

DO ALIENS DREAM

The belief that people have been abducted by aliens has been mocked, ridiculed and even gently chided in the international press and UFO journals alike. Is there anything left worth saying about alien abductions and those who promote them? In an outspoken attack, PETER BROOKESMITH accuses the world's three leading abductionists of gross intellectual sloppiness

Like reading Charles Dickens' description of the death of Little Nell, accounts of so-called 'alien abductions' ought to reduce strong men to uncontrollable tears of laughter. But people get quite touchy if you snigger about abductions.

The very contradictions and absurdities in the abductees' claims ought to alert us to the likelihood that these stories, and the hardly less bizarre justifications that their supporters offer up, are taken so seriously because they signify something much more profound than their bald narrative surfaces offer. But if you take abduction stories at face value - as do Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs and John Mack (hereafter referred to as HJM) - they are merely ridiculous; and all the more so as the evidence that these three abductionists present for the objective reality of the phenomenon is flawed to the roots.

The latest effusions by Hopkins' two major disciples - David Jacobs' *Alien Encounters: First-hand Accounts of UFO Abductions* (Virgin 1994) [1] and John Mack's *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (Simon & Schuster 1994) - demonstrate how they have deluded themselves, and that their delusions lead them to distort, misrepresent, fail to investigate or simply ignore the truth. [2]

DOUBLE SCREEN

One of the aliens' many amazing talents, HJM claim, is the power to cover their tracks by altering the memories of their victims. Allegedly, the aliens implant phoney memories of innocuous events into abductees' minds, to shield 'real' memories of abductions.

however, surprisingly fragile. [3] The American abductee Virginia Horton, for instance, consciously recalled meeting a deer in a wood; hypnotic probing by Budd Hopkins 'revealed' the deer image as a screen memory of an alien, which in turn led to the unravelling of an abduction story. If screen memories exist at all, there is no need to call in the aliens (assuming *they* exist) as their agents. The human mind is all you need.

Why bother, then? Because it makes the aliens seem more powerful, more Otherworldly and more frightening. American sociologist John Whitmore has identified the strategy: "In standard captivity narratives victims are often rescued by a morally perfect hero who destroys the victim's tormentors; in abduction tales the hero is the researcher-hypnotist, who alone knows the chilling agenda behind the victim's capture." [4] The dark side of this knightly derring-do is a certain prurience, and a persistent casting of women in humiliating roles that they come to believe are genuine and continuing.

David Jacobs in particular goes to some lengths to dig up unpleasantness, even out of what might normally be considered quite enjoyable experiences. On page 56 of *Alien Encounters...* we learn that 'Tom and Nancy' were making love when she felt "an electric

jolt" go through her hips. He felt nothing, then looked at the clock and "was surprised to find that he had been engaged in lovemaking for about forty-five minutes". Physical passion must be the world's commonest inducer of missing-time episodes, but this innocuous event becomes - under hypnosis - a screen for the abduction of Nancy (poor Tom is rolled off her by the aliens and left lying "switched off", but still with a useless nine-incher, while the grays whisk his wife away).

Jacobs misses what may be the real key to this extraordinary elaboration when Nancy says: "I kept telling them [the aliens] to leave me alone, to stop using me because I told Tom I want another baby and I can't get pregnant if they keep bugging me, if they're messing my cycle up." Jacobs gives no sign that he's done the obvious double-checking; finding out if Nancy was already having problems with her "cycle". Instead, we get *post hoc, propter hoc* rationalisations for a stupendously improbable cause.

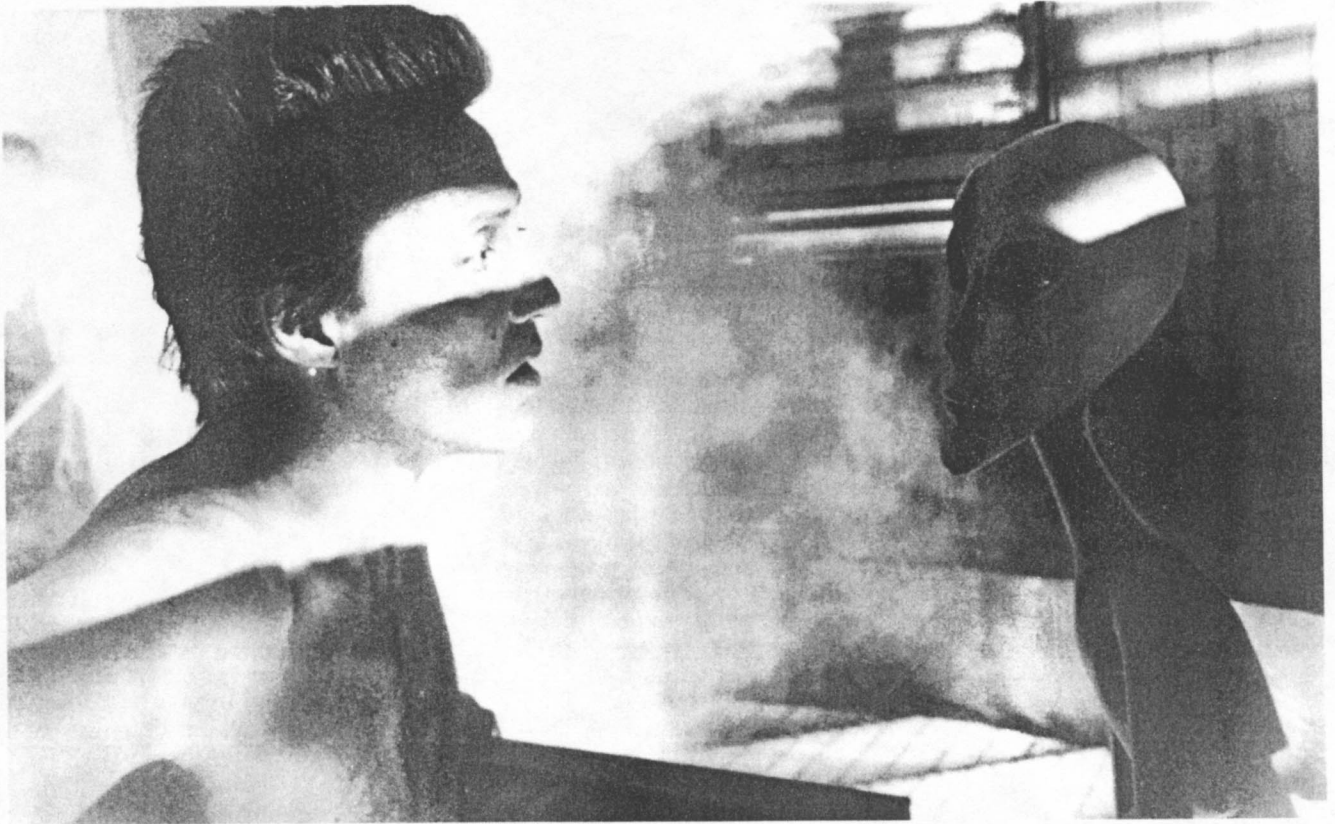
The literalists have not only traduced but contradict Freud's concept of 'screen memories' (see panel, page 26). As La Planche and Pontalis [5] define it, a screen memory "leads back to indelible childhood experiences and to *unconscious phantasies*." (My emphasis.)

This is interesting when placed beside what Dr Bob Hinshelwood, clinical director of the Riverside Mental Health Service in Richmond, Surrey, told me: "In principle... a Freudian would tend to regard the [abduction] phenomenon as a visitation from the patient's inner world, his unknown inner world, his uncon-



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OF JACOBS' SHEEP?



RONALD CAWAT ARCHIVE

The 1989 screen adaptation of Whitley Strieber's autobiographical *Communion* helped reinforce popular notions of the abduction scenario.

a visitation from outer space would seem likely to be a disguised (dream-like) externalisation of the 'return of the repressed.' In other words, if Freud was right, an abduction memory may itself be a species of screening event.

This is borne out too by the account of screen memory given by George Ganaway, professor of psychiatry at Emory University, Atlanta. "Therapists," he is reported as saying, "...must always try to avoid implanting memories... either through suggestion or expectation, because once a suggestion is seeded it can sprout into an elaborate 'screen memory' that serves to block out the patient's ambiguously painful but relatively unremarkable childhood experiences."

Ganaway cited the example of 'Sarah' who 'remembered' seeing 12 children bound, raped and brutally murdered in a satanic ritual. It turned out eventually that this was a mask for her childhood terror when her grandmother insisted on reading grisly details from detective magazines to her. "Sarah invented the 'screen memory' of... mass murder in an attempt to preserve her grandmother's image as a

loving, protective figure," Ganaway concluded. And he warned that "memories can be distorted, even created, in susceptible minds by the tone of voice, phrasing of a question, subtle non-verbal signals, and expressions of boredom, impatience, or fascination. In short... in some cases... therapists were creating the very problems they hoped to cure." [6]

The implications here for the matter of leading questions in regressive hypnosis are painfully obvious.

The highly partial requisitioning of the screen memory concept, and the ignorance of the psychoanalytic context in which it occurs, demonstrate the HJM school's sloppy research. It is not made better by HJM's apparent ignorance of psychologists' doubts about the existence or even possibility of actual repressed memories. For example, Drs Harrison Pope and James Hudson, Harvard psychiatrists like Mack, have made a massive search of the literature for evidence of genuinely repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse - and found *none*. [7] But then, two of the abductionist trinity are not clinically trained.

Not that the abductionists' deceptions are necessarily either conscious or deliberate. They are more likely a product of their fixed beliefs, which cause them constantly to bamboozle themselves. For example, Jacobs describes a man who under hypnosis at first recalled a raven-headed, "beautiful young woman... coming over to him for... a sexual liaison". His response is revealing: "Through meticulous questioning about the minute details of her actions and her appearance ('If her head is on your upper chest, can you see the top of her head?'), the false memories fell away and the abductee independently realised that it was her black eyes that he had been describing and not her hair. In fact, she had no hair at all." (p324)

This is presumably an example, and the result, of asking 'proper' questions, something which earlier abduction investigators, Jacobs says, did not know how to do: "Even when competent hypnotists were called in on cases, they were not well-versed enough in abduction research to ask the proper questions. They could not tell if the subject was 'filling in' with false infor-

mation... And because investigators did not know exactly what happened during an abduction, they could not identify false memories purposely placed in the victims' minds." (p45)

Where proper questions end and leading ones begin, Dr Jacobs does not say – any more than he explains how he came to think that no one should begin any investigation unless they know what they are going to find. The delusion that there is a kind of immutable, adamant plot waiting to be uncovered by the hero's 'proper questions' leads him to follow his nose up his own garden path.

It is no use, one is reminded, telling a fundamentalist Christian that the New Testament insists Jesus had 12 disciples, and then gives the names of 14. And it is probably no use telling HJM that memories are, according to the best current knowledge, emphatically not graven indelibly on the brain, but are malleable and *reconstructed*, sometimes out of third-party accounts. [8]

JUST SO, STORIES

Delving a little deeper into psychoanalysis might have helped HJM come to a more reasonable conclusion about abductions – and it is amazing that Dr Mack, a professor of psychiatry, seems to have done neither.

Dr Sue Davison, Chair of the Psychotherapy Unit at the world-renowned Maudsley Hospital in London, commented to me: "I have certainly not come across the phenomenon [of] abductions by aliens except as a delusional belief of someone suffering from schizophrenia."

However, having a fantastic delusion doesn't make you a schizophrenic, any more than getting twitchy, when you think somebody's out to get you, makes you a paranoid. As the American writer on UFOs Martin Kottmeyer has pointed out, the kind of fantasy typified by an abduction narrative may be symptomatic of schizophrenia but not necessarily indicative of psychosis. Such fantasies, he says, are "defensive strategies... [They are] in this sense equally a sign of normality. It is a defence potentially available for most people and can be called upon for less challenging mental dilemmas than schizophrenic episodes... fiction writers call them up frequently for dramaturgical purposes." [9]

Given the apparent lack of psy-



The first abductees: Betty and Barney Hill became famous after going public with their memories of being abducted by aliens in the wilds of New Hampshire in 1961.

chosis in abduction victims reported in UFO literature, and investigators' deformation of the screen memory concept, Dr Davison's experience indicates that ufological (as opposed to clinical) abduction reports may not be spontaneous, and that they are probably not factual. Indeed they are probably picked up from popular culture, whose images are easily absorbed even by people with no special interest in, say, science fiction; just as I have a vague idea of who Take That and Nirvana are (or were), without knowingly having heard any of their recordings.

These treacherous suggestions have been borne out by research. Kottmeyer, Nigel Watson and

The delusion that there is a kind of immutable, adamant plot waiting to be uncovered...leads Jacobs to follow his nose up his own garden path

Bertrand Méheust have unearthed many images and episodes from the silver screen, comic books and TV that have found their way, through memory (possibly cryptomnesia) directly into abductees' narratives, and Kottmeyer has also shown how abductees borrow motifs and images from one another. Some of these details, which include mummy-like entities and a tendency for the aliens to remove and then replace (but not improve) their captives' brains, are so outlandish even by the mad standards of abduction lore that looting seems the only reasonable explanation for the claimants being apprehended with such fantasies in their possession. [10]

British UFO writer Peter Rogerson has turned up evidence that ought to have embarrassed the abduction liter-

alists no end. His sedulous bibliographical research turned up the intriguing fact that the first full-blown account of an abduction (as we know them today) appeared in a work of fiction – *The Terror Above Us* by Malcolm Kent, published by Tower Books in 1967 – just a year after the Betty and Barney Hill story was made public. This *novel* was the first work to describe the 'Oz factor', 'doorway amnesia', and the alien in disguise (ie. the screen memory) and bring them together with the beloved 'medical examination'.

Of course, the prior existence of raw materials in the public domain, or even in a specific abductee's mind, doesn't account for the seeming consistency of details in abduction accounts retrieved by HJM. But these stories were far more varied in almost all respects before HJM began publishing their findings; all three make no secret of the fact that they know one another, indeed inspired one another, discuss cases together and generally collaborate – if not necessarily on a conscious level.

One of the most telling passages in *Dark White*, Jim Schnabel's analysis of the abduction industry, runs: "In the spring of 1993, Budd Hopkins hypnotized Calvin Parker, Charles Hickson's companion during the [1973] Pascagoula incident. Under hypnosis... Parker remembered that as he had entered the spacecraft... he had been curled up in the... tuck [ie. foetal] position... Hopkins told Jacobs about it, and suddenly Jacobs began to find that a lot of his abductees were being taken into spacecraft while in the tuck position." [11]

Consider such major TV audience-pullers as *The UFO Incident* (1975) portraying the Hills' 1961 abduction, the space-napping of Fallon in *The Colbys* (1987) and the mini-series *The Intruders* (1992), based on Budd Hopkins' book of that title, let alone the books and films of Whitley Strieber's *Communion* and of Travis Walton's 1975 experience in *Fire In The Sky* (1993). Thanks to these there can hardly be a citizen left in the West who does not now have some idea of what is supposed to happen next if, one dark and lonely night, they see a little grey chap hovering by their bedside or flagging down their pick-up on a lonely blacktop in the boonies.

This brings us back to the question of what really happens when abductee

candidates present themselves to the likes of HJM and put themselves on the hypnotists' casting couch. Jacobs calls hypnosis "an indispensable [sic] tool in unlocking memories of an abduction." All are extraordinarily convinced by the emotional reactions of subjects as they recount horrific events suffered at the hands of the 'aliens'. To the naive HJM, this indicates the genuineness of the memories being relived – "this intensity of recovered emotion... lends inescapable authenticity to the phenomenon," writes Mack (page 402). Sorry, but that is a crock.

There was, perhaps still is, in Cardiff a lady named Janet Jones, better known to the world as Jane Evans. In the late 1970s she was regressed by hypnotist Arnold Bloxham and produced detailed accounts of past lives – one as a member of a wealthy 17th-century French household, one as a Roman living in England, and one as a Jewess living in York and witnessing the massacre of the city's Jewish population in 1190 – an event about which there is no doubt.



In 1986, police took Moors Murderer Myra Hindley to Saddleworth Moor. They failed to locate the graves of their victims. Now Hindley is to be hypnotised to obtain clues to aid a new search.

While describing her experience of this event under hypnosis, she became progressively "very agitated", "very distressed", "full of stress", "panicky", hysterical and finally, as her children were murdered in front of her, "almost incoherent with terror". [12] As well she might. But two researchers, Melvin Harris and Ian Wilson, working independently, established that details Jane Evans gave of Jewish life in York at the time were so wildly wide of the historical mark that the rest of her story had to be fabrication. Melvin Harris also tracked down two novels that almost certainly served as the inspiration for her 'former lives' in 17th-century France and Roman Britain. [13] Jane

Evans was dramatising. It really was as simple as that.

Consider this, also. There is no doubt that Myra Hindley committed some of the most unimaginably cruel murders to come to light in Britain this century. There is also no doubt that she cannot recall where she and her lover Ian Brady buried some of their victims. I was at my desk at 3am on 25 January this year, when I heard this news item on the radio: "The Home Office has agreed that the Moors murderer [Myra Hindley] can be put in a trance to help her remember where one of her victims is buried. Dr David Ryde from the Association of Medical Hypnosis [14] admits it doesn't have a high success rate: 'I've been called in a number of times on murder cases and rape cases by the police, but even though one of the subjects was deep-tranced and we had quite an amount of recall from an event of about 10 years ago, it really – it added up to nothing in the end.'"

Here is an expert in hypnosis admitting that *the technique is no use* in investigating events that we know really happened. That HJM believe

ENOUGH ROPER TO HANG THEMSELVES

Ever since the findings of the famous 1991 Roper Organization poll on Unusual Personal Experiences became known, Hopkins and his associates have touted them as an indication of the vast scale of alien abductions in the USA. In particular, they have done so through a pamphlet titled *Unusual Personal Experiences*, published by Bigelow in 1992, with an introduction by John Mack. The interpretation, by Hopkins, Jacobs and Ron Westrum (HJ&W), of the survey's results is 100% hogwash.

The presumption behind their reading of the figures was that a person had possibly been abducted if he or she answered Yes to five key questions and No to a 'lie detector' question. Out of 5,947 respondents, Roper found precisely 18 people who fulfilled this criterion. This represents 0.3% of the sample. It does not represent 0.3% of the US population or (using HJ&W's figures) 555,000 people. This is because the margin of error in the poll is $\pm 1.4\%$. Any number below that might, statistically, just as well be zero. To find out

if this number is representative, you would need to question at least five times as many people as Roper did, and probably many more to overcome a law of diminishing returns.

All the Roper research tells us is that in this particular sample there were 18 people who had had five experiences that, according to HJ&W, indicate they have been abducted. It is even possible, statistically, that they are the only 18 such people in the USA.

It shouldn't, then, be hard to speculate why HJ&W decided that if a person gave positive answers to only four of the five questions it would show, in their words, "there is a strong possibility [that] that individual is a UFO abductee."

Not surprisingly, this relaxation of standards gave a rather more startling result: HJ&W concluded that 119 people in the sample, representing 2% of the population or 3.7 million people in the continental USA, were abductee candidates. Taking the margin of error into account (which they don't), this could actually mean that as 'few'

as 1.11 million or as many as 6.29 million adult Americans may have been abducted.

Collapse of stout party? Not off this bar stool.

The trouble is that no known system of logic will support any such conclusion at all. In the words of veteran market researcher James R. Adams: "What they are saying is, if abduction, then all these other symptoms. All these other symptoms (or some of them, even), therefore abduction. This does not follow; the logic has what is known as an 'undistributed middle'. If it is raining, the pavements are wet. But, the fact that the pavements are wet does not mean that it is raining."

In other words, HJ&W are offering a classic false syllogism of the kind that amuses schoolboys, as 'fact': 'A dog has four legs; a table has four legs; therefore tables enjoy marrowbones, chase cats and bark.'

Whatever else the Roper results may tell us, they reveal *absolutely nothing* about the incidence or reality of abductions by aliens in the United States.

that hypnosis is so useful for investigating a prodigious improbability like abductions by aliens makes sense only if hypnosis is seen as a ritual within a belief system.

To be under hypnosis is to be in a condition of extreme suggestibility. Despite Jacobs' anguished denials, the many verbatim reports of hypnotic sessions in his book reveal countless questions indicating what he hopes to hear. But you don't actually need leading questions to generate an abduction account, a past life or a tall story of any kind from a hypnotised subject.

In the Open Media documentary, *Hypnosis: The Big Sleep*, shown on Channel 4 this year, a woman "regressed" into the past reported herself to be living as a desert nomad in the 5th century – despite the fact that she was asked scrupulously un-suggestive questions. All you need for the desired result is the right setting – the subject's knowledge of what is expected. *Being hypnotized is itself an experience of being led.*

The people who arrive at HJM's doorsteps must, in the nature of things, already be set up to expect, even hope for, the revelation that they have been 'abducted'. Like the alleged abduction victim Linda Cortile, aka Napolitano, they present themselves because they have read or heard about the investigators' work and think they may have had an experience "consistent with the possibility" of having been abducted. They can hardly be surprised when they pour forth confirmatory 'evidence' under hypnosis.



The alien leader in Invaders from Mars, a 1953 film that dramatised anxieties about alien intrusion into everyday life.

Naturally, HJM deny this and harp on the horror and dismay with which their subjects greet the news that they are victims of aliens. "I thought this only happened to white people," one Afro-American lady remarked ruefully to John Mack when being assured that what she had remembered was literally true. Another subject implied he would rather have been told he was mad than have to accept the idea that his story (or as they like to call it, "refreshed" memory) was a factual record of events. Note here that the insistence on the actuality of the accounts is clearly coming from the investigators – not from the 'victims', who seem instinctively to recognise the inherent absurdity of what they have said. But insistence, more hypnosis, and reinforcement through contact

with other abductees will soon turn created memories into apparently real ones – and scepticism into distressed belief.

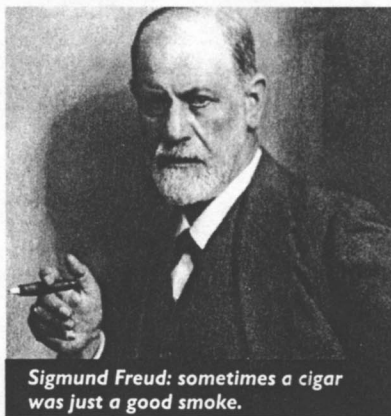
In this revealingly unselfconscious passage, Mack describes his investigatory technique (p391): "...we may need a different kind of consciousness. This means that the process of gaining information about abductions is, to a large degree, 'co-creative'...[A] process such as this may yield information 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... the information gained in the sessions is not simply a remembered 'item', lifted out of the experiencer's consciousness... It may represent a developed or evolved perception, enriched by the connection that the experiencer and the investigator have made." Lifting off the cosy eiderdown of New Age verbiage, this simply means that Mack and his 'clients' egg each other on in their fantasies.

The desire to please and conform is part of this setting. In the 1960s, the experiments of sociologist Stanley Milgram [15] showed that, with the right encouragement, about seven out of 10 perfectly ordinary people were prepared to give lethal electric shocks to others rather than disobey instructions. Milgram concluded that to deviate from what was felt to be the 'norm' of a social circumstance involves breaking such a powerful taboo that most people would rather conform to expectation – regardless of the consequences. The lesson for 'regressive' hypnotists ought to be plain enough.

FREUD'S SMOKESCREEN

The notion of screen memories was first conceived by the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. In his opinion, they were usually very vivid memories but of something strangely trivial, which covered up genuine but repressed memories of either distasteful or unbearable events. But, he noted, the screen memory is a transformation of the original event and always left symbolic clues to the 'repressed material' it camouflaged.

The abductionists have corrupted the concept somewhat. While transferring the power of repression and substitution to the all-powerful aliens, they leave aside (forget? repress?) the awkward symbolic connection between the two kinds of memory that Freud was able to use in order to winnow real



Sigmund Freud: sometimes a cigar was just a good smoke.

from concocted events. HJM also ignore – if they ever knew about – an important point Freud makes in his original (1899) paper: "...these falsified memories... must have originated at a period of life when it has become possible for conflicts... and impulses toward repression to have made a place for themselves in mental life – far later, therefore, than the period to which their content belongs." [24]

But they will probably feel no embarrassment at hearing what Dr Sue Davison, of the Maudsley Hospital in London, said to me about screen memory: "This is an early concept of Freud's and one that does not play a large part in our thinking nowadays."

FALLACIES & DECEPTIONS

Neither Mack nor Jacobs seems capable of handling evidence of any kind. For example, on page 19 of *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, Mack attempts to dismiss the astonishing parallels noted by American journalist Lawrence Wright between Satanic abuse narratives and abduction stories but fails to focus on the point that Wright actually makes, which is that these tales are produced in exactly the same way, have common motifs and serve similar psychological purposes.

The parallel phenomena described by Wright – including victimisation, mind control, ‘little people’, witches coming in through windows who later transmute into adult male abusers, etc [16] – were produced by one alleged ‘survivor’ while, in effect, being bullied in a trance-like state. It is clear that had this subject been questioned in the presumption that an abduction sequence had occurred, he could have produced the appropriate ‘memories’ with only a slight shift of imagery. In due course he retracted his ‘evidence’ and refused to testify against his father and others accused with him.

Wright also quotes Professor Michael Nash, who treated a *soi-disant* abductee but “took the position that the abduction story was relevant therapeutic material but not literally true.” Nash told the August 1992 meeting of the American Psychological Association in Washington DC that under therapy the patient’s anxiety symptoms abated but, to the therapist’s chagrin, “he walked out of my office as utterly convinced that he had been abducted as when he walked in.” Nash noted: “I could discern no difference between this patient’s clinical presentation around the trauma and that of my sexually abused patients... in terms of clinical utility, it may not really matter whether the event actually happened or not... In the end, we (as clinicians) cannot tell the difference between believed-in fantasy about the past and viable memory of the past. *Indeed there may be no structural difference between the two.*” [17]

Mack himself appears unable to distinguish between “believed-in fantasy about the past and viable memory”. At any rate, he finds himself accepting the most preposterous material as ‘evidence’. The epic produced



Swept off her feet: this 1781 fictional abduction from France presages motifs found in modern-day accounts.

by his subject ‘Paul’ (pp217-240) could head any list of fantasy-run-riot.

He begins by taking Paul’s word for everything, including poltergeist activity that supposedly distressed his previous therapist (but who at least failed to extract from him desired memories of sexual abuse in childhood), and a detailed, “hypnotically refreshed” abduction memory from the age of two or three – an age beyond the usually recognised borderline of childhood amnesia. Regressed to an abduction in 1972, when he was six years old, Paul estimates he has

Mack finds himself accepting the most preposterous material as ‘evidence’

been on the ‘spacecraft’ about 70 times (although he is given a standard tour of the thing as if he’d never clapped foot aboard before).

It is explained to him that he is in fact an alien spirit in a human body. Few will be surprised to hear that his home planet is very peaceful and aliens are “trying to help you, but we came and we were killed by many of you... You people are too violent... too hostile.” There are many dual-identity aliens on Earth. The aliens – the ‘TA people’ – came here thousands of years ago, and communicated with

dinosaurs who had great intelligence and powers of precognition. “They were able to have an understanding, a compassion towards the future of *your* [ie. current human] existence.”

In further regressions, Paul is “shown the world” by a hooded figure with a pointer and “all these people are dying. He’s telling me I’m going to fix it.” At the age of 12, he has a battle in a cellar with what “some people call Satan”. At the age of nine he is abducted and a piece of bone is removed from his leg. (Mack gives no sign that he has checked this easily checked detail.) The aliens tell him they “want me to form a group that can meet with them” to enter into “an ‘exchange’ of love”. The aliens “may have shown me where the creational force is.” He claims to have “notebooks full” of information on the “unbelievable” technology of the aliens. Paul meets ‘Julie’ in Mack’s abductee support group, and she says she has met Paul many times on the alien spacecraft.

That Mack positively collaborated in producing this clichéd messianic contactee drivel is especially apparent when Paul reports that in his alien identity (but also aged nine as a human) he is present at a UFO crash in a desert; there are dead aliens that “men in uniforms” have shot. The human military take away the crashed ship.

Mack immediately identifies this tale with the so-called Roswell incident of 1947, but has a temporary difficulty with the fact that Paul was not born until 1966. He speculates aloud about “consciousness as a kind of ‘continuous fabric’ that allows you to go ‘anywhere under certain conditions’.” Paul agrees.

Mack concludes that Paul really was at Roswell in 1947. He produces another prize crock by trying to explain consciousness as “a kind of hologram of universal sourcefulness [sic] which can create matter and form itself” (etc, etc). All he really does, on even the ufological true-believer’s level, is show how little he knows about crashed-saucer legends. But then he seems to know diddley-squat about UFOs at all. For example, he tells us (p12) that “on August 24, 1981, one million Chinese saw a spiral-shaped UFO simultaneously... but there is no record of any follow-up questioning of individual witnesses.” That ‘UFO’ was in fact a *meteor shower*, already predict-

ed by local astronomers, there were numerous eyewitness accounts (several described classic flying saucers), and it all happened a month earlier than Mack says. [18]

Mack goes several dimensions beyond Hopkins or Jacobs in abandoning any application of Occam's razor to the material he so willingly laps up – but then he constantly reminds the reader of his view that Western logic and science are inadequate and useless for dealing with it. At any rate, he is probably unique among abductionists in managing to roll alien encounters, alien/human reincarnation (three of his 13 subjects besides Paul produced accounts of past lives involving alien contact) and alien/human hybrids into one alleged phenomenon. He is surely the best living indicator that the investigator, not the subject, determines the content of abduction narratives.

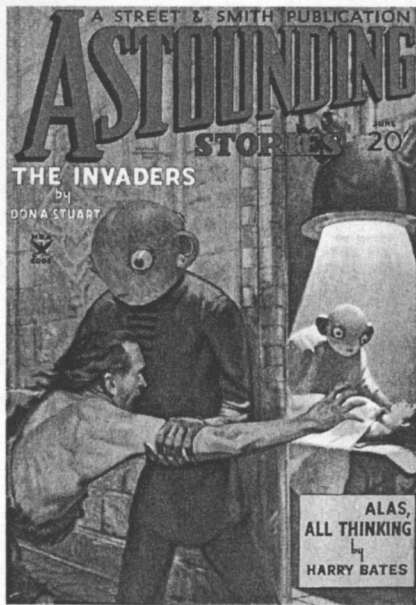
Yet Mack's book is paradoxically more useful than Jacobs'. Jacobs' thematic treatment leaves one itching to know more about his informants, and what he did (or didn't) ask or do to verify their claims. Mack's deals with his subjects case-by-case, and is so transparent and detailed in his presentations that one gets a decent picture of the characters of the claimants – without which no one, sceptic, curmudgeon or true believer, can assess any abduction story.

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Nonetheless, the abduction syndrome is based on *something*. The question is, what?

It's possible to see the meaning of UFO myths as centred on the inner life – not the world of the mind, but the realm of the soul, and the relations between everyday kitchen-sink reality and the seemingly universal human need to discern a meaning in life and to acquire a language in which to express, celebrate and refine the life of the spirit.

I tend to think of aliens as godlings, reconciling religious and scientific responses to both timeless and immediate, contemporary, human dilemmas. But Peter Rogerson and, in a very different way, Paul Devereux (editor of *The Ley Hunter*), suggest that the aliens are reflections of *ourselves* – alien-ated, dis-eased with ourselves and one another, and with the dis-spirited, impersonal and uncontrollable elected dictatorship of a society that we – or



Forced physical examination of abductees, like many other elements of the modern abduction story, may have its roots in popular culture, such as this piece of pulp science-fiction from June 1935.

worse, persons unknown, but uncomfortably like us – have created and, more important, sustain. Devereux also implies that certain conditions, not necessarily associated with 'earth-lights', may precipitate a 'dump' of

We don't need real live aliens to explain accounts of abductions – but we may need the stories of aliens in ways that we are only beginning to understand

natural chemicals within the brain and create specific abduction imagery. [19]

Thus Rogerson has written: "It seems to me totally obvious that the ufonauts do not represent aliens, but are perceived as non-human (or at least non-humane) aspects of ourselves and our society. The 'greys' are surely personifications of 'little grey men' – that stock term of abuse for petty, colourless, hidebound bureaucrats – an apt image of 'only-doing-my-job' cosmic social workers. I would go further, and say that there is being made here an identification between the impersonal forces of mass society and the impersonal forces of wild nature." [20]

And Devereux has said: "There is some intriguing work going on with DMT. This is the most hallucinogenic substance known to us. It is produced naturally within the human brain and occurs in psychedelic plants that have been used from time immemorial by shamanic peoples... What is relevant to ufology is that for many years people who have used this substance have reported rather similar experiences...

One of these common transpersonal experiences is that alien intelligences are encountered.

"Alan Worsley has been experimenting with trying to enter the lucid dream state directly from the waking state, without any intervening sleep. He has reported that, deep into the extreme relaxation and concentration required for him to do this, he is interrupted by the tangible experience of being 'examined in the dark by robots' or being 'operated on by small beings'. [21]

"...Nowadays we have no cultural context for experiences of the Other-worlds – which, remember, can appear totally real, with all senses involved. Rather than spirits and ancestors [encountered during altered states of consciousness in shamanic societies], our modern altered states of consciousness are peopled by aliens and machines. While shamanic initiates experience death and rebirth, we experience invasive examinations at the hands of impersonal beings. The machine is within the modern soul. And the ET robot or alien could be the very image of our estrangement." [22]

It could easily be argued that "estrangement from our own inner selves and from nature itself" and "an identification between the impersonal forces of mass society and the impersonal

forces of wild nature" are aspects of the same thing; and they may well combine and lead to a violent recoil of the unappeased religious impulse. That is what makes us all attempt to create meaning and sanity – salvation and redemption – out of the only material we have to hand and build myths, mortared by faith, to answer our need.

THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Of the literalist trinity, John Mack is the most honest about this aspect of the phenomenon – although as a potential believer, not an analyst. And, I suspect, it arises from his known concerns about nuclear arms and 'the environment' – which, by a mysterious coincidence, his subjects' aliens seem to share and echo: "Is it possible that... an effort is being made to place the planet under a kind of receivership? This would... arrest the destruction of life and make possible the evolution of consciousness or whatever the *anima mundi* has in store... I would merely suggest that if we could allow ourselves to reintroduce the possibility of

a higher intelligence into the universe, and experience the numinous mystery of creation, this scenario is consistent with the facts of the abduction phenomenon." [23]

Mack's 'facts' may not be the facts of the mundane world. But it is certainly not hard to detect apocalyptic elements in the imagery of abductees' 'visions' and not difficult either to discern in them parallels with many aspects of Western, that is Semitic, religious traditions. And which, in the end, do you really think is more likely – that 'scientifically advanced' aliens are using the crudest possible methods in a probably impossible programme of

interbreeding with humanity, and indulging in the occasional spot of amateur reincarnation at the same time, or that the abduction scenario is just that – a shared drama that reveals us to ourselves?

We don't need real live aliens to explain accounts of abductions; but we may need the stories of aliens in ways, and at levels, that we are only just beginning to understand.

Hopkins, Jacobs and Mack are playing a dangerous game with their clients' lives, and contribute nothing of intellectual value to any debate about the real meaning of abductions. But they have at least illuminated the land-

scape through which we must travel if we are to understand the abduction narrative – and they have shown how tenaciously attractive is this most revealing, and revelatory, myth of our times. FT

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MACK ATTACK

John Mack's enthusiasm for abduction stories has brought opprobrium from academics

For the last year, John Mack, a distinguished 65-year-old Harvard psychiatrist, has been under a special investigation by a group of his peers, prompted by their embarrassment at his public endorsement of the phenomenon of alien abduction.

He was a founder of the psychiatry department at Cambridge Hospital, a teaching hospital run by Harvard. In 1977, he won a Pulitzer Prize for a biography of T.E. Lawrence and is currently director of the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research at the Harvard-affiliated Center for Psychology and Social Research.

Shortly after the publication of his 1994 book *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, Mack was invited onto popular TV talkshows and series (like *Unsolved Mysteries*) where he declared that aliens have "invaded our physical reality and [are] affecting the lives of thousands, if not millions, of people." The 13 case studies in his book include: Ed, whose sperm was collected by a female alien operating a masturbation device; Jerry, who claims to have given birth to a human-alien hybrid; and Peter, who has an 'alien wife' in a 'parallel universe'.

Almost immediately, the board of the Harvard Medical School ordered an inquiry into his conduct. The decision split the academic community. Daniel Tosteson, dean of the school, said there was concern about whether Mack's research conformed to Harvard's standards of investigation and whether his treatment of his 120 patients was appropriate. Some academics denounced the inquiry as an assault on the freedom traditionally granted senior academics with tenure.

It seems that Mack did not have the special permission required to conduct research on human subjects. Another criticism was that Mack had not published his work in a refereed journal before writing his book and, given the bizarre nature of the narratives of his patients, that he had not had them examined by a neutral psychiatrist for comparison. Mack replied to the committee that he had indeed tried to publish in an



academic journal but his paper was rejected, and that a number of colleagues had been invited to attend his sessions with patients. Some of these psychiatrists later wrote letters of support to the committee.

The inquisition also divided Mack's friends. David Hufford of the Penn State College of Medicine and author of the highly praised study of night paralysis *The Terror That Comes In The Night*, said: "I think John has given up prematurely on the classic methodology of science, but he's on to something much more complex than the people who dismiss him allow." More outspoken was Paul

McHugh, director of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Medical School: "I have known John since the 1950s. He's a brilliant fellow who occasionally loses it and this time he's lost it big time."

After more than 30 closed meetings, some attended by Mack, the committee chairman Dr Arnold Relman, former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine* and emeritus professor of the medical school, finally submitted to Tosteson a report that defended Mack's right to pursue any line of inquiry that interested him, but deplored his methods. Dr Relman distanced his committee from the issue of the reality of alien abductors, saying: "It was not our function to determine whether Dr Mack's astonishing claims are true."

As Mack avoided reporters, his lawyer Roderick MacLeish told Associated Press that Mack does not necessarily believe in the existence of 'space aliens' but was exploring "unknown traumatic experiences which explain his patient's memories... He was not vouching for their testimony, just that they did not appear to be mentally ill."

On 3 August, the school finally delivered its verdict. Although he remains a fully tenured professor, Mack was publicly censured by Tosteson for allowing his enthusiasm to overshadow the high standards expected by the faculty.

Sources: [AP] 5 May, 4 Aug; New York Times, 5 May 1995.