

Dr. Mack's new book calls for a response from his fellow analysts, who see him as a friend and respected colleague, admired for his clinical work, his scholarly biography of T. E. Lawrence, and his activities for peace and international conflict resolution. In his new self-chosen role as Prince of Our Unreason, his book is easy to dismiss as a wide-ranging attack on Western European traditions of rationality and experimental science. Mack invites scientific consideration of his reports on extraterrestrial kidnappings, but he also rejects potential critics "who believe that the laws of physics, as encompassed by the Newtonian/Einsteinian system, are the full definition of reality." This excludes most analysts, who consider themselves children of the Enlightenment and subscribe—whatever their disputes about clinical theories—to a favorite quotation from "The Future of an Illusion": "The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but does not rest until it has gained a hearing" (Freud, 1927, p. 53).

Right-wing attacks on analysis by neoconservatives like Frederic Crews can be met with further scholarship, but Mack's book, with his account of reported visitations from outer space, is a more subversive assault on psychoanalysis as a science. Mack begins with his initial skepticism about UFO landings and extraterrestrial humanoids, but then, after his encounter four years ago with Budd Hopkins and his own observations on "survivors" referred by Hopkins, Mack arrived at a kind of conversion experience. He came to believe, along with his 76 subjects, that their nocturnal voyages and sexual explorations by "aliens" were actual events, not merely dreams or delusions or vivid fantasies mistaken for reality by suggestible people. With subjects who did recall their experiences as "dreams," Mack persuaded them that this was a euphemism to protect them from the reality of these events.

He acknowledges the obvious similarities between these phenomena and the visions of saints, mystics, and shamans throughout history, as well as the "trips" induced by psychedelic drugs. But instead of regarding these reports as products of the human imagination, familiar from folklore and mythology, Mack reverses conventional attitudes about myths and the unconscious. He interprets ancient dreams and mythical visions as possibly real occurrences, as evidence of "new realms of psychical awareness," the "opening of consciousness to new domains of being," "the existence of other intelligences in the universe," or even of multiple universes. For example, quoting a colleague, Mack suggests that Ezekiel's vision of fiery wheels in the sky may be more than dramatic Old Testament imagery: the prophet may have seen an actual UFO visitation by sixth-century B.C. extraterrestrials.

Mack continues with a brief history of recent abduction reports, beginning with a young Brazilian in 1957 and the experiences of Mr. and Mrs. Hill in 1961 (Fuller, 1966, and shown as a 1975 film, *The UFO Incident*). Mack reviews the work of his chief predecessors, Hopkins (1981) and Jacobs (1992). Mack rejects all psychiatric explanations of these phenomena, as well as similarities with reports of Satanic abuse (Wright, 1994), multiple personality and hypnotically induced memories of childhood sexual abuse, recently called "false memory syndrome" (see Gardner, 1993). His own observations on 76 "experiencers" confirmed Hopkins' findings, and Mack concluded that he was "dealing with a phenomenon that . . . was simply *not possible* within the framework of the Western scientific worldview" (p. 20).

Mack considered "the possibility that our consensus framework of reality is too limited and that . . . a new scientific paradigm might be necessary," and consulted the eminent historian of science, Thomas Kuhn and his wife. Kuhn also happened to be a childhood friend of Mack's, and is quoted as saying that "the Western scientific paradigm had come to assume the rigidity of a theology . . . held in place by . . . polarities of language such as real/unreal, exists/does not exist" (p. 20). Armed with this aphorism, Mack decided simply to collect raw data and later to look for possible meanings. Then Mack proceeds to use Kuhn's formulation as a kind of mantra throughout his book, decrying science, materialism, Cartesian dualism, and conventional logic. Thus he justifies an attitude of total credulity toward his subjects' narratives.

What Mack calls the "transformational and spiritual growth aspects of the abduction phenomenon" include information about previous lives, flights to and from their "cosmic source or 'Home,'" and double or multiple human/alien identities. There is even love for their alien kidnappers, when they are recognized as "intermediate entities between . . . human beings and the primal source of creation or God (in the sense of a cosmic consciousness)" (p. 48). Some abductees learn about their previous lives, undergo cycles of death and rebirth over centuries, and experience "other realities beyond space/time, realms that are described as beyond a 'veil'" (p. 32).

Mack acknowledges that his encounters with "abductees" affected him profoundly, and he describes his investigative method as "a combination of the old and the new." This means that he combines standard psychiatric interviews with hypnosis, "modified by the use of the breath for centering and deepening the process," a technique derived from his training in the "Grof holotropic breathwork method" (p. 22). Mack emphasizes how much he is "fully involved, experiencing

and reliving with [his subjects] the world that they are calling forth from their unconscious" (p. 39). He calls this process "co-creative" in bringing forth "in experiencers something I am helping them to discover within themselves" (p. 391). He says he avoids leading questions, but admits that "a co-creative intuitive process . . . may yield information that is in some sense the product of the intermingling or flowing together of the consciousness of the two (or more) people in the room. Something may be brought forth that was not there before in exactly the same form" (p. 391).

By his own acknowledgment, Mack's "co-creative" method, with its emphasis on a collaboration between equals, leaves him open to many kinds of *mutual* suggestibility, both conscious and unconscious. Freud, as we know, was constantly on guard against elements of suggestion in psychoanalysis, once he had given up hypnosis for free association. Freud was also highly critical of Ferenczi's "mutual analysis," an experimental method of Ferenczi's last years, which made conscious use of mutual suggestibility between patient and analyst (see Gay, 1988, pp. 576-587).

Despite their presumable sources in the unconscious, Mack's abduction scenarios prove to be banal and highly monotonous in their common themes. Many are variations on sexual union between humans and alien beings and the creation of hybrid offspring, usually by surgical probing in a bright operating room, removing and reimplanting human sperm and ova and growing fetuses in plastic tubes. The imagery is repetitious, with its small grey creatures with enormous eyes, white luminous spaces, and other details familiar to us all from science fiction books and movies for the past 50 years. Strangely enough, Mack interprets the similarity of these images among his many "experiencers," who had never known each other before, as evidence that these must have been real events. He admits his subjects are drawn to him because of his interest in abduction phenomena, and after their interviews with Mack they are followed in "support groups" where they discuss their experiences. In at least one case a subject was referred to these groups until Mack could schedule her hypnotic sessions.

A more commonplace view of these phenomena suggests that their similarities reflect the universality of the human unconscious, occurring, for example, in Greek myths of human intercourse with the gods, seventeenth-century beliefs in demoniacal possession, and the delusions of Dr. Schreber, Freud's famous case, about being impregnated by divine rays from the Godhead—in a word, the need to believe that deities are interested in our affairs. The superficial details

of these modern abduction narratives also reflect the poverty of our contemporary high-tech imagination, compared to the richness of ancient myths and visions. Most of us are able to recognize an "extra-terrestrial" whether or not we have ever seen a sci-fi film or book; the ubiquitous movie ads alone have penetrated our collective unconscious.

Interpreted in a more commonsense way, the book suggests that neither Mack nor his informants are crazy, in the clinical sense of experiencing psychotic delusions. But they would certainly be called "crazy" in the colloquial sense of holding irrational beliefs that are not shared by the "compact majority." In this sense they are "crazy" in the same way as believers in Creationism, faith healing, thought transference, or the end of the world on a specific date. Such believers lead perfectly sane ordinary lives, except for their isolated belief in the irrational. Even their critics, of course, may have a weakness for minor irrational ideas like astrology or Tarot cards. Without reviewing the mythology of celestial travel and millenarian sects, believing in alien abductions recalls the "epidemics" of superstition that have swept whole populations in historical times, as in the Salem witch trials. In past ages of faith, however, most sane, ordinary people believed in visions and visitations from divine beings, although these experiences tended to occur among a select few, usually priests, witch-doctors and ascetics.

In more recent times, the nearest analogy to Mack's abduction phenomena is the Spiritualist movement, which first emerged during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. As faith lost its hold on the imagination, a need arose to believe in supernatural phenomena outside the realms of conventional religions. Emmanuel Swedenborg was the originator of such a belief, envisaging a world peopled by spirits, with "signatures" in Nature to be read by the initiate. These visions came to him during a long and original scientific career in engineering and geology, before he composed his theological writings. Through his followers, Swedenborgianism became a religious sect, contending with many others in nineteenth-century America.

More secular forms of Spiritualism evolved around 1850, from a confluence of many happenings here and in Europe. The first dates from March 1848, in Hydesville, New York, when Miss Kate Fox, a nine-year-old girl, heard noises that were interpreted as messages from a murdered man. Investigators were led to the cellar of the Foxes' house, where his body was buried. Kate and her sister became famous mediums, and underwent many investigations by professional men, judges, doctors, and scientists, who were all skeptical at first but

eventually became converts to the spiritualist movement. Another source was the great English utopian, Robert Owen, the founder of New Harmony, who began as a skeptic and founded the *Rationalist Quarterly Review*. Yet he wrote in 1853 that a new moral revolution was coming from "communications . . . with invisible yet audible powers, purporting to be from departed spirits." He said he had conversed with the spirits of Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, and with deceased relatives. His son, Robert Dale Owen, while he was American ambassador at Naples, witnessed the levitation of a 96-pound table in 1855. A few years later, in France, he saw a table fully set for a *déjeuner a la fourchette*, rise four feet off the floor, untouched by the guests standing round it. He published a comprehensive book about Spiritualism, *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (Wallace, 1896, pp. 71-72, 152-165).

Besides this odd attraction of Spiritualism for radical socialists of that era, most of whom were free thinkers, Owen and his British followers introduced several eminent scientists to the movement. The most famous was Alfred Russel Wallace, the great naturalist and contemporary of Darwin, who had arrived independently at evolutionary theories of natural selection. Wallace was also a political radical and skeptic, but he became converted to Spiritualism as a young man. He published a sympathetic account of the movement (Wallace, 1896), and his scientific ideas were influenced by these beliefs. He suggested that man's moral qualities were so different from animal behavior that they could only be explained by "some influx from the unseen world of spirit."

Sir William Crookes was a prominent British chemist and a member of the Royal Society, who visited the U.S. to observe table-rapping, apparitions, and communication with the dead through mediums. He published his proofs of their objective reality in 1874. Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir James Jeans, and other eminent scientists joined the movement, and J. F. W. Myers founded the influential *Journal of Psychical Research* in 1882. By the turn of the century, Spiritualism had become a fashionable fad, and William James, Conan Doyle, and Marie and Pierre Curie experimented with *séances* and mediums. Freud conducted a *séance* in his own house (*Freud-Ferenczi Correspondence*, 1993, p. 523) with Rank, Sachs, Hitschmann, and their wives, but the demonstration of thought transference was not convincing. Freud remained skeptical, as he had been in 1910 when Ferenczi wrote him about experiments with a local medium. Ferenczi was more susceptible to beliefs about thought transference, both as a young man (Casonato, 1993) and in his last years, when he believed he was still in

communication via "thought-waves" with his American analysts during her return voyage home (Gay, 1988, pp. 576-587).

These examples could be multiplied, but they will suffice to make two main points. First, highly intelligent, even skeptical minds can become converts to irrational beliefs and remain otherwise quite sane, just as Freud tenaciously defended his adherence to Lamarckian theories of evolution against Ernest Jones's scientific reasoning. Second, the source of such beliefs, like sexual relations between men, women, and supernatural beings, lies in the universal longings of the human unconscious, unrelated to historical time and place. But the superficial format of these beliefs, the imagery of apparitions and space voyages, for example, are the product of contemporary scientific and literary conventions. A few brief examples will illustrate this: an early Spiritualist journal was called *The Spiritual Telegraph*, Volume 1, 1853, reflecting *avant-garde* technology of its day, while the iconography of current alien abductions is already influenced by computer science and cyberspace. Another typical book of the Spiritualist movement, *People from the Other World* (Olcott, 1875), was dedicated to both Wallace and Crookes. The book illustrated apparitions from then exotic parts of the world, rather than outer space. One apparition was one Safar Ali Bek, leader of Mme. Blavatsky's Kurdish bodyguard when her husband was vice governor of Erivan in 1851. This man "materialized" before the eyes of the Eddy family in Rutland, Vermont in full native costume, followed by a "juggler from Central Africa" who wore two sets of antelope horns (Fig. 1), instead of today's conventional ET antennae.

One last point about nineteenth-century Spiritualism compared with current abduction theory: the repetitious ghosts, table rapping, and levitation of heavy objects witnessed by our forebears also seem banal, but they have a certain innocence. Their chief concern was establishing communication with the dead, either with deceased relatives or with illustrious men of the past, just as Odysseus spoke to the ghost of Achilles. In contrast, extraterrestrial aliens, as interpreted by John Mack, are transmitting complicated, indirect messages from some divine cosmic intelligence, warning us against our materialist transgressions against Mother Nature, our crimes against ecology. And these warnings turn out to be precisely the recent concerns of John Mack.

I have not discussed the 13 case histories which Mack presents in lively and colorful detail, because they raise questions of faith rather than evidence, total belief or scientific skepticism. Instead, I shall conclude with a followup report on one of Hopkins' most famous



Figure 1. From Olcott (1875), p. 329. Facsimile reprint, Charles E. Tuttle, Rutland, VT, 1972.

informants, whom Mack calls one of the few abductions that was witnessed independently. This was Linda Cortile, the pseudonym of a New York woman who was levitated from her bed in her twelfth-floor apartment on a beam of blue light, and carried by extraterrestrials to a spaceship that plunged into the East River. The event was witnessed by two policemen on the street below the apartment of Mrs. Cortile, and she presented their letter as corroboration of the space kidnapping. This occurred on November 30, 1989, and was reported by Hopkins at the 1992 MUFON Conference in Albuquerque. The followup report by Shaeffer (1993) casts doubt on the abduction because Mrs. Cortile later told several conflicting stories about being kidnapped from her apartment by "security guards" and taken to Long Island, where one agent fell on his knees to worship her, the other attempted to drown her, and she was rescued by the first agent. The agents could not be located, and a prominent UFOlogist, George Hansen, claimed that Hopkins and several colleagues had objected to an investigation lest it be "politically damaging" to UFO research.

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