uranus conjunction."

As we've often said in these pages, give an old paranormal favourite a technological ring and you're often onto a winner. Computers are now essential to the business-minded commercial astrologer. The magazines are full of offers for details charts generated by computers. But now astrology has a "new, technologically and psychologically mature form" called ASTRO*CARTO*GRAPHY. This is a method of producing, by computer, a map of your geographical power zones. These are, of course, locations where you can find "success, love, fun, employment or any other potential." To get your own personal power-map, you provide your birth details and, I suspect more relevantly, £9.95.

The testimonials that almost always accompany advertisements for clairvoyants, palmists, and the like are often unintentionally hilarious. In praise of "Aqua", Mr R. of London SW17 writes "I was astonished when you said that I would have something stolen and returned. On leaving, my car was gone! I got it back that night from Norbury Police. Congratulations."

I'll conclude with this question. Which Israeli conjurer's yacht is called "The Paranormal"? No answers on postcards, please.

REVIEWS

CONFERENCES

ASSUMING RANDI'S MANTLE

Michael Heap

Peter Casson, appearing at Sheffield City Hall, Feb 14, 1988.

I recently went to see a performance by a stage hypnotist in Sheffield. The theme of his show was the supernatural, and the posters outside informed us that we would be witness to experiments performed 'under laboratory conditions'. The show was billed as part of 'a National Scientific Investigation into the supernatural, with full documentation for academic research.'(1)

My wife and I saw this particular stage hypnotist do a show in Canterbury over a couple of years ago without the supernatural element. Before the performance, we purchased his brochure. From the information contained therein it was evident that we were about to be entertained by no ordinary person: 'Peter Casson, Hypnotist and Psychologist'. In the section on his life story, we are informed of his exploits and accomplishments as a boy scout. We also read that his training in psychology was at the age of 15 when he attended psychology classes at night school with a Mr Baggott. A publication from Cairo is quoted as stating that Mr Casson was 'a lecturer in the fundamentals of electricity and other scientific subjects' at the age of 14 and a half years, 'and later discovered he was psychic'. Other achievements in the extensive catalogue include 'the First Measure of the results of Hypnotic Activity using scientific instruments' in 1981. There is also a photograph of Mr Casson with some people in a swimming pool, demonstrating 'the treatment that he invented for a disease he discovered and named Aquaphobia'. I am not sure if this has anything to do with hydrophobia. Perhaps Mr Casson wishes to demonstrate his knowledge of both Greek and Latin. On the last page we read how Mr Casson has succeeded in his purpose in life 'to get Hypnosis accepted both as a scientific subject and medically'.

Mr Casson is also Chairman of the Federation of Ethical Stage Hypnotists. In their binding

Code of Practice are the rules that 'No age regression shall ever be attempted' and 'No suggestion shall be given to any subject of the ingestion of any noxious substance' (2). There is in fact a Hypnotism Act (1952), which, among other things, prohibits the use of hypnosis for entertainment purposes on people who have not attained the age of twenty-one years; the Family Reform Act (1969) lowered the age of consent to 18 years. (3). Indeed, some hold that stage hypnotism should be outlawed entirely; in fact it is in some countries. I am not so enthusiastic. The audiences in Canterbury and Sheffield were clearly having a good time, and laws infringing on people's enjoyment should not be rushed into lightly.

Anyhow, back to Mr Casson's researches into the supernatural. These appear to have caused some consternation amongst religious circles in recent years. In Shrewsbury, a group of baptists, worried by Mr Casson's 'dabbling with the occult', held a vigil outside his show at the Music Hall 'to pray for the safety of the audience'. At one point in his performance they succeeded in having their hymns heard in the auditorium(4). Further north, in Hasiingden, where a similar extra-mural gathering was held, the temporary silencing of Mr Casson's microphone was interpreted by lay preacher Mr Ian Pickup as a divine intervention. 'Often when God works, He just does little things like that to show He has control of the situation' explained Mr Pickup(5).

No such excitement attended Mr Casson's Sheffield performance, but, to be sure, he had plenty of problems with his equipment. An act in which a lady called Ruth was photographed to ascertain if her thought contents also appeared on the print went awry, seemingly through the fault of the volunteer photographer. This was passed off with good humour by Mr Casson, who explained that it was not intended to be a serious demonstration.

The performance opened in darkness with some eerie music; then we beheld Mr Casson, the experimenter, in a black cloak, wearing on his forehead a pair of red horns which promptly fell off. He began by informing us that he had been studying the supernatural for many years. He showed us some lantern slides depicting various so-called supernatural occurrences and declared himself unconvinced. He revealed to us a metal bar in a sealed transparent tube and challenged anyone to bend it in the manner of Mr Geller, with the promise of exotic rewards. Before selecting his volunteers, Mr Casson explained that people under the age of 18 years were not permitted to take part in any of the hypnotic demonstrations, confirming what was stated in his

brochure. Then followed the 'experiments'. Ten people were hypnotised on stage, re-alerted, and asked to guess which of five Zener cards an off-stage volunteer was studying. There was a sequence of ten such cards, so the odds were that two would be correctly guessed by chance, assuming a truly random sequence. Mr Casson revealed that in one of his shows someone obtained a score of six correct. A second 'experiment' involved the volunteers' guessing the nature of ten hidden photographs obtained from a newspaper from another part of the country. Ruth then had her photograph taken, or not, as it turned out.

After the interval the results were announced. Correct guesses for the Zener cards ranged from 1 to 4 and provided yet more support for the laws of probability. But the conjectures as to the identities of the ten photographs seemed surprisingly inept (3.5 being the highest score) if my knowledge of the typical contents of a local newspaper is any indication. Mr Casson said that these results are available for psychologists at universities. Let's hope they don't all rush at once.

A forked twig and a pair of dowsing rods were then produced. Three volunteers from the original ten were hypnotised, re-alerted, and then instructed to ascertain, using the aforementioned implements, which of 5 containers was full of water. Somewhat bemused, they pottered about the stage while the audience feil about. Afterwards they were asked in turn which was the filled container. One of them was correct.

Regressions followed. Ruth was regressed through various ages down to six years and we observed samples of her signature on the way. All ten subjects were then asked to regress to a previous life. Not all did so. Ruth said she was imprisoned in a dark dungeon but didn't know where, when, or why. The audience hooted with delight. Ruth did not look happy. Finally, it was suggested that all ten volunteers were on a holiday island, quenching their thirst with their favourite alcoholic beverage, free in unlimited quantities. Ruth said she felt dizzy and was allowed to sit down. Some of the volunteers appeared to become totally inebriated. The audience was ecstatic. After more hilarity our hero announced that he intends to write a book on the supernatural and the show concluded with a brief snatch of the '1812 Overture'.

Well! What is there to say? In his interview with the Sheffield Star, Mr Casson is asked what he thinks of Doris Stokes. 'What she was doing--well shall we use the word "bogus"?' he replies. Poor Doris! I wonder what she would have to say about Mr Casson. Who knows, she might be telling us at this very moment!

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Dr Michael Heap is Principal Clinical Psychologist at Middlewood Hospital, Sheffield, a lecturer in psychology at the University of Sheffield, and Honorary Secretary of the British Society for Experimental and Clinical Hypnosis

Editor's note: Peter Casson attended the CSICOP London Conference in June, 1985. I know, because he sat next to me at the dinner, at the same table with James Randi and Ray Hyman. During the course of the meal, he told me that he was the only hypnotist who had been able to produce a medically verifiable hypnotic trance.

Casson's show was written up in the Sheffield Star, under the headline "Geller 'a fake-' hypnotist." According to the article, Casson challenged anyone believing "they have psychic powers unlocked by Geller" to "...come to my show and have a go at bending a thin brass rod by psychic means.

"If they succeed I promise to take them around the world and make them rich and famous."

And possibly a target for the KGB? --wg

MYSTERIES OF THE PENNINES

Chris Wright

"Mysteries of the Pennines," a day of illustrated lectures, held at the Library Theatre, Sheffield, on 26 March, 1988. Organised by the Northern Earth Mysteries Group.

The five speakers covered topics as diverse as UFOs, ghosts, legends, and traditions, earth mysteries, etc. There was also a bookstall selling a variety of books and publications dealing with the mysteries of the Pennines and the paranormal in general, together with a number of books on

legends and folk tales.

The first speaker was Rob Wilson, co-author with David Clarke of Strange Sheffield, a study of the mysteries and legends of Hallamshire. He is also the joint editor of Northern Earth Mysteries magazine.

He gave an interesting talk, the main theme of which was the legends of the Sheffield area (a subject of which I know nothing). Running through his talk were the ideas of "ley" lines and astronomical alignments of stone circles; churches, and burial mounds. On these points I was far from convinced about the correctness of his theories. As far as I am aware, statistical analysis of these phenomena leads to the conclusion that there is no genuine attempt to place mounds, circles, etc., in any particular location for any reason other than convenience. Thus any apparent straight alignment of such places is by chance alone.

As to the astronomical layout of standing stones and natural features of the landscape on the horizon to mark the rising/setting of the moon at "the major or minor lunar standstill" and other such alignments, again, I was a little uneasy. After all, if you allow any astronomical alignment of any heavenly body at any time of the year or decade, then you would be very unlucky if nothing at all lined up with your stones, no matter where you put them down.

After the lunch break, David Clarke and Andy Roberts gave a joint talk, called "Spooklights of the Pennines." David Clarke is co-author of Strange Sheffield, and also joint editor of Northern Earth Mysteries. He has published his own work on UFOs, together with Granville Oldroyd, called Spooklights. Andy Roberts is a UFOlogist and editor of the magazine UFO Brigantia.

Messrs. Clarke and Roberts seem to be firm supporters of the idea of a natural terrestrial origin for UFOs--possibly plasma jets formed by the stresses in the earth along fault lines in the outer crust, or electromagnetic radiation in a new or unusual form. They don't appear to be very keen on the extraterrestrial hypothesis.

Terence Whitaker came next with "Ghosts of the Pennines." Mr Whitaker has written two best-selling books dealing with the ghosts and legends of the north of England. He is a professional writer and broadcaster, having had his own TV series on the BBC. His talk (which was often amusing) was about haunted houses in the north of England together with case histories of people who claim to have seen ghosts in or around them. If the things happened the way the people say they did, it seems they must have had a very frightening experience, whatever your thoughts about ghosts and hauntings.

Mr Whitaker's own house is associated with the ghost of an old lady, who is said to arrive at his front door in a coach and then walk in. The ghost was said to come regularly, but in all the years he's lived there, he's seen nothing--perhaps there's a morai in that somewhere. I enjoyed his talk very much.

I suppose the highlight of the day was the final talk of the afternoon session, as this was given by Jenny Randles, the well-known writer of UFO books. Her main subject was the Pennine UFO mystery, that is, the sightings and abduction stories of this area; although she covered UFO themes world-wide as introduction and background information. As you would expect, her talk was very professionally done and most interesting, covering as it did the spectrum of UFO origin theory.

However, at the end of her talk I was unsure just which theory she subscribed to herself, as she didn't "push" any of them as being the more likely in her view. But, to be fair to her, she only had an hour to talk to an audience whose knowledge of the subject ranged from profound to total ignorance. And, as she said: in the absence of any hard evidence one way or the other, "you pays your money and takes your choice."

All in all, it was a very successful day with a good turnout by the audience, who I'm sure must have found something to interest them. Unfortunately, none of the speakers could shed any light on my particular interest: why do designers of theatre seats that have to be sat on all day make them such that they will only fit a misshapen dwarf?

Chris Wright works as a research technician in the Department of Chemical Engineering and Fuel Technology at Sheffield University.

MEDIA

THE UNDOING OF A PARAPSYCHOLOGIST

Steuart Campbell

'Antenna', BBC2, 8.10 pm, 16 March 1988.

One of the subjects dealt with in this science programme was the conversion to scepticism of Dr Sue Blackmore, Parapsychologist at Bristol University. She became interested in parapsychology after experiencing the 'tunnel of light' and what is called the 'out-of-body-experience' (OOBE). This led to a great interest

in Tarot cards and the conviction that they predicted the future and described personality. She even developed a theory of psi; we all share a collective memory and ESP is a tapping of this common resource.

However, she was puzzled by the fact that she could find no evidence of ESP in her own experiments (ignoring Tarot). Psychologist Dr Dick Bierman of the University of Amsterdam pointed to the experimenter effect (without drawing any conclusions) and parapsychologist Dr Serena Roney Dougal of Glastonbury described Blackmore as a 'bad experimenter'. After studying the apparently successful experiments of Carl Sargent, she implied that he cheated!

Finally, she asked herself whether or not the experimenter's own attitude affects the results of the experiments. To test this hypothesis, she conducted experiments on the Tarot cards (in which she did believe). To eliminate her own influence, she arranged for someone else to interview the subject, while she analysed the results. The result was a failure to repeat the success achieved when she conducted the interviews. Clearly she had been influencing the result without realizing that she had done so. Her conclusion was that from now on parapsychology would have to do without psi. Further experiments showed that people who believe in ESP are more likely to think that they can control chance experiments.

Blackmore predicted that although all strange experiences will be explained, no psi effect will ever be found.

Steuart Campbell is a science writer living in Edinburgh, and a frequent contributor to the B&IS

Editor's note: Dr Susan Blackmore's experiences looking for psi are entertainingly recounted in her book The Adventures of a Parapsychologist, published by Prometheus Books and reviewed in B&IS I.2. She has recently been named a Fellow of CSICOP. --wg

BOOKS

THE SPECULATIVE INQUIRER

Wendy M. Grossman

Isaac Asimov, The Roving Mind. Originally published by Prometheus Books, 1983. Reprinted Oxford University Press, 1987. 348 pp. £5.95.

Isaac Asimov has always been able to write entertainingly about anything, even subjects which in the hands of other writers are, if not dull, at least difficult and abstruse. In this collection of essays, he speculates about the future of science, technology, and our planet, argues over and over again for lowering the birth rate to control population, examines the consequences of Reagan's philosophy, argues that science and technology go hand in hand, retails his difficulties in learning to work a word processor (two of the funniest pieces in the book), and sidesteps to examine the brilliance in chemistry Sir Arthur Conan Doyle attributed to Sherlock Holmes (highly inaccurately, he says.)

Dedicated to CSICOP, of which Asimov is a Founding Fellow, the book covers all these subjects with the same imagination and detail Asimov brings to his science fiction. In one essay, for example, Asimov describes vividly the sights to be seen in the skies of Jupiter's four Galilean satellites (black sky, even in the daytime, huge orange-and-red-striped Jupiter, with the other three satellites wheeling around it, dominating everything). In another, Asimov speculates on the future of collecting, surmising that in the future, after they have been superseded, credit cards may prove to be highly collectible items. Asimov's vision of the future may not appeal to everyone--if you like travelling, for example, you may be surprised how willing he is to assume people will want to find ways to avoid it.

The diversity of the pieces reflects the diversity of the publications they were originally written for: the New York Times, the Franklin Mint Almanac, TV Guide, Science Digest, and even the Christian Science Monitor, all between 1973 and 1982. Inevitably, Asimov makes some of the same points over and over again for his different outlets. The book begins, for example, with two pieces on creationism, one originally written for the New York Times Magazine, and the other for Penthouse. Asimov approaches the same ideas differently for a different readership; reading the two pieces together is excellent instruction in how to tailor violent and possibly unpopular opinions to one's audience.

Altogether, the book is entertaining and imaginative, and a cogent defense of science education. Give Asimov the last word, from his final essay, about his father, who asked where Asimov had learned all his science and reacted with surprise when told it was from him: "...you taught me to value learning. That's all that counts. All these things are just details."

Wendy M. Grossman is editor and founder of the British & Irish Skeptic.

LETTERS

UFOs

Hilary Evans replies to Stuart Campbell's review (B&IS II.2):

I do not like replying to reviewers of my books, but in the case of UFOs 1947-1987 I was simply its Editor, and I feel I owe it to its forty-or-so contributors to question, on their behalf, some of Stuart Campbell's comments.

Some of his statements are, indeed, not open to question; for instance, that Danish contributor Hansen doesn't include a single Danish case. Turn to page 72, however, and you'll find the Maarup case, which is Danish; Hansen also includes cases from neighboring Norway and Sweden, with whose organizations SUFOI collaborates.

It is also an error that 'most of the contributions are unoriginal accounts...often from secondary sources.' Virtually every item was written specifically for this publication; the exception is Jacques Vallée's piece, which I included because it appeared in a very hard-to-come-by scientific publication, and I thought it deserved a wider readership.

Many of Campbell's comments are mis-directed because he retains the popular usage of the term 'UFO' as equivalent to 'alien spacecraft', whereas most of my contributors--like most serious UFO researchers nowadays--do not make this, or indeed any other assumption. Among my personal acquaintance, I know of scarcely one serious ufologist who takes this as the basis of his/her research. It is simply one option among many; and for most of us, it is an option that we do not rate very highly--to put it mildly!

I suppose it is understandable that, writing for this magazine, Campbell should harp on

the 'skeptic versus believer' angle. Most of the contributors, however, as a reading of the book makes clear, regard themselves as neither one nor the other, they stand in no entrenched positions, and merely seek to learn what is the truth behind what people report. Campbell quotes my critical comment on Klass; he does not mention that every one of Klass's books is listed in the bibliography as 'essential'.

Campbell attributes to me a 'preoccupation with the mysterious', which I suspect he does not intend as a compliment--yet I will take it so; for, yes, I am indeed passionately preoccupied with the mystery of what is really happening when someone claims to see a statue of the Virgin weep, or to be possessed by the Devil, or to have been abducted aboard an alien spaceship. I fail to see how my own interest in these matters differs from that of, say, Phil Klass, or Denys Parsons, or Campbell himself, all of whom I regard as fellow-searchers into these mysterious matters.

Campbell, however, would perhaps argue that there is a difference--my alleged 'antagonism to science.' Heaven knows where he got this idea, but I suppose it is because I have on occasion spoken out against bad science, and defective science, and negligent science. But so, I hope, would any reader of these pages. Or perhaps it is because I, along with most of my contributors, lack scientific qualifications. If so, he is, of course, quite correct: we are amateurs, most of us. But is those who are scientifically qualified won't examine the UFO question, we who are not--and that includes Phil Klass as much as it does me--must do the best we can.

Hence this book. I won't dispute Campbell's right to disapprove of it: but when more than three dozen researchers have collaborated to present a

serious counterbalance to the usual sensational writings on the UFO subject (doing so, like the editors, for no financial reward) they deserve something better in your columns. Your readers should not be discouraged by Campbell's comments from obtaining as balanced and comprehensive an account of the UFO phenomenon as may be found anywhere.

NONEIN BOARD TEST REPORT

Redge Lewis supplies the first complete test report of the Nonein Board:

The usual team of qualified testers assembled early on the day of the Harmonic Convergence in order to take advantage of all possible auguries. To guard against failure of communications we took with us the deep-frozen entrails of a turkey, it being considered that those of a chicken might not have enough ectoplasm in an emergency.

It is difficult to convey to a reader who has not been privileged to inspect the prototype exactly what it looks like or how it may be expected to perform. We should make it clear that none of us had ever seen anything like it and are at a loss for words to provide an adequate description. The nearest we can get is "something like a plank on a central pivot which enables it to rise, dip, and twist."

The manufacturer's handbook recommends that for best results it should be used on a full stomach in total darkness and conditions of maximum barometric pressure. So the test venue decided upon was a cave located close to the Lost Land of Cockaigne in the heart of the Pyrenees near Esterra di Aneo with its excellent Inn. Our brief was to make it clear exactly what the NONEIN Board

does. Notwithstanding certain difficulties (as we were working in total darkness, which made it impossible to see either the handbook or the Board) we were able to place it (The Large Deluxe Model) in the centre of a ring of 26 vertical stones, each marked with a letter of the alphabet.

[Editor's note: there follows a lengthy description of the meal they had at the Inn, which we have cut for reasons of space. Those wishing to duplicate the test conditions exactly may write for a copy of the original report.]

Prepared with full stomachs (the meal and final drinks had induced a delightful feeling of goodwill and oneness with the Cosmos), the party of testers returned to the cave, which was rediscovered with some difficulty. The member of the party (who shall be nameless) who had eaten the most by a peculiar coincidence was also the largest and heaviest of those present, so he was invited to take position at one end of the Board and told to be quiet and still. Apart from an occasional smothered belch and a slight shaking of the Board, he obeyed instructions. Two smaller members of the party then placed themselves at the other end. Gravity took over and the Board behaved like--yes, like a seesaw. So the first part of the description, that of the inexhaustible source of free power, was proved true. Gravity did its stuff, and provided unlimited free movement. In order to ensure the impossibility of trickery, clockwork, or electric power from some hidden source misleading us, we tested the equipment for some time under controlled conditions, changing the positions of the personnel involved until all were satisfied there was a distinct up and down motion. This was confirmed by those who had had more than one glass each of

wine, to say nothing of the final drink, which was delicious, dangerous, and reminiscent of Armagnac.

It was then easy to move the plank clockwise or anti-clockwise around the stone circle, but as it was dark we couldn't record the letters opposite which the Board paused. However, we did get some results.

The first series of messages was not entirely unexpected, and were verbal. I must admit that when we started the test, before serious reportage took over, there was a certain amount of joie de vivre, and people stationed themselves in the dark around the circle of stones waiting for the Board to pass them so they could give it a whack and a bit of a shove up or down as the fancy took them. The fat man was being madly sent on his erratic way--a graphic representation of his path would look like a random sine wave of varying frequency and amplitude. And ail in the dark. You can now see how important it was to obey the explicit working instructions--especially those stipulating the necessity of testing being carried out on a full stomach for positive results.

So it's not really surprising that our fat man started to yell STOP STOP. Naturally, we speeded everything up, and it was some time before we who were on the perimeter of the stone circle made out the message, which was now coming through loud and clear. I can't speak for fat man, but as far as the rest of us were concerned, we wrote this experiment off as a trial run, and didn't regard it as a psychic experience. We then calmed down a bit, and what with the lunch and a bit of laughter and some light on the scene, the game was played properly, subject to minor hiccups, with the following results.

It will be appreciated that as the messages were spelt out letter by letter, the tests took some time to record and complete.

First series: OUIJA NON Stop. NONEIN OUI Stop (etc., ad nauseum).

Second series: NOT A BAD LUNCH Stop A JOLLY GOOD LUNCH Stop ENJOYABLE LUNCH I THOUGHT Stop ARE WE STAYING FOR LUNCH TOMORROW Stop WONDER WHAT'S FOR DINNER TONIGHT Stop HOW LONG ARE WE STAYING HERE Stop WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THAT LAST DRINK Stop

As we were about to start recording the third series the fat man fell off and the central pivot jammed. So remembering how time-consuming the elucidation of these messages was, to say nothing of the questionable value of the results so far obtained and the psychic veracity being open to doubt, it was decided that the experiment should stop for the day.

Although dinner at the Inn that evening was memorable, washed down as it was with liquors that unfortunately don't travel well, I don't remember enough to give you the details. The following morning we threw away the turkey (which had become unfrozen and was beginning to smell foul). Those of us able to commune with the human race did so, while the majority stayed in their chambers and considered the psychic qualities and value of the NONEIN BOARD. Some determined to acquire one immediately on their return to civilization, while others preferred to erase any trace of the previous day's events from their memories.

There are still some openings for NONEIN BOARD Franchisees for those with Capital, Courage, Credulity, and Confidence. Apply to Redge Lewis, c/o the B&IS.

THE PRESS GALLERY

December 30, 1987

THE SUN

SUE SORTS IT OUT



Triangle tragedy haunts me

MY PROBLEM is a strange one. A few days ago I read a book called The World's Greatest Unsolved Mysteries.

Now one of the stories is haunting me.

It's about six aircraft which disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle in December, 1945.

It's in my thoughts all day and I even dream about it. I keep wondering what could have happened to those aeroplanes and all the

IF you're a teenager with a problem, I can help. Write to Sue Cook, The Sun, 124 Portman Street, Glasgow G41 1EJ. Send a stamped addressed envelope for a personal reply.

other aircraft and ships that have vanished in the same area of ocean since that time.

Sometimes I think I'm going mad, because reading something

has never had this effect on me before.

What is worse is that I'm becoming more and more obsessed with solving the mystery.

Why do I feel so strongly about this?

GABRIEL, Queen's, E. London.

SUE SAYS: Our dreams are often a way of visualising and clarifying problems in our conscious lives, and the message is usually in "symbols."

So although you are dreaming and thinking a lot about the Bermuda Triangle mystery, the reason for this could lie less in the spooky story than in some personal worry.

If you are unable to pinpoint what is really bothering you in your life, and the story persists in dominating your thoughts, it could help to have a session with an analyst.

Write

Your GP could recommend one, or you could write to the British Association for Counselling, 8 Sheep Street, Rugby, Warwickshire, for the name of a suitable therapist near your home.

UFO branches

Ex-members of disbanded UFO investigation groups are being invited to contact a Worcester group, who want to set up local branches. For details contact: 'Skyscan' c/o 145, Tudor Way, Dinas Green, Worcester. 3/3/88

CARDIFF POST

SPOOK SQUAD FOR HAUNTED FAMILY

By MARTIN STOTE

THE council involved in a haunted house row yesterday offered to bring in a team of ghost-busters.

Experts from Nottingham University have suggested installing special equipment to detect the spooks that have driven the Costello family from their home and yesterday a council spokesman said: "We'll be pleased to co-operate with them."

Spirits

John and Helen Costello and their three daughters are terrified by haunting "hearts" knocks at night and a guitar and "rain" that played themselves.

Finally they could stand no more and find the house in Melbourne Road, Stapley, Notts.

The council-claused the family, made themselves homeless and refused to "house them."

But a High Court judge ruled yesterday that they had enough evidence to challenge the ruling.

Housing committee chairman Ted Hickey said yesterday: "If the team



The Star yesterday

from Nottingham University are willing to carry out an investigation we will be pleased to co-operate."

"We are not demanding there are any supernatural forces (and our bed) in the house."

The family, who have been living in the house since 1971, yesterday revealed the smaller room they left last year.

But Susan Costello, 18, who used to wake screaming

in the night, couldn't bear the thought of entering it.

"The noises started last year. As soon as I saw it, the whole nightmare came back. I experienced a very strong fear of fear."

"I don't even want to go back inside that house again in my life."

"The spirit seemed to play me. It tapped on my bed and I used the bed. Costello's. I would wake up screaming."

Sadness

"I got up one morning and my left bodice dead with a face between my feet. I was screaming in the cage."

"After 11 years, 55 weeks of imprisonment. A lifelong anxiety came flooding back."

but I am not a terrible feeling. I apologise.

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World famous clairvoyant bows out in style

DORIS: THE FINAL TOUR



IT IS THE END of an era! World famous clairvoyant Doris Collins will step on to the stage next month to say a fond farewell to her family of 12 million Sun readers.

Doris, who has brought comfort and help through her daily messages in Britain's number one newspaper, is finally touring.

And she is staging her last appearances just for her loyal Sun fans.

For 50 years Doris has played concert halls larger than any rock superstar. Now, at 70, she has decided the pressures of touring are just too much and is giving it up to set up a healing centre.

Next month, Doris—regarded as Britain's number one clairvoyant—will be appearing at nine specially-selected venues around the country in a series of shows promoted by The Sun.

The tour will bring an end to a 50 year career which has seen her:

- TRAVEL more than 30,000 miles to more than 15 countries
- SELL more than 120,000 books in 10 countries
- PAGE the 4,000 seat Royal Albert Hall out two nights running
- BEAT runner John Walker's leg to be won the Olympic 1500 metres
- Now Doris says: "This is my final tour. I shall have 10 meetings all over the country—and that will be it."
- I may be a pensioner, but I'm living the life of a pop star, which is something I shouldn't be doing at my age.
- I'm too old to be travelling all over the world, staying in a different hotel room every night.
- "But I'm not giving it all up completely. I'm winning my own healing centre in August, so everyone can come and see me there."
- Doris travels more than 15,000 miles every year, demonstrating her remarkable gift—contacting the dead and healing the sick.
- She has held healing meetings in more than 15 countries and her success rate is phenomenal. For the last year she has been putting sun readers and friends from the other side.
- Her army of devotees includes Michael Bentin, Frankie Howard and actress Lynne Frederick.
- And Prince Charles used to congratulate her on the success of her book The Power Within.
- Doris is selling her house in Richmond, Surrey, to live near Woburn in Bedfordshire, where she will set up her healing centre.

You can join her farewell

HOW TO GET YOUR TICKETS

DORIS will be holding meetings exclusively for Sun readers throughout Britain.

She will be trying to visit most parts of the country, so that her loyal fans can see her as she finally says goodbye to touring.

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DORIS COLLINS FAREWELL TOUR

Please send me (under quantity) tickets @ £5 each, including postage. I enclose cheque or postal order, name payable to the Sun (NHS).

I want to attend the show on the back of my envelope! DO NOT SEND CASH WITH NAME AND ADDRESS ON BACK OF CHEQUE.

SEND YOUR CHEQUE AND RETURN TO: DORIS COLLINS TICKETS, PO BOX 406, LONDON E1 8DN

NAME.....
ADDRESS.....
CITY.....
POSTCODE.....

THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT HER

- 1 The youngest of nine children, she was born in London's East End when her dad was 48.
- 2 She has a brother in Australia but until five years ago hadn't seen him since she was eight, she says. "We met in the street. He struck me instantly."
- 3 She found more lost relatives when they read her first book, A Woman of Spirit.
- 4 She has been married three times. Her first two husbands—Jack Lewis and Richard Collins—are now dead.
- 5 People never believe Doris is 70. She says: "I look so young because I keep active."
- 6 Her first job was as a swimming instructor at a pool in East London when she was 16.
- 7 She has a son, Brian, 48, two step-sons and an adopted daughter, Margaret, 41. The only child to have her father's talent.
- 8 Doris fell in love with a man during a show and later learned he had attempted suicide by setting himself ablaze with petrol.
- 9 She claims she steps dizzily from Kenny Craid's s' husband slave by being for two years Johnny died last year aged 92.
- 10 Doris also recalls an 'o' m's made a blind tab rador see again.

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Angela Cunniff on a new feat in book-selling — close encounters of the word kind

Blank looks catch the eye

G-29/02/88

THE IRISH TIMES, Thursday, May 5, 1988 9

Claims against hypnotist settled

DAMAGES claims brought against a hypnotist by six people whose speech impediments were not cured after they attended a six-day course of treatment were settled for undisclosed sums. District Justice Hubert Wise heard yesterday.

The plaintiffs, all from counties Dublin and Wicklow, were suing Mr Paul Goldin at Dun Laoghaire District Court for breaching contracts in relation to a six-day course for stammering.

Mr Vincent Scallan for the plaintiffs, said his clients answered a newspaper advertisement which offered the course for speech impediments with a money-back guarantee if it failed. However, on completion of the course, they were not cured and when they asked for their money back, they did not get it.

Ms Margaret Leaby, a lecturer in speech pathology at Trinity College, Dublin, said that stammering had a psychobiological component which could not be readily treated on a short-term basis.

Mr Ian Doherty, an engineering technician, Ballinacree Heights, Killiney, Co Dublin, said he attended the course on November 17th, 1986, at a cost of £300, plus £200 for hotel accommodation. He said he believed he would not stammer after seven days and failing this, he would receive a refund of the £500.

Under cross-examination by Mr Adrian Hardiman, the plaintiff agreed that his speech fluency had improved at the conclusion of the course. Some seven months later, however, he became disillusioned, particularly with such techniques as head nodding involved in Mr Goldin's course and he said that the cure did not appear to him to be permanent.

After a recess, Mr Hardiman told District Justice Wise that he could dismiss each action with no order as to costs. District Justice Wise said he was happy with the situation.

EVEN by the standards of early morning urban commuters, the pinched, blank-eyed faces staring out from the sides of bus shelters over the past few weeks have been strange. The posters (see right) are not leftovers from Close Encounters, but the latest in book publicity.

Publishers are well used to dreaming up wheezes to squeeze as much mileage as possible from less than intergalactic advertising budgets. So when Arrow, Century Hutchinson's paperback imprint, decided to push *Communion: Encounters With The Unknown* as its "superlead" new title for February, it brought in BT for a little extra-terrestrial help.

Whitley Strieber's book, for those not yet enticed by the posters and press advertisements, is (according to Arrow's blurb) "one man's powerful testimony of his shattering encounters with intelligent non-human beings who invaded his home and left him doubting his own sanity." A runaway success in America, it then did well in Century Hutchinson's hardback version.

To sell the paperback, Arrow had a budget of £50,000, quite high by book-publishing standards, and that striking jacket design. "It all started with the jacket, really," says Century Hutchinson's publicity director, Susan Lamb. "We decided that if we put a title on

it, that would obscure and diminish the value of the picture." So the paperback appeared without a title on the front cover (though they did chicken out and repeat the picture, with the title, on the back).

The ensuing ad campaign, on Adshel bus-shelter posters and in occasional spots in the national newspapers, added only a telephone number under the picture. A call to the number elicited a breathily recorded run-down on the book.

The campaign has so far brought in more than 13,000 telephone calls and sales of 150,000, sending it smartly to No 3 on the non-fiction paperback best-seller list.

In a typical year, Arrow has around eight titles which are given their "superlead" status, with budgets of between £30,000 and £60,000. "I think that, considering the budgets, book publishing is really quite high-profile — and it must deal with more products in a year than practically any other industry," says Lamb.

She recalls as probably the most unusual campaign of last year the treatment of Edward Rutherford's *Sarum*. "We had six entirely different jackets on it, and so got brilliant display in bookshops." The only problem, apparently, was that everybody went for one of the jackets, a Constable pastiche — so it promptly sold out long before the others.



THE SUNDAY TIMES 13 MARCH 1988

Holy rolling a way to the great medicine con

It is bad enough just being ill, without being publicly humiliated, robbed of your last cents and generally taken to the cleaners by some gangster who tells you the Lord has "very specifically put you on his heart". Yet the victims of America's faith healers — vulnerable, simple and poor — daily take part in rituals of self-immolation before cameras more extraordinary than those of any Japanese TV game. At the preacher's word, those with heart conditions run red-faced down the aisle and collapse dead at his feet; diabetics stop taking their medicines and have to be rushed to hospital; widows give, as instructed, their ultimate mite and find themselves living in the street.

James Randi knows a bit about flopping people. As a conjurer he is often required to pull the sheepskin over people's eyes, but there is nothing woolly about the man himself. On the principle of set a thief to catch a thief, he was funded by the MacArthur Foundation to look into the practices of America's leading faith healers and his book about them makes astounding reading. Astonishing largely because of the brazen, cheapjack nature of the deceptions: the only miracle is that they were not found out long ago.

We see the walking disabled being shepherded helplessly into hired wheelchairs so that they will be able later to rise again at the preacher's command. We see — and there are splendid photographs — Max Wall's hilarious limb-lengthening routine offered to the crippled as serious treatment. One trick involves "calling out" — divining by inspiration the names and illnesses of members of the audience — miraculous indeed, until you learn that there are stooges with radio transmitters chatting up the assembled faithful for hours before the show begins.

One of Randi's collaborators dressed up as a woman (photograph included) and spun these guys a few wild stories.

THE FAITH HEALERS
by James Randi
Prometheus
£13.95 pp314

SUFFERERS AND HEALERS
by Lucinda McCray Beier
Routledge Kegan Paul
£27 pp314

Iain McGilchrist

As a result, he was "called out" later under the name of Bernice Mankoff and cured of ovarian cancer. For good measure, Randi and his pals went through the garbage left after the show and found, sad to say, touching letters from the desperate faithful, unceremoniously trashed (once the cheques had been removed) despite assurances that such precious testimonies would be "anointed with holy oil" and "prayed over in the temple".

So Randi is a bit of a rat, but an unrepentant one. Compared with the vicious cynicism he exposes, a few dirty tricks seem pardonable. And there is a small matter of those cheques. The hundreds of thousands of dollars which flowed, tax free, into the pockets of these upright men of God allowed them and their relentlessly, and understandably, smiling wives to enjoy a "lifestyle" which, in its combination of gold leaf, surplus footwear, booze and pornography, irresistibly recalls the worst excesses of the family Marconi. Meanwhile faithful families who have given their all arrive at the door in rented pick-ups, with their few sticks of furniture tied up in the back, asking for some of their thousands back, and getting never a penny.

The desire to be made whole lies so deep that it has always been open to exploitation. But the advent of television, and even more of the computer, has opened the way to ever larger audiences, and thus to the possibility of systematic exploitation. It is suddenly possible to send begging letters to a list of susceptible subjects which may con-

tain hundreds of thousands of names, and to make each appear to be a personal communication.

At the same time you can project into every home a piece of classic showbiz, full of rhetoric, sentimentality and sleight of hand. General expressions of goodwill to all and sundry are interlarded with less conventional appeals to self-interest: Jesus will make you a quick buck, find you a new chick, pay off your old bills, and show you how to run a car without it using gas. The combination of pie-in-the-sky and toad-in-the-hole smacks strongly of Reagan's America, and as usual the tab is picked up by the poor.

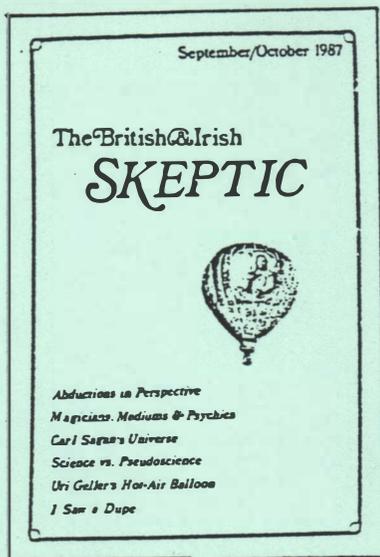
Lucinda Beier's *Sufferers and Healers* looks back to the apparently different world of 17th-century England. Her examination of illness soon spills into the exhilarating but unwelcome attempt to examine the stuff of life itself, so interwoven are the fibres of pain and suffering in the fabric of daily life.

The extraordinary casualness with which death and disaster walk through these pages does nothing to limit the sense of suffering. They pass great stones and record the size with stoical equanimity; their children are always falling in the fire or being taken with the pox; they themselves submit with equanimity to the "pill barbarosa" or an injection of green water. An engraving (see right) shows men in frock coats quietly getting into someone's skull with a blunt instrument, while the victim lies on a canopied bed in a room overlooking the garden.



The procedure of applying a trepan to the cranium was reserved for the most desperate cases, when the patient was expected to die in any event

Iain McGilchrist is a fellow of All Souls and a practising doctor



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BACK ISSUES--CONTENTS

- Vol I, No. 1: The Knock Legend (David Berman); Starting Anti-Science (Lewis Jones); Toierating Continued Uncertainty (Peter O'Hara); Review: Secret Cult; Hits & Misses.
- Vol I, No. 2: Brooke Bond's "Unexpiained Mysteries" (Lewis Jones); The Geller Bumph (Frank Chambers); A Spanish Close Encounter (Ian Ridpath); Reviews: Sorry, You've Been Duped!, The Adventures of a Parapsychologist; Profile of a Small-Time Psychic; coiumns: Hits & Misses; Psychic Diary; Letters.
- Vol I, No. 3: The BMA Report on Alternative Medicine (Peter O'Hara); The Monstrous Myth at Loch Ness (Steuart Campbell); Reviews: The Transcendental Temptation, Scarne's New Complete Guide to Gambliing; UFO-Line.
- Vol I, No. 4: Proper Criticism (Ray Hyman); The Telepathic Philodendron (Henri Broch); Mark Plummer Interviewed on the Gay Byrne Show; Knock: Two Alternative Views (Leslie Shepard, Steuart Campbell); UFO Exploded (Luis Alfonso Gamez); Profile of Doris Stokes; new coiumns: The Press Gallery, European Report, Skeptics in the News.
- Vol I, No. 5: Abductions in Perspective (Hiiary Evans); Geiler in Reading (Michael Hutchinson); Magicians, Mediums & Psychics, Part One (David Alexander); Carl Sagan's Universe (William Steeie); Science vs. Pseudoscience, Part One (Peter O'Hara); I Saw a Dupe (Karl Sabbagh); Reviews: BUFORA's Congress '87, Nessie in Conference, Geller and The Sun, The Vanishing Hitchhiker; State of the Art (Frank Chambers).
- Vol I, No. 6: Creationism in Austraiia (Martin Bridgstock); Noah's Ark Founders on the Facts (Stephen Moreton); Nessie Hunt (Steuart Campbell); Magicians, Mediums & Psychics (David Alexander); Science vs. Pseudoscience (Peter O'Hara); The 'Royal Nonesuch of Parapsychoiogy (H.B. Gibson); Skeptics' Predictions 1988; Reviews: "Is There Anybody There?" (Leslie Shepard, Lewis Jones), Divine Creationism (A.T. Symon), Extrasensory Deception (Frank Chambers).
- Vol II, No. 1: Geiler's Sailboat (Frank Koval); Magicians, Mediums & Psychics (David Alexander); Knock: some new evidence (David Berman); Predictions 1988; Nelson's Emporium (Frank Chambers); Telepathy: a Mechanism? (Gordon Gray); The 'Alternative' in Alternative Medicine (Michaei Heap); Reviews: Witchcraft, the BBC, and Responsibility (Michael Hutchinson); Kiiroy on UFOs (Steuart Campbell); The Medium & the Message (Andrew Tomlinson); The Straight Dope (Wendy M. Grossman)
- Vol II, No. 2: Interview: Paul Kurtz (Part One); S.G. Soal: Master of Deception (Chris Scott); Doris Collins and the Sun (Wendy M. Grossman); the Society for Psychical Research (Frank Chambers); Reviews: Psychic Forum (Redge Lewis); 'QED': Glimpses of Death (Steuart Campbell); The Faith Healers (Wendy M. Grossman & Peter O'Hara); The Other Quote Book (Stephen Moreton); UFOs 1947-1987 (Steuart Campbell)

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