

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
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Editor: Kent Harker

THE FACE ON MARS: ASTROFANTASY '88?
by John Hewitt

(John Hewitt has done perhaps the most thorough research extant on this question.)

"The simplest way to explain the Face on Mars," says Richard Hoagland, "is that we're looking at a MESSAGE intended for us." He believes the chances are better than 50/50 that "we are dealing with something in the order of conscious design." Inside nearby pyramids, "We may find records, we may find catalogs . . ." because the intelligent beings who built the Face came not from Mars. If the unusual features are not artificial, they're "not worth worrying about," says Hoagland, who cites a recent "Applied Optics" article in which Dr. Mark Carlotto asserts that the face exhibits 3-D symmetry and anthropomorphic facial detail. Mystifying cosmic alignments complete Hoagland's scenario.

Is this astrofantasy, wishful seeing, gifted insight, New Age religion, honest objective inquiry, or plain old pseudoscientific nonsense? Is it a confused effort to heighten public interest in Mars, or a cynical media campaign to sell books?

Most scientists state flatly that there is "absolutely no evidence" for Hoagland's et al. claims. Many feel that the only thing artificial about the face on Mars is the controversy generated by its promoters. "It isn't science, it's public relations," says NASA geologist Michael Malin.

Cydonia Mensae, the region of Mars which contains the face, is a heavily eroded former tableland a thousand miles northeast of Chryse. It lies along the eastern edge of Acidalia Planitia, where vast, sparsely cratered lowlands meet the northern boundary of the ancient cratered uplands. The plains of Acidalia show an overall NE/SW erosional flow pattern; and, between 40 degrees N and 50 degrees N and 10 degrees W and 20 degrees W, polygonal patterns of intersecting fractures cut the plains into a mosaic of huge angular blocks. Systems of radial and parallel faults and ridges are often found on the Martian plains.

The Viking Orbiter views of Cydonia reveal a complex landscape, rich in detail, displaying an enormous number of individual features. High-standing erosional remnants of primitive plateaus stick up everywhere as knobby hills, mesas, and steep, smooth-sided mountains. For thousands of square miles, chains of these isolated remnants trace

ghostly outlines of once grand features in the ancient terrain.

Cydonia's fabulous natural landforms, geometric patterns, intrinsic symmetries and erosional alignments make the region a most likely place to look for random features which resemble familiar objects. With a little imagination one can see many suggestive shapes, especially in low sun-angle images. It would be surprising indeed if one could NOT pick out a vaguely face-like hill somewhere in 56 million square miles of Martian landscape!

Dr. Mark Carlotto, in his "Applied Optics" article, acknowledges that the mere existence of "a feature which resembles a face in isolation tells us nothing." Hoagland, however, has found it extremely difficult to believe that a "fiendishly clever geologic environment has `conspired' to create several familiar looking objects on Mars." Hoagland has even suggested that damage to his face, nearby "fortresses" and "pyramids" is due not to erosion but to "explosive penetrations" in a Martian nuclear war that left bomb craters across Cydonia!

Martian winds and sandstorms, ancient glacial flows, volcanism, ice, and water have played diverse roles in sculpting the northern plains of Mars. For an extensive discussion of the mottled plains, patterned plains, disordered plains, fretted terrain, and knobby terrain, see "The Surface of Mars" by Michael H. Carr.

The face is a weathered knob at about 40.9 degrees N, 9.45 degrees W. Its peak elevation is probably less than 1200 feet, while its linear dimensions are about 1 by 1.5 miles. To professional planetologists, who specialize in interpreting the geomorphology of alien landscapes, there is nothing artificial whatsoever about the face or its environs. In Cydonia, on Mars, it looks utterly natural.

The face does not live up to even the most basic claims of its promoters. It does not follow the profile of a face, human or prehuman. It is shaped roughly like a skewed pyramidal hill, cut by a couple of major fractures. Its peak, clearly delineated by a sharp-pointed shadow, is near its southern extremity. The feature does not show perfect bisymmetry at all. Its ridge cuts across the base diagonally, along an angle shared by many neighboring knobs and mesas. On Earth, the face might be called an "inselberg" (German: "island mountain"). It is far less symmetrical than our large, streamlined "yardangs" (wind-sculptured hills) such as those found in the Egyptian deserts or at Cerro Yesera in the Ica Valley, Peru.

The impression of a face rests heavily on a single shadow which gives the illusion of an eye socket in late afternoon light. The human eye and brain, notorious for perceiving familiar patterns in random visual fields, fill in the blanks and supply the missing symmetry. The higher elevations of many Martian knobs show pits or hollows which create similar shadows.

In his "Applied Optics" article, Dr. Mark Carlotto, an image-enhancement specialist, uses a single-image shape-from-shading

technique to "suggest that the impression of facial features . . . are not (sic) a transient phenomenon." He also claims, for example, that there is "fine structure in the mouth resembling teeth." Carlotto applies his procedure to two high-resolution Viking images, 35A72 and 70A13, both of which have late afternoon illumination. The eastern side of the face lies hidden in deep shadow; and Carlotto notes that "only the features on the left, sunlit side of the face are visible."

Undeterred, Carlotto proceeds to enhance "subtle features" on the right, to reconstruct the face's "3-D structure," and to "synthesize alternative views in varying illumination conditions" including "simulated morning light." A lower resolution image containing the face (753A33) shows the area illuminated by REAL morning light, but Carlotto dismisses the frame as having insufficient resolution for his purpose. A second, lower resolution frame (673B56) has mid-afternoon light, but this too is said to be useful only in providing "a context for our analysis."

Most scientists remain unimpressed by Carlotto's effort to convince them that the Cydonian landscape harbors features that "may not be natural." Mr. Hoagland's central object of worship appears EVEN MORE like an ordinary eroded hill that vaguely resembles half a face in oblique afternoon sunlight. A major leap of imagination is necessary to see the symmetrical detail Carlotto suggests his technique reveals. Many critics argue that Hoagland (via Carlotto) is once again making much too much out of far too little.

Dr. Bernard Leikind, a General Atomic physicist working at Lawrence Livermore, states, "Carlotto's input data simply are not of sufficient quality to justify his extraordinary conclusions." Leikind points out that the paucity of imagery available has forced Carlotto to employ his shape-from-shading technique in lieu of more preferable methods. The variety of initial assumptions made, the basic pixel-to-pixel interpolation scheme used, and the smoothing algorithm's effect of adding information that isn't there to critical dropped-pixel locations highlight the biases inherent in all such imaging models. Also, when two 3-D images are combined, dropped pixels in either one must weaken our confidence in the accuracy of any composite. Considerable doubt remains, therefore, whether Carlotto's extreme enhancements are good representations of actual Martian surface detail. The "Applied Optics" article, while computationally sound, merely documents an elaborate procedure which ultimately adds nothing to our understanding of Mars.

Support for the extravagant claims of Hoagland et al. is further eroded by a closer look at other Viking images of Cydonia. Frames 673B56 and 753A33 (mentioned by Carlotto) both contain information at odds with the assertions. In the morning light of 753A33, our favorite mesa lacks any impression of facial features. The "eye socket" becomes a broad, shallow hollow; and the base appears as an asymmetrical erosional polygon like its neighbors. It is easy to see why these images get little attention.

Hoagland and company fail to mention two ADDITIONAL frames of Cydonia

containing the face, 673B54 and 753A34. Presumably they are unaware of their existence. These "new" images of the area can be obtained simply by phoning the Nat'l Space Science Data Center in Maryland. Norman Sperling, a former editor of "Sky and Telescope", made such a call and has recently received 8 x 10 prints of the frames. The images of the face are small, perhaps 50 or 60 pixels (compared to over 400 pixels in the higher resolution views) -- but they are good enough to show all sorts of features on the other side. A broad, bright slope, hidden in the shadows of 35A72 and 70A13, rises toward two peaks along an ascending, ragged ridge. The frames don't show anything that bears the slightest resemblance to a face!

In classic pseudoscientific fashion, the Face-on-Mars promoters are making selective use of the data available to them, and have drawn conclusions unsupported by the data they HAVE used. They failed to obtain all relevant data initially, and they have ignored overwhelming evidence contrary to their claims. Throughout, they demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of probability and statistics.

Hoagland has invented a system of alignments among certain "unusual surface features" which just happen to lie in the same Viking frames as the face. The features are given clever names such as "the City, the City Square, the Fort," etc., to create a compelling fantasy about the "context" of the Facebuilders' civilization. Woefully arbitrary and ambiguous, the claims about these nearby forms and their "exquisite mathematical system" of contrived interrelationships serve only as another fine example of post-hoc selection of data.

The grandest cosmic alignment Hoagland invokes is that "half a million years ago, you could stand in the City Square and watch the sun come up over the Face" at summer solstice. This datum is then used to "date" the alien habitation of Cydonia On Mars, major long-term changes make it easy to draw virtually any solstice sightlines to fit conveniently chosen hypotheses. Hoagland's hocus-pocus should not be mistaken for archaeoastronomy -- he's reading tea leaves in the sky.

The mistake Erich von Daniken made was setting his godly chariot scenarios on Earth, where his facts could be shown false with relative ease. Promoters of planetary pseudoscience, however, use the simple stratagem of placing their claims of extraterrestrial visitations and/or paranormal manifestations elsewhere in the solar system, making it mighty expensive to disprove them. I suggest the name "cryptoplanetologists" for practitioners of planetary pseudoscience.

"The Face on Mars" is archetypal planetary pseudoscience, in the tradition of George Leonard and his lunar mining machines. The face was widely publicized by Viking scientists when the image first appeared in July 1976. By February 1977, the face had been so mercilessly exploited by ancient astronaut promoters that the "Griffith Observer" featured it on the back cover, noting that nearby pyramids prove the Martian Sphinx and the monuments of ancient Egypt are doubtless relics of alien visitations. Since then, the face has appeared in countless publications. It has hardly been suppressed or

neglected, as claimed by Hoagland,

Who built the Face and why? Pseudoscience writers generally display a stunning lack of originality in answering their own questions -- and Face promoters are no exception. Once again, readers are subjected to an interminable litany of lame alien visits, tiresome Atlantis lore, and dimstore pyramidology.

H. Beam Piper's "Omnilingual" (1957) shows infinitely more respect for the scientific method than do Face-on-Mars promoters. Piper's story details the careful, interdisciplinary teamwork involved in reclaiming relics of a dead Martian civilization and deciphering their secrets. Pyramids on Mars appeared in Stanley Weinbaum's classic "A Martian Odyssey" (1934) as bizarre silica-based "pyramid creatures" half a million years old. Five million year old ruins, plus one not human -- but humane statue in Arthur Clarke's "Jupiter Five" (1953) show that an interstellar Culture X who "guessed that the future belonged to the Earth" once co-existed amicably with a dying, insectoid Martian race.

We mention only two of the many Mars-related science fiction movies, from the fine Hammer film "Five Million Years to Earth" to the incredible "Mars Needs Women." The author has personally discovered a giant "Playboy bunny logo" on Mars, three miles long. Obviously this is connected in some deep cosmic way with the last film!

FINDERS WEEPERS

by Don Henvick

Daniel Sabsay calls me one summer evening to say that a police psychic is coming to town for a personal appearance and asks if I'd like to go check her out with him. Sure. What the hey. A little homework turns up that this particular mystic is Dorothy Allison, a lady from Nutley, New Jersey who has taken credit for solving no less than 4,000 murders and missing person cases in the last twenty years. Should be interesting.

The big night arrives, as do I, at a country club in Marin. Good crowd, mostly women. Yuppie heaven. They are charging \$15 at the door. Before I can get to my wallet I find myself miraculously teleported through the door. Amazing, but cheap. Dorothy introduces herself by way of a videotape of a feature about her on "Secrets and Mysteries," a gee-whiz syndicated series. The show details three of her most successful cases and follows her as she consults with police in an on-going case. Narrator Robert Stack goes all gushy about her powers, so it must all be true.

In 1968, before she declared her powers, a little boy was lost and feared drowned. Dorothy went to the police and, in a feat never duplicated by her again, perfectly described the clothes the boy was wearing. Cynical types like me might suspect that somehow she got hold of the information, since no one as yet knew her or what she was after, but the police were impressed. Oh sure, they already knew what

the boy was wearing; that was not the problem. They needed to know where the body was. Dorothy gave them several pieces of information, which to her chagrin, they refused to follow up. Helpful information like, "I see a number somewhere," and "There's a number one and a twenty -- what does that mean?"

Well, the police didn't interpret this stuff correctly until after the body was discovered accidentally. Only then did Dorothy's clues become meaningful. For instance, the body was found very close to a school, P.S. #8, "just as Dorothy had predicted!" And the detective in charge was notified that the body had been found and he got the call at 1:20 p.m. No, the body wasn't found at 1:20 -- he just got the call at 1:20. But it still counts. Get the picture? If the cops had gotten the call at 8:00 p.m. that the body had been found near P.S. 120, the guillable would be no less amazed.

The pattern continues with the other cases: The number 222 is significant in a manner which becomes clear when the body is found on February 22; names can be that of the victim, the perpetrator, a policeman, or friends or acquaintance of any of the above. In one of the strongest cases, the letters M-A-R lead a relative to a rock with those letters painted on it. The relative searches the marshes around the rock for weeks without success, but the body is found by chance months later near the rock and Dorothy is a success again. The relative gives a grateful testimonial that he could not have found his daughter's body without Dorothy's help. The relative makes a very cogent comment about why he couldn't find the body himself despite Dorothy's clues: "You don't know distance and time and you can't tell past, present or future."

In all of the past cases, the video-taped Robert Stack tells us about the half-dozen or so clues that Dorothy has given which are found (after the fact) to correspond to the case. Now comes a revelation. When we see Dorothy consult with the police on an unsolved case, she doesn't give her six clues; after pumping the policeman in the time-honored, hot-or-cold game, she eventually comes up with no less than fifty clues! So not only are the clues so vague they could fit almost anything, but she also gets to choose the six best and forget she ever made the other forty-four. Truly nice work if you can get it. Dorothy went down to Atlanta to consult on the famous child murders and give them the name of the perpetrator. I find out later that, according to Randi [CSICOP co-founder James Randi] (whom she calls "some magician who's always attacking me") she gave police no less than 42 names, so they must have been standing in line to do the crimes.

Finally the tape ends and Dorothy sings more of her own praises. The crowd is hooked; most are there to have her answer their own questions and she does a bit of her thing off the cuff. I finally get to ask if, in any of her 4,000 cases she can point to any in which the police actually used her clues to solve a case. She refers to the video. I refer to the fact that in those cases bodies were found by other means, and her clues, far from helping the police, only served to help her reputation by enabling her to say that she was right after the fact. Dorothy replies that she's not the police and it ain't her fault

that they either can't or won't follow up on her information. So it seems kind of funny that the police she praises so highly and with whom she is on such good terms are all too incompetent or bull-headed to use her clues to solve the crimes and find the bodies. It seems funny to me, anyway. At any rate, she couldn't name one case in which her information, supernatural or not, was used by the police to actually solve a case. Yet she claims to have helped the police 4,000 times. There is no question that she's helped Dorothy Allison.

Of the cases that haven't yet been solved, Dorothy is as much in the dark as anyone else. Concerning one of them on the videotape, Dorothy said, "One and seven are very important, whether 17 or 71 I don't know." Robert Stack confides breathlessly that the victim is buried in plot 17 in the cemetery now, though he does not explain of what possible importance this could be to solving the case. Nor does Dorothy. The crime remains unsolved.

Dorothy is in northern California for this talk so she can be consulted on several cases, most notably that of Baby Jane Doe, the infant girl whose body washed up on the shore of Tiburon in May. The day after her talk, she goes to the Marin authorities and spends six hours talking to police about the case. A Marin newspaper article appears shortly afterward, alluding to her record and her "help" to the police. A call to the paper to set the record straight produces the standard, "I wish I had known that before the story I got," but no retraction will be forthcoming. The Marin Sheriff's Department states that no comment can be made on what evidence Dorothy provided because the case is still open, but no composite picture of the murderer has been made and apparently no leads have brought the case any closer to solution.

Dorothy has done her part and has moved on to other cases, not to give any more thought to Baby Jane Doe until and unless regular police work comes up with a solution, at which time she will review the "clues" she gave, find ways to make some fit the facts, discard the rest of them and announce that she has psychically solved another case. And more relatives of missing or murdered people will come to her, rack their brains trying to make sense of her meaningless information, and then go home to wait for events to take their natural course and for Dorothy to reappear to claim credit. Nice work if you can get it. And if you can stand it.

PERSONAL PROFILES

BAS welcomes our newest board member, John Lattanzio. John's passion is astrophysics, and he comes to us most recently from Canada where he just finished a post-doctoral research fellowship at the Canadian Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics in Toronto. Before his Canadian stint, he completed his Ph.D. in Australia (of course, in astrophysics). Some of the best work in the U.S. happens right here in the Bay Area at Lawrence Livermore -- not to be confused with Lawrence Berkeley -- so John took the offer of another post-doctoral fellowship

at the Institute for Geophysics and Planetary Physics at Lawrence Livermore. (This means we can only have him for about two years, when he will leave to seek a post in a research division of some major university.)

John's primary interest is in the late (that's "lyte," in Aussie) stages of red giant stellar evolution. He has presented invited papers at major conferences, the latest of which was at the Internat'l Astronomical Union. Numerical fluid dynamics (as applied to stellar formation), molecular cloud complexes, cosmological gas dynamics, and computer simulations of Large Areas (both gas and dark matter) round out the rest of his professional training and research.

This man does not seem to have any of the trappings of a stiff egghead. Mention something about the cosmos and he gets a look on his face like a little kid. He was in the thick of things with the Australian Skeptics, serving on their Executive Committee until leaving Australia. Upon his arrival in Canada, he promptly set about forming the Ontario Skeptics with Henry Gordon. His Australian experience helped guide the Canadian group very quickly to a place of prominence.

So what does a cosmologist do when he does not have his head in the nether reaches of the universe? Folk music is his pleasurable pastime. John tinkers at the mandolin and accordion, adding (modestly, perhaps) that he is strictly an amateur. Having gotten a taste of travel in his professional pursuits -- literally and figuratively -- he plans to take in plenty of the sights here on earth.

Our imaginations run wild with what we may anticipate from John Lattanzio.

JULY MEETING: PARAPSYCHOLOGY: INSIDE PSYCHICS AND CHARLATANS
(Dr. Lloyd Auerbach)
by Ivan Linderman

Dr. Auerbach described himself as a social scientist and is an instructor in parapsychology at the J. F. Kennedy University in Orinda. The parapsychology laboratories there have been discontinued due to recent cut-backs. Dr. Auerbach is also a member of the Society of American Magicians and author of "Handbook of Parapsychology" and "ESP: Hauntings and Poltergeists".

Dr. Auerbach's objectives in his presentation were to describe 1) how phonies convince people they are psychics and 2) how to differentiate between phonies and sincere psychics. Dr. Auerbach differentiated between 1) phony psychics who know they are phony, 2) sincere psychics who believe they are psychic and want to help people, and 3) sincere psychics who believe they are psychics and want to profit financially from their believed ability.

To illustrate how psychics convince people they are psychics, Dr.

Auerbach demonstrated magic tricks. Although there has been a long history of antagonism between parapsychology and magicians, the American Society for Psychical Research was founded by magicians; e.g., Houdini, Hoffman, etc. Magicians were particularly adept at detecting tricks used by spiritualists popular at the beginning of this century.

With the appearance of such "psychics" as Uri Geller in the 1960's, it became apparent that magicians were more adept at exposing fraud than the general scientific community. [My own hypothesis is that magic (and puzzles) are generally designed to purposely mislead the observer.]

Since 1983, parapsychologists have tried to get professional magicians to work with them. A professional magician is defined by the American Society of Magicians as someone who earns 100% of his income from performing magic. While professional magicians can be used to detect fraud in psychics or errors in parapsychology experiments, they usually will not tell researchers how they detected the fraud or how the experimental subject misled the investigator because this would break their oath not to reveal professional secrets. Nevertheless, a panel at the Parapsychology Convention in Boston concluded magicians should be present at all times during parapsychology experiments; with computer-mediated experiments, computer experts should also be present.

Dr. Auerbach described some of the principles of magic, pointing out that we "see" as much (if not more) with the mind as with the eye. [As a biologist, I would like to add that the human eye, while often compared to a camera, is much more. Evidence suggests that simply the way the nerve cells in the retina are wired causes decisions to be made before the light information is even passed to the optical nerve and to the brain. Cats for example, can detect horizontal motion more readily than vertical motion, so a cat magician would be well advised to do his tricks in the vertical plane where they would tend to be invisible to the cat. Before a nerve impulse enters the optical cortex of the brain for interpretation, it passes through specific area of the medulla and is further filtered and modified. Hence, even before any conscious or learned interpretation of the incoming visual information is performed in the cerebral cortex, the original light signal has been extensively modified.]

Dr. Auerbach used the example of people who had been blind from birth and then had their sight restored later in life. They literally had to be taught to see. Additionally, seeing appears to have some cultural components as well. Dr. Auerbach said pygmy people saw distant animals as literally growing larger as they came closer, and did not seem to understand the Western concept that objects in the distance retained their original size but just appeared smaller owing to the smaller perspective angle. [I also understand that different cultures have varying abilities to detect various shades and tints, and that this ability even extends between the sexes. In some cultures, women, who perform most of the agriculture, are more adept at detecting various shades of brown whereas men in the same culture, who are primarily

rain forest hunters, can see more shades of green. It is an often repeated anecdote that some Arabs have hundreds of 2X2 words for the color of horses and Eskimos have an equally vast number of words for types of snow, and these nuances of perception evade most Europeans.]

As further evidence that (at least visual) perception is to a high degree learned, Dr. Auerbach noted children are often the worst audiences for magicians. They are difficult to fool because they have not yet completely learned to see in the adult way. To illustrate how magicians take advantage of learned perception, faulty memory, false angles and the like to perform their tricks, Dr. Auerbach performed some simple, and for the most part convincing, magic tricks. The advantage to the parapsychologist of knowing magic is that he is less likely to jump to conclusions. As a professional ghostbuster, Dr. Auerbach has noted most cases of the paranormal resolve into misinterpretation of natural events.

Dr. Auerbach gave an example of a woman police officer who was observed by her colleagues to seem to be fighting an invisible foe. There was indication that during one of these episodes she may even have been lifted off her feet as she struggled with the "demon." Regardless of the details of her attack, however, it was definitely established that her neck swelled during and after the attack and showed marks which could have been made by strangulation.

Dr. Auerbach visited the woman in her home. During the interview, he noted she glanced off as though there were another unseen visitor in her house. She appeared to become anxious and agitated. Suddenly, she fell struggling, as if thrown, to the floor. Dr. Auerbach watched as her throat reddened and swelled during the attack. [It was difficult not to imagine the demon-possessed child in *The Exorcist* when Dr. Auerbach described this incident.]

Further investigation revealed the woman was in therapy for psychological problems associated with having been raped by her father during childhood. Her son, who bore a resemblance to the woman's father, was visiting her and the hypothesis was advanced that the son reminded her of her father and her childhood trauma. Working with the woman's therapist, Dr. Auerbach suggested the "demon" was the memory of her father and the childhood rape. When she told her "father" to leave her alone, the attacks stopped.

In other words, she caused her own physical symptoms, and could voluntarily stop these manifestations by consciously changing her thinking and perception.

Dr. Auerbach provided this case not only as an example of how seemingly well-documented cases of possession can be simply natural events misinterpreted, but also as an example of the help parapsychologists (or even psychics) can provide people.

Another example, which drew considerable response from the audience, was a family who claimed to live in a haunted house. They had sought help from police, clergymen, psychics and parapsychologists without

success. The family was convinced they needed real ghostbusters. Auerbach's group, although finding no evidence of verifiable paranormal phenomena, literally acted as ghostbusters. They asked the family to leave the house and the parapsychologists set up a system to generate ghostly sounds. When the family returned the "ghosts" were gone.

While the family was relieved of their anxiety over this particular problem by the phony ghost busters, the audience did not feel this chicanery was ethical. It was also felt while such fraud may have indeed helped people, it also encouraged irrational beliefs. [Personally, I am ambivalent on this question. Many medical texts suggest physicians say a few magic words over warts in children to cause the warts to recede. I have seen this "therapy" work and of course there is nothing paranormal about it. Like the previous example of the woman possessed, the human mind can exert considerable control over the body. Perhaps the only way to deal with incurably irrational people is in an irrational way.]

While Auerbach admitted there is little quantitative evidence of psychic ability and no direct measurement of ESP or psychokinesis, he defended parapsychology and "good" psychics on the grounds that they do provide a needed function to at least some people in some societies. He noted there are always people who won't be responsible for their own actions and who look for others to alleviate this responsibility. These people are the natural prey of bad psychics.

"Good" psychics, on the other hand, try to provide another way -- albeit perhaps, an equally irrational way -- of viewing problems and questions. [I thought Dr. Auerbach could have made a better point by suggesting "good" psychics could provide analogies to help people overcome their problems. Colin Wilson, in a rather extensive review of the occult, suggested that paranormal activities, while useless in themselves, served the purpose on concentrating one's attention on a problem. The simple act of closing one's eyes when deep thinking, may be viewed as a way of concentrating on a subject to the exclusion of extraneous (but real) information. In "The Origin of Consciousness from the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind", Julian Jaynes posits a universal human need for "archaic authorization"; i.e., giving personal responsibility to another person. The problem of course, is in knowing there is no reality to these actions even if they are useful. Once, while studying entomology, I developed an abnormal fear of insects. I saw a psychiatrist two times to rid myself of this fear. During the first visit, we discussed how insects might remind me of various (imagined) traumas in my childhood and set a program for gradually desensitizing me to insects. In the second (and last) visit, when I was complimenting the psychiatrist on our success, he commented, "You know, all that stuff about your Mother is nonsense. I just made it up." He went on to explain that phobias are generally diffuse in the mind and that the real therapy was to localize the fear onto some specific event. Once so localized, the fear can be easily removed. It may be this was the point that Auerbach was trying to make.]

Dr. Auerbach also described general principles psychics use in making "cold readings"; e.g., people are more similar than different, problems are generated by transitions (deaths, births, marriages) and concern similar issues (money and love) etc.

Finally, he provided some suggestions on how to select psychics for personal help, noting it was not important how accurate the psychic was, but how helpful they were. Bob Steiner (well-known BAS founder), strongly objected to this point precisely because psychics bypass authority. [The point was not made that temporarily overlooking authority might be both useful and acceptable.] Since Dr. Auerbach obviously could not win with this audience, he concluded that "An anomalous way of gathering information is being used by people."

As Stephen Hawkins is fond of saying, "Whatever that means!"

GERARD STRAUB IS HERE.

Don't forget: in Oakland at the Montclair Woman's Club, corner of Thornhill and Mountain Blvd. on Sunday, October 16 at 1 p.m. Suggested donation is \$4 prepaid, or \$5 at the door; reservations are strongly suggested. The event is sponsored by the Secular Humanists of the East Bay, to whom you should make your checks payable. Mail reservations to SHEB, Box 5313, Berkeley, CA 94705 before October 8.

Directions: Take Highway 13 east to Montclair exit. Take the Thornhill off ramp, go two blocks to Mountain Blvd. Montclair Woman's Club is on the corner. There is off-street parking behind the building (entrance from Mountain Blvd.).

BASIS

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