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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Clark on Abductions 2/2

From: clark@mn.frontiercomm.net [Jerome Clark]
Date: Sun, 09 Nov 1997 17:11:05 PST
Fwd Date: Sun, 09 Nov 1997 17:52:32 -0500
Subject: Re: Clark on Abductions 2/2

> Date: Sat, 8 Nov 1997 19:20:41 -0500
> From: Peregrine Mendoza <101653.2205@compuserve.com> [Peter Brookesmith]
> Subject: Clark on Abductions 2/2
> To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>

> [Pt 2 of 2]

> CHIEF EDDIE HARD BULL'S EMPIRICAL APPROACH

> Jerome entirely ignores four things here. They are: the natural
> dramatic structure of the typical abduction account; the
> *collaboration* of candidate abductees and their ufological
> investigators ("set and setting" in trade jargon); the numerous
> detailed parallels to the structure and imagery of abduction
> accounts found in other kinds of anomalous experience; and, most
> blindly of all, the fundamental cock-up in the design of Chief
> Eddie Hard Bull's research. For what he did was ask ABDUCTION
> INVESTIGATORS whether they led or influenced their subjects.

> >Bullard is so uniquely valuable: a believer in empiricism in
> >this field is to be treasured. No wonder he drives the critics
> >nuts. He doesn't play by their rules and, in his own gentle,
> >understated way, shows that their rules get us nowhere.

> Bullard doesn't play by the accepted rules, or any acceptable
> rules, of objective research, in "The Sympathetic Ear", full
> point, end of story. That's one reason why he drives this critic
> nuts. And this is the genius Jerome hauls out at every
> opportunity to illustrate the hard-nosed logic of ufologists, the
> airy vacancies of their critics, and the fanciful ululations of
> psychosociologists, crepuscular creatures of the sepulchre that
> they are.

Now let's put things in perspective here. Duke, indignant defender of lost causes, claims that Bullard's empirical approach is seriously misguided, or his empiricism is misapplied, or whatever. Meantime, he accepts -- and even quotes -- the likes of Rogerson and Kottmeyer, whom he apparently regards as paragons of "objective research." Bullard and I have written separately of these guys' elemental failures of logic, research, adherence to demonstrable evidence, or even coherence, not to mention excessive (or even entire) reliance on speculation.. Yet Duke is drawing them ever closer, all the while, ever more -- it seems to me -- hysterically, as if he figures that if he can shout loud enough, he and they will start making sense.

Bullard develops a testable hypothesis and then seeks evidence that will confirm or disconfirm it. He is scrupulously fair and balanced, would never engage in the rhetorical flights of fancy that characterize Duke's discourse, and comes to conclusions that are marvels of nuance, moderation, and restraint. At the end he declares, as he puts it, "the triumph of uncertainty" -- which at this stage seems an undeniable conclusion, given evidence that is, on one level, puzzling and, on another, inadequate.

The one testable hypothesis I associate with Rogerson was a 1984 prediction that virtually all CE3/abduction claimants would be found to possess fantasy-prone personalities. He was entirely in error, as subsequent developments turned out, but I give him credit at least for trying to make something approximately scientific out of what heretofore had looked like the amiably muddle-headed, stream-of-consciousness mental rambles of a liberal-arts major who'd read a lot of books on subjects of uncertain or no relevance to UFO investigation, of which he had no experience to speak of.

> >I was JOKING, Duke, when I cracked wise about abductees burying
> >themselves in obscure folklore texts. Okay? I was poking fun at
> >psychosocial theorists who act as if the mere existence of some
> >obscure folklore parallel to a modern abduction report deflates
> >the latter. Let me quote Bullard here:

> >"In most other efforts to establish media or cultural influences,
> >standards of evidence are most conspicuous by their absence.
> >After fishing expeditions amid folklore, science-fiction
> >literature, and movie imagery, psychosocial theorists satisfy
> >themselves to draw isolated motifs out of context, select
> >favorable examples but ignore the rest, and never worry about
> >whether the obscurity of sources limits the likelihood that an
> >abductee might have seen them. Movies are a plausible source
> >because they enjoy mass exposure, but why abductees choose the
> >same narrow selection of movie elements when Hollywood has
> >offered so much variety remains an unanswered question."

> Bullard seems to be saying in slightly more flowery language what
> Jerome claimed to be uttering as a joke. A slight contradiction
> here? (I am all for empiricism.) In any case, Bullard traduces
> the "psychosocial theorists" by erecting a strawman of cause-and-
> effect, or direct acquisition of imagery or motifs ("the
> obscurity of sources"), which no one, as far as I know, has ever
> proposed to occur in so grossly simplistic a fashion. That there
> are parallels with other cultural material is undeniable; and one
> of the best has been enunciated by Bertrand M=E9heust, in his essay
> in Evans & Spencer's "UFOs 1947-1987" (Fortean Tomes 1987, ISBN
> 1-870021-02-9), which does anything but rip things untimely from
> their context. To discover why and how those parallels occur, and
> what meaning we can draw from the abduction experience, and why
> the unmediated *experience* is mirrored by abduction accounts
> given under hypnosis, is the central challenge of the phenomenon,
> and of one of the best endeavors of psychosocial ufology. Yes,
> abductions are a mystery, but trying to solve the problem by
> hitting it with the literaist presumption of the ETH is to
> approach it from the wrong end.

> Perhaps Jerome's notion of empirical research is illustrated by
> his proposal to re-examine old CE-III accounts and comb them for
> signs of abduction. This follows exactly the false logic of
> Westrum et al in interpreting their infamous Roper poll results
> to claim 3.7 million US citizens may be abductees.

> >And then there's Martin Kottmeyer with his spurious claim about
> >the "Bollero Shield" Outer Limits episode and its supposed effect
> >on Barney Hill's testimony. The connection can be rejected on
> >other grounds (see High Strangeness, p. 250), but what is
> >particularly striking is that Kottmeyer was content simply to
> >draw the connection without bothering to ask Betty Hill if she
> >and Barney were in the habit of watching Outer Limits. (I did
> >ask her; they weren't.)

> Now, as Bismarck once remarked, for the pig-sticking

Here Duke drones on, quoting fellow speculationist Kottmeyer, on what I call above the spurious association of the "Bollero Shield" episode with Barney Hill's testimony. I'm simply going to quote what I wrote in High Strangeness (reprinted in The UFO Book) about this bit of psychosociological speculationism. I

wish to stress here that Kottmeyer, no empiricist, didn't even inquire of Betty Hill if they'd seen the show. She denies it, but Duke the Clairvoyant, who always knows more than mere witnesses, insists she and Barney did, anyway. What do witnesses know, anyway?

>From High Strangeness (p. 250) and The UFO Book (291-92):

Another attempt to explain away the Hill encounter, or at least a portion of it, has been proposed by Martin Kottmeyer, a UFO skeptic and a student of popular culture. Twelve days before Barney underwent hypnosis on February 22, 1964, an episode of Outer Limits, a science-fiction television show, featured an alien with wrap-around eyes. The alien is given these words of dialogue: "In all the universes, in all the unities beyond all the universes, all who have eyes have eyes that speak." Under hypnosis Barney says at one point, as he encounters the beings on the road, "Only the eyes are talking to me." Kottmeyer finds this significant and further observes that Barney said nothing about wrap-around eyes in his earlier conscious memories.

This is a point, but not much of one. For one thing, Kottmeyer did not trouble to inquire of Betty Hill... if she and her husband were in the habit of watching Outer Limits. (When asked by another writer [me], Betty said, "As for the Outer Limits program -- never heard of it. Barney worked nights. If he was not working, we were never home because of our community activities. If we had been home, I am sure this title would not have interested us.") In his conscious memory, dating back from that night in September 1961 (long before the airing of the show, in other words), Barney could recall seeing the beings only from a distance, from which perspective the precise shape of the eyes may not have been easily apparent. He did, however, remember vividly the intense stare and the apparent mental message that the beings were about to capture him. The sense of being caught in the stare, and of being the recipient of communication in that state, is consistent with his later testimony.

Under hypnosis, interestingly, Barney says something whose significance would be apparent only many years later. After expressing his fears about the talking eyes, he states, "All I see are these eyes.... I'm not even afraid that they're not connected to a body. They're just there. They're just up close to me, pressing against my eyes. That's funny. I'm not afraid."

This aspect of the story was overlooked in virtually all subsequent rehash and analysis of the Hill case, but eventually strikingly similar testimony would emerge in the accounts of other abductees. As the abductees told it, the abductors placed their faces right up against theirs and stared into their eyes. David M. Jacobs quotes these words from a woman under hypnosis:

"I'm looking into those eyes. I can't believe that I'm looking into eyes that big.... Once you look into those eyes, you're gone. You're just plain gone.... I can't think of anything but those eyes. It's like the eyes overwhelm me. How do they do that? It goes inside you, their eyes go inside you. You are just held. You can't stop looking. If you wanted to, you couldn't look away. You are drawn into them, and they sort of come into you."

Another investigator, Karla Turner, quotes an abductee who says, "The ETs like to put their noses almost on my nose, and when they do this, I just stare into their eyes. Sometimes that's all I ever see, their eyes, and nothing else that's

happening."

Even Kottmeyer refrains from contending that such accounts can be traced to a few overlooked sentences among the many Barney spoke during hours of hypnotic testimony. Having exhausted the argument, he retreats into "psychological symbolisms" which he professes to find meaningful and others may see as evidence of Kottmeyer's reluctance to entertain more heretical and disturbing possibilities.

In any event, Kottmeyer's assertions about wrap-around and speaking eyes, while of some interest, simply do not tell us anything about the nature of the Hills's experience. Instead we are given a small detail, taken out of the much larger context of a complex experience, and asked to think of it as the only issue of consequence, and then, what is more, to dismiss testimony from other persons about this same obscure detail as irrelevant to consideration of its reality status. What is missing in Kottmeyer's argument is a coherent hypothesis, though it is hard to imagine what that hypothesis would be.

----end of quote---

Of course in the damned-if-they-do, damned-if-they-don't, always-an-out, hermetically sealed world of speculationist discourse, Duke will say:

(1) Ah! All these other people got this detail from Barney Hill's testimony.

(2) On the other hand, if nobody else reported it, Duke would declare: See, obviously a fantasy. Nobody else reported it!

(Karl, if you want to weigh in on the Hill case, here's your chance.)

Which reminds me. As I recall, on part one of his posting, Duke asserted that nobody besides Sandy Larson had ever reported the bizarre detail of brain removal. Not so. It figures in other, extremely obscure abduction claims. Of course: Ah! They got it from Sandy Larson. But of course if nobody else had reported it ... well, you get the drift.

You gotta give it to Duke and company: they've jiggered the rules so there's no way for his pals to lose or anybody else to win. No matter what happens, it proves what they need to believe.

> MISCELLANEOUS RAMBLINGS

> >In the meantime, agnosticism is not, as Duke foolishly
> >implies, craven cowardice but perhaps the only truly
> >intellectually honest response. What it says is that we don't
> >have the answers yet, that we're going to have to do a hell of a
> >lot more work before we do. Why should that make Duke so mad?

> Insofar as the "research" of abductionists is not objective, and
> insofar as they rely on "techniques" that are irretrievably
> flawed in execution and untrustworthy in principle (read the
> literature on "memory retrieval" in child abuse and RSA cases,
> and the Royal Society of Psychiatrists' report on same that
> contributed to their decision to outlaw hypnotic and related
> techniques, and top that with the emerging revisionist literature
> on repressed memory), then agnosticism about abductions becomes a
> moral abdication and an intellectual snare and delusion. The
> best example of a moral sewer in abduction literature so far is
> "Witnessed", although when I outlined one reason why I hold this
> view on this List, Linda Cortibalone responded by describing the
> exercise as 25 paragraphs of nothing. Some minds are impenetrable
> (but I tried, Lord, I tried).

Amazing. Duke, whose make-it-up-as-you-go-along methodology

defies belief and whose don't-get-your-hands-dirty approach to UFO research and investigation is positively medieval, presumes to lecture everybody who begs to differ of lacking objectivity. I've said it before and I'll say it again: Give me one good field investigator over 10,000 armchair gasbags, especially gasbags with attitude.

Again, readers, for a really splendid discussion of the sorts of intellectual errors Duke repeatedly indulges in, at ever greater volume, read David J. Hufford's book. Among other things, Hufford demonstrates, to devastating effect, what happens when you ignore what the witness has told you, tell him or her what "really" happened, then reinvent the testimony so that you can "explain" it; see especially the chapter "The Psychological Dis-Interpretation of the Old Hag." Hufford also shows why a keen sense of agnosticism, as well as a willingness to concede the limits and tentativeness of knowledge, is absolutely essential in our investigation and consideration of poorly understood experiential phenomena. Unlike Duke, Hufford does not engage in phony moral grandstanding on this issue.

In his vigorous -- some would say relentless -- pretense to certainty where none exists, Duke is as embarrassingly belief-driven as some of those he attacks so fervently. One does not know whether to admire or pity. One does know, however, not to travel down that lost highway with him.

Yours in favor of saying "I don't know" when we don't,

Jerry Clark

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