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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: MJ-12 and Area 51

From: Greg Sandow <GSANDOW@prodigy.net>
Date: Mon, 30 Dec 1996 00:50:52 -0500
Fwd Date: Mon, 30 Dec 1996 10:43:38 -0500
Subject: Re: MJ-12 and Area 51

Still catching up....and considering the question of alleged alien writing.

Peter Brookesmith and John Powell made helpful comments about testing claims that people have seen the same writing. Here's the gist of some of it, with quotes mixed and matched from both gentlemen:

> Lacking the priceless MSS, John Powell suggests comparing 'original'
> and 'fresh' samples of alleged alien writing from each claimant (a
> vertical test) and then comparing these writings claimant v. claimant
> (an horizontal test).

> > We compare the two samples (the fresh one from the claimant and the
> > original one from the claimant) and statistically on a character by
> > character basis we'd expect equal or better than 80% similarity to
> > advance that example further in our dataset.

> So far so good, but you haven't any controls in this experiment. I'd
> suggest that an even more workable dataset would have a third axis,
> using the same abduction claimants and a control group of
> non-claimants (selection criteria to be agreed). AFTER the claimants
> have produced their "fresh" allegedly-alien scripts, you ask the
> claimants and the control group to write down their
> *impressions* of a couple of lines of writing in (a) the Greek
> alphabet (b) Arabic script (c) Hebrew alphabet (d) Chinese pictograms.
> It will be obvious to anyone who knows these scripts whether or not
> the writer is giving an impression or really knows them.

[snip]

What they write doesn't
> have to make sense - we just want to know how accurately they recall
> details of unknown scripts that they have seen only casually.
> When they have completed their impressions, you show them a couple of
> lines of the real thing, for a couple of minutes or so, then ask them
> to reproduce them from memory. That gives you a measure of how
> accurate (compared to the generality, too) the claimants' memories for
> such things may be.

This is all a big plus. Anything that makes abduction research more objective has to be welcome.

A couple of thoughts on it:

We're treading on a very tricky question here -- the nature and functioning of memory. This isn't something the scientific world exactly agrees on. Some memory researchers might suggest that the control-group procedure ends up comparing apples and oranges. That is, innocent

controls are shown writing that doesn't use the roman alphabet. Then they try to draw what they see, giving us some idea of how well people remember what experiencers claim to remember when they reproduce what they say is alien writing.

But the control group isn't under any stress. They're just shown what to them are random symbols. There's no special reason why they should remember them. But an experiencer, undergoing a real abduction (if abductions in fact are real) would be under tremendous stress. There would be every reason why things seen during the experience would stand out in memory. Some memory researchers believe that traumatic memories behave differently from casual ones. If this is correct, abductees might have better recall of writing seen during abductions than a casual control group would of writing shown to them during an experiment.

There's also a notion of "state-dependent" memory -- if you're in a particular mental state when you experience something, you remember it suddenly when you're in that state again. This might be stretching a point, but if abductions take place in an altered state of consciousness (as they indeed seem to), then data could be recalled very sharply when the experiencer again enters an similarly altered state of consciousness -- under hypnosis. This would mean that writing seen during an abduction could be sharply remembered under hypnosis, more sharply than writing casually seen in an experiment would be. (If this notion of altered-state abductions and hypnosis seems far-fetched, don't blame only me. I cribbed the idea from Stewart Appelle, a genuine university psychologist who edits the Journal of UFO Studies. It's in his piece in the current volume about theories of abductions, and the evidence that does or doesn't support those theories. VERY valuable reading!)

OK, moving right along...

Once the experiment is carried out, we'd have to clarify what constitutes similarity. How do we measure it? What constitutes 80% similarity, as opposed to 60% or 20%?

There's a procedure for doing that, which I'd strongly urge be adopted. You need two or more independent observers, not part of the experimental team. These would be people who've never seen the alleged writing samples before. They'd each make separate judgements of each pair of items we wanted to compare. They'd rank the similarity on a simple scale, maybe one to five, with one meaning no similarity at all, and five meaning very greatly similar. Then their numerical rankings are averaged. That gives a reasonably independent and objective measure of similarity. It's a standard procedure, used in social science research.

And it might be overkill to test whether people can remember Arabic or Chinese. The supposed alien writing I've seen was much simpler than Japanese or Chinese or Hebrew or any earthly alphabet I've ever seen. When I described it, I compared it to Morse Code. Morse Code has only two elements -- dots and dashes. The supposed alien writing has more elements than two, but not very many more. And they're combined into "letters" more or less the way dots and dashes are combined in Morse Code. Each "letter" (or most of the letters, anyway -- now my own memory might not be totally accurate) is built from the same few easily specifiable elements.

What that means is that this alleged alien writing easier to remember than Russian or Korean writing. Anyone could look at Morse Code for two minutes and then write out pages of an accurate imitation. The dots and dashes might not mean anything, but there wouldn't be much doubt that Morse Code was being imitated. Ditto for the alien writing. Anyone could look at it, and then spew out pages of imitation. Even if you got something wrong -- the writing has diagonal lines, maybe, and you slanted them to the left instead of to the right -- there still wouldn't be much doubt that you and the abductee to your left were imitating the same thing.

In other words...if this is a sample of alien writing

```
^^\\+   \\++^   ^+^^
```

it wouldn't be very hard for most people to look at it for 30 seconds and reproduce a good imitation. I'd be pretty impressed if I saw

```
\\++^   ^\\^+   +^^+^
```

and I wouldn't be any less impressed just because someone goofed and wrote

```
//^++   +/   /^/+^^
```

That's still consistent with the original, and a far cry from

&\$\$\$\$\$))) ()()@%% j__=!

Greg Sandow

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