The Aliens Among Us: Hypnotic Regression Revisited

The experiences and behaviors portrayed in recent alien-abduction books are explained in a naturalistic and satisfying way by our understanding of anomalistic psychology.

Robert A. Baker

FOR THE AVERAGE person walking down the aisle of a modern bookstore or passing through the checkout lane at the nearest supermarket, it would be easy to conclude that aliens from outer space not only are here but also have joined the Baptist church, have put their kids in school, and belong to the Rotary Club. This conclusion is demanded by the recent rash of nonfiction books about UFO contacts, encounters of the third kind, and human abductions by little gray men from outer space or some other parallel universe. Typical of these tomes are *Communion,* by Whitley Strieber; *Intruders,* by Budd Hopkins; and *Light Years: An Investigation into the Extraterrestrial Experience of Eduard Meier,* by Gary Kinder. (See reviews of the Strieber and Hopkins books in the Fall 1987 *SI.*) According to these and other UFO pundits, abductions by "little gray aliens" are so prevalent they will soon become commonplace and generally accepted as a fact of life by a now skeptical public and press.

My friends and colleagues and I, however, are beginning to believe that we have Alien B.O. or something worse, because none of us has been contacted, interviewed, briefed, threatened, kidnapped, or physically examined by any of the little folk. We, sadly enough, have not even had our car stalled by one of their spaceships. It stalls on occasion, but the problem lies in Detroit rather than with the aliens. Could all this alien activity going on around us be overlooked by responsible authorities?

To impress the general reader, all three authors have taken great pains to give as much credibility and authenticity as possible to their claims. Strieber not only took a lie-detector test but also had a psychiatrist write a statement attesting to his sanity.[1] Kinder had professional photographers examine a

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number of Meier's photographs and also had an IBM metallurgist endorse the unusual quality of a metal fragment from the purported spaceship. To Kinder's credit, however, he admits that he is skeptical about some of Meier's claims—particularly that of journeying back in time and talking to Jesus Christ. As for Hopkins, he not only consulted a number of psychologists and psychiatrists (he even found an abductee among them) but also had medical specialists corroborate the correctness of the medical techniques the aliens used to examine their human subjects. Just why aliens should copy human medical approaches is an unanswered question.

One would have thought that Philip Klass's (1981) devastating attack on abductee claims, published in this journal, coupled with Robert Sheaffer's (1981) brilliant and calmly reasoned work, *The UFO Verdict,* and Douglas Curran's (1985) *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space,* along with William R. Corliss's (1983) *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena,* would have given the true believers pause and would have dampened somewhat their extravagant claims. But, like a rubber ball, they keep bouncing back.

Sheaffer and Corliss offer credible and scientific explanations of 99 percent or more of the strange lights in the sky, whereas Curran's extensive catalog of aberrant human believers suggests that the true aliens in our midst are not from outer space or a parallel dimension but are our fellow *Homo sapiens* from the edge of town. If you wish to see some excellent photos of aliens, study the pictures and read the biographies in Curran's book.[2] Truly, the aliens and the alienated are already among us and have been for a long while, differing from the majority of other Americans only in the extreme nature of their beliefs and convictions. Klass's continuing excellent work on UFO demystification highlights the significance of hypnotic regression in the abductee belief system. For hypnotic regression and the personality pattern Wilson and Barber (1983) call "fantasy-prone," as well as the behavior of individuals undergoing hypnogogic and hypnopompic experiences, furnish, we believe, complete and credible explanations to most—if not all—accounts of UFO contacts and abductions past and present.

Most people seem unaware of the fact that there is an already well established branch of psychology, anomalistic psychology, that deals specifically with the kind of experiences had by Strieber, Meier, and the other UFO abductees. This psychology provides naturalistic and satisfying explanations for the entire range of such behaviors. Let us examine these explanations a little more closely and in a little more detail.

Hypnosis and Hypnotic Regression

In France in the 1770s, when Mesmerism was in its heyday, the king appointed two commissions to investigate Mesmer's activities. The commissions included such eminent men as Benjamin Franklin, Lavoisier, and Jean-Sylvain Bailly, the French astronomer. After months of study the report of the commissioners concluded that it was *imagination,* not magnetism, that accounted for the

Hypnotic regression, the fantasy-prone personality, and 'waking-dream' experiences furnish credible explanations of most—if not all—accounts of UFO abductions.

swooning, trancelike rigidity of Mesmer's subjects. Surprisingly enough, this conclusion is still closer to the truth about hypnosis than most of the modern definitions found in today's textbooks.

So-called authorities still disagree about "hypnosis." But whether it is or is not a "state," there is common and widespread agreement among all the major disputants that "hypnosis" is a situation in which people set aside critical judgment (without abandoning it entirely) and engage in make-believe and fantasy; that is, they use their imagination (Sarbin and Andersen 1967; Barber 1969; Gill and Brenman 1959; Hilgard 1977). As stated earlier, there are great individual differences in the ability to fantasize, and in recent years many authorities have made it a *requirement* for any successful "hypnotic" performance. Josephine Hilgard (1979) refers to hypnosis as "imaginative involvement," Sarbin and Coe (1972) term it "believed-in imaginings," Spanos and Barber (1974) call it "involvement in suggestion-related imaginings," and Sutcliffe (1961) has gone so far as to characterize the hypnotizable individual as someone who is "deluded in a descriptive, nonpejorative sense" and he sees the hypnotic situation as an arena in which people who are skilled at make-believe and fantasy are provided with the opportunity and the means to do what they enjoy doing and what they are able to do especially well. Even more recently Perry, Laurence, Nadon, and Labelle (1986) concluded that "abilities such as imagery/imagination, absorption, disassociation, and selective attention underlie high hypnotic responsivity in yet undetermined combinations." The same authors, in another context dealing with past-lives regression, also concluded that "it should be expected that any material provided in age regression (which is at the basis of reports of reincarnation) may be fact or fantasy, and it is most likely an admixture of both." The authors further report that such regression material is colored by issues of confabulation, memory creation, inadvertent cueing, and the regressee's current psychological needs. (See also Nicholas Spanos's article in this issue.)

Confabulation

Because of its universality, it is quite surprising that the phenomenon of confabulation is not better known. Confabulation, or the tendency of ordinary, sane individuals to confuse fact with fiction and to report fantasized events as actual occurrences, has surfaced in just about every situation in which a person has attempted to remember very specific details from the past. A classical and amusing example occurs in the movie *Gigi*, in the scene where Maurice Chevalier and Hermione Gingold compare memories of their

courtship in the song "I Remember It Well." We remember things not the way they really were but the way we would have liked them to have been.

The work of Elizabeth Loftus and others over the past decade has demonstrated that the human memory works not like a tape recorder but more like the village storyteller—i.e., it is both creative and recreative. We can and we do easily forget. We blur, shape, erase, and change details of the events in our past. Many people walk around daily with heads full of "fake memories." Moreover, the unreliability of eyewitness testimony is not only legendary but well documented. When all of this is further complicated and compounded by the impact of suggestions provided by the hypnotist plus the social-demand characteristics of the typical hypnotic situation, little wonder that the resulting recall on the part of the regressee bears no resemblance to the truth. *In fact, the regressee often does not know what the truth is.*

Confabulation shows up without fail in nearly every context in which hypnosis is employed, including the forensic area. Thus it is not surprising that most states have no legal precedents on the use of hypnotic testimony. Furthermore, many state courts have begun to limit testimony from hypnotized witnesses or to follow the guidelines laid down by the American Medical Association in 1985 to assure that witnesses' memories are not contaminated by the hypnosis itself. For not only do we translate beliefs into memories when we are wide awake, but in the case of hypnotized witnesses with few specific memories the hypnotist may unwittingly suggest memories and create a witness with a number of crucial and vivid recollections of events that never happened, i.e., pseudo-memories. It may turn out that the recent Supreme Court decision allowing the individual states limited use of hypnotically aided testimony may not be in the best interests of those who seek the truth. Even in their decision the judges recognized that hypnosis may often produce incorrect recollections and unreliable testimony.

There have also been a number of clinical and experimental demonstrations of the creation of pseudo-memories that have subsequently come to be believed as veridical. Hilgard (1981) implanted a false memory of an experience connected with a bank robbery that never occurred. His subject found the experience so vivid that he was able to select from a series of photographs a picture of the man he thought had committed the robbery. At another time, Hilgard deliberately assigned two concurrent—though spatially different—life experiences to the same person and regressed him at separate times to *that date.* The individual subsequently gave very accurate accounts of both experiences, so that anyone believing in reincarnation who reviewed the two accounts would conclude the man *really had* lived the two assigned lives.

In a number of other experiments designed to measure eyewitness reliability, Loftus (1979) found that details supplied by others invariably contaminated the memory of the eyewitness. People's hair changed color, stop signs became yield signs, yellow convertibles turned to red sedans, the left side of the street became the right-hand side, and so on. The results of these studies led her to conclude, "It may well be that the legal notion of an independent recollection is a psychological impossibility." As for hypnosis,

she says: "There's no way even the most sophisticated hypnotist can tell the difference between a memory that is real and one that's created. If a person is hypnotized and highly suggestible and false information is implanted in his mind, it may get embedded even more strongly. One psychologist tried to use a polygraph to distinguish between real and phony memory, but it didn't work. Once someone has constructed a memory, he comes to believe it himself."

Cueing: Inadvertent and Advertent

Without a doubt, inadvertent cueing also plays a major role in UFO-abduction fantasies. The hypnotist unintentionally gives away to the person being regressed exactly what response is wanted. This was most clearly shown in an experimental study of hypnotic age regression by R. M. True in 1949. He found that 92 percent of his subjects, regressed to the day of their tenth birthday, could accurately recall the day of the week on which it fell. He also found the same thing for 84 percent of his subjects for their fourth birthday. Other investigators, however, were unable to duplicate True's findings. When True was questioned by Martin Orne about his experiment, he discovered that the editors of *Science,* where his report had appeared, altered his procedure section without his prior consent. True, Orne discovered, had inadvertently cued his subjects by following the unusual technique of asking them, "Is it Monday? Is it Tuesday? Is it Wednesday?" etc., and he monitored their responses by using a perpetual desk calendar in full view of all his subjects. Further evidence of the prevalence and importance of such cueing came from a study by O'Connell, Shor, and Orne (1970). They found that in an existing group of four-year-olds not a single one knew what day of the week it was. The reincarnation literature is also replete with examples of such inadvertent cueing. Ian Wilson (1981), for example, has shown that hypnotically elicited reports of being reincarnated vary as a direct function of the hypnotist's belief about reincarnation. Finally, Laurence, Nadon, Nogrady, and Perry (1986) have shown that pseudo-memories were elicited also by inadvertent cueing in the use of hypnosis by the police.

As for advertent, or *deliberate,* cueing, one of my own studies offers a clear example. Sixty undergraduates divided into three groups of twenty each were hypnotized and age-regressed to previous lifetimes. Before each hypnosis session, however, suggestions very favorable to and supportive of past-life and reincarnation beliefs were given to one group; neutral and noncommittal statements about past lives were given to the second group; and skeptical and derogatory statements about past lives were given to the third group. The results clearly showed the effects of these cues and suggestions. Subjects in the first group showed the most past-life regressions and the most past-life productions; subjects in the third group showed the least (Baker 1982).

Regression subjects take cues as to how they are to respond from the person doing the regressions and asking the questions. If the hypnotist is a believer in UFO abductions the odds are heavily in favor of him eliciting

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UFO-abductee stories from his volunteers.

Fantasy-Prone Personalities and Psychological Needs

"Assuming that all you have said thus far *is* true," the skeptical observer might ask, "why would hundreds of ordinary, mild-mannered, unassuming citizens suddenly go off the deep end and turn up with cases of amnesia and then, when under hypnosis, all report nearly identical experiences?" First, the abductees are not as numerous as we are led to believe; and, second, even though Strieber and Hopkins go to great lengths to emphasize the diversity of the people who report these events, they are much more alike than these taxonomists declare. In an afterword to Hopkins's *Missing Time,* a psychologist named Aphrodite Clamar raises exactly this question and then adds, "All of these people seem quite ordinary in the psychological sense—*although they have not been subjected to the kind of psychological testing that might provide a deeper understanding of their personalities"* (italics added). And herein lies the problem. If these abductees were given this sort of intensive diagnostic testing it is highly likely that many similarities would emerge—particularly an unusual personality pattern that Wilson and Barber (1983) have categorized as "fantasy-prone." In an important but much neglected article, they report in some detail their discovery of a group of excellent hypnotic subjects with unusual fantasy abilities. In their words:

> Although this study provided a broader understanding of the kind of life experiences that may underlie the ability to be an excellent hypnotic subject, it has also led to a serendipitous finding that has wide implication for all of psychology—it has shown that there exists a small group of individuals (possibly 4% of the population) who fantasize a large part of the time, who typically "see," "hear," "smell," and "touch" and fully experience what they fantasize; and who can be labeled *fantasy-prone personalities.*

Wilson and Barber also stress that such individuals experience a reduction in orientation to time, place, and person that is characteristic of hypnosis or trance during their daily lives whenever they are deeply involved in a fantasy. They also have experiences during their daily ongoing lives that resemble the classical hypnotic phenomena. In other words, the behavior we would normally call "hypnotic" is exhibited by these fantasy-prone types (FPs) all

the time. In Wilson and Barber's words: "When we give them 'hypnotic suggestions,' such as suggestions for visual and auditory hallucinations, negative hallucinations, age regression, limb rigidity, anesthesia, and sensory hallucinations, we are asking them to do for us the kind of thing they can do independently of us in their daily lives."

The reason we do not run into these types more often is that they have learned long ago to be highly secretive and private about their fantasy lives. Whenever the FPs do encounter a hypnosis situation it provides them with a social situation in which they are encouraged to do, and are rewarded for doing, what they usually do only in secrecy and in private. Wilson and Barber also emphasize that regression and the reliving of previous experiences is something that virtually all the FPs do naturally in their daily lives. When they recall the past, they relive it to a surprisingly vivid extent, and they all have vivid memories of their experiences extending back to their early years.

Fantasy-prone individuals also show up as mediums, psychics, and religious visionaries. They are also the ones who have many realistic "out of body" experiences and prototypic "near-death" experiences.

In spite of the fact that many such extreme types show FP characteristics, the overwhelming majority of FPs fall within the broad range of normal functioning. It is totally inappropriate to apply a psychiatric diagnosis to them. In Wilson and Barber's words: "It needs to be strongly emphasized that our subjects with a propensity for hallucinations are as well adjusted as our

comparison group or the average person. It appears that the life experiences and skill developments that underlie the ability of hallucinatory fantasy are more or less independent of the kinds of life experience that leads to pathology." In general, FPs are "normal" people who function as well as others and who are as well adjusted, competent, and satisified or dissatisfied as everyone else.

Anyone familiar with the the fantasy-prone personality who reads *Communion* will suffer an immediate shock of recognition. Strieber is a classic example of the genre: he is easily hypnotized; he is amnesiac; he has vivid memories of his early life, body immobility and rigidity, a very religious background, a very active fantasy life; he is a writer of occult and highly imaginative novels; he has unusually strong sensory experiences—particularly smells and sounds—and vivid dreams. More interesting still is the comment made by Strieber's wife during her questioning under hypnosis by Budd Hopkins (p. 197). In referring to some of Strieber's visions she says: "Whitley saw a lot of things that I didn't see at that time." "Did you look for it?" "Oh, no. Because I knew it wasn't real." "How did you know it wasn't real? Whitley's a fairly down-to-earth guy—" "No, he isn't." . . . "It didn't suprise you hearing Whitley, that he sees things like that [a bright crystal in the sky]?" "No." It seems if anyone really knows us well it's our wives. But even more remarkable are the correspondences between Strieber's alien encounters and the typical hypnopompic hallucinations to be discussed later.

It is perfectly clear, therefore, why most of the UFO abductees, when given cursory examinations by psychiatrists and psychologists, would turn out to be ordinary, normal citizens as sane as themselves. It is also evident why the elaborate fantasies woven in fine cloth from the now universally familiar UFO-abduction fable—a fable known to every man, woman, and child newspaper reader or moviegoer in the nation—would have so much in common, so much consistency in the telling. Any one of us, if asked to pretend that he had been kidnapped by aliens from outer space or another dimension, would make up a story that would vary little, either in its details or in the supposed motives of the abductors, from the stories told by any and all of the kidnap victims reported by Hopkins. As for the close encounters of the third kind and conversations with the little gray aliens described in *Communion* and *Intruders,* again, our imaginative tales would be remarkably similar in plot, dialogue, description, and characterization. The means of transportation would be saucer-shaped; the aliens would be small, humanoid, two-eyed, and gray, white, or green. The purpose of their visits would be: (1) to save our planet; (2) to find a better home for themselves; (3) to end nuclear war and the threat we pose to the peaceful life in the rest of galaxy; (4) to bring us knowledge and enlightenment; and (5) to increase their knowledge and understanding of other forms of intelligent life. In fact, the fantasy-prone abductees' stories would be much more credible if some of them, at least, reported the aliens as eight-foot-tall, red-striped octapeds riding bicycles and intent upon eating us for dessert.

The Power of Suggestion on Memory

IN MY OWN work on hypnosis and memory, the power of suggestion on the evocation of false memories was clearly and dramatically evident. Sixty volunteers observed a complex visual display made up of photographs of a number of common objects, e.g. a television set, a clock, a typewriter, a book, and so on, and eight nonsense syllables. They were instructed to memorize the nonsense syllables in the center of the display and were given two minutes to accomplish it. Nothing was said about the common objects. Following a 40-minute delay the students were questioned about the nonsense syllables and the other objects on display. They were also asked to state their confidence in the accuracy of their answers. Some were questioned under hypnosis and others while they were wide awake.

As a secondary part of the study the extent of the student's suggestibility was also studied. This was done by asking them to report on the common objects (as well as their primary task of memorizing the nonsense syllables) and asking specific questions about objects that *were not on the display.* Since their attention was not directed at the objects *specifically,* they were of course unsure about what they saw and didn't see. Therefore, when they were asked the questions "What color was the sports car?" and "Where on the display was it located?" they immediately assumed there must have been a sports car present or I wouldn't be asking the question. Similarly with a suggested lawnmower and calendar. Although 35 subjects reported the color of the suggested automobile in the hypnoidal condition, 34 reported the color while awake. Similarly, although 26 subjects reported the suggested lawnmower's color and position in the hypnoidal state, 27 reported its color and position while awake. For the nonexistent calendar, 24 reported the month and date while hypnotized, and 23 did so while awake.

As for suggestibility *per se* under all conditions, 50 out of 60 volunteers reported seeing something that wasn't there with a confidence level of 2 (a little unsure) or greater, while 45 out of 60 reported seeing something that wasn't there with a confidence level of 3 (sure) or greater, whereas 25 out of 60 reported seeing something that was not there with a confidence level of 4 (very sure) or greater. Finally, 8 out of the 60 reported something not there with a confidence level of 5 (absolute certainty). Interestingly enough, 5 of the 8 reported they were certain of the object's existence even though they were wide awake; and, when they were allowed to see the display again, they were shocked to discover their error (Baker, Haynes, and Patrick 1983).

—*Robert A. Baker*

Finally, what would or could motivate even the FPs to concoct such outlandish and absurd tales, tales that without fail draw much unwelcome attention and notoriety? What sort of psychological motives and needs would underlie such fabrications? Perhaps the best answer to this question is the one provided by the author-photographer Douglas Curran. Traveling from British Columbia down the West Coast and circumscribing the United States along a counterclockwise route, Curran spent more than two years questioning ordinary people about outer space. Curran writes:

> On my travels across the continent I never had to wait too long for someone to tell me about his or her UFO experience, whether I was chatting with a farmer in Kansas, Ruth Norman at the Unarius Foundation, or a cafe owner in Florida. What continually struck me in talking with these people was how positive and ultimately life-giving a force was their belief in outer space. Their belief reaffirmed the essential fact of human existence: the need for order and hope. It is this that establishes them—and me—in the continuity of human experience. It brought to me a greater understanding of Oscar Wilde's observation. "We are all lying in the gutter—but some of us are looking at the stars."

Jung (1969), in his study of flying saucers, first published in 1957, argues that the saucer represents an archetype of order, wholeness, deliverance, and salvation—a symbol manifested in other cultures as a sun wheel or magic circle. Further in his essay, Jung compares the spacemen aboard the flying saucers to the angelic messengers of earlier times who brought messages of hope and salvation—the theme emphasized in Strieber's *Communion.* Curran also observes that the spiritual message conveyed by the aliens is, recognizably, our own. None of the aliens Curran's contactees talked about advocated any moral or metaphysical belief that was not firmly rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As Curran says, "Every single flying-saucer group I encountered in my travels incorporated Jesus Christ into the hierarchy of its belief system." No wonder Eduard Meier had to travel back in time and visit the Savior. Many theorists have long recognized that whenever world events prove to be psychologically destabilizing, men turn to religion as their only hope. Jung, again, in his 1957 essay, wrote: "In the threatening situation of the world today, when people are beginning to see that everything is at stake, the projection-creating fantasy soars beyond the realm of earthly organization and powers into the heavens, into interstellar space, where the rulers of human fate, the gods, once had their abode in the planets."

The beauty and power of Curran's portraits of hundreds of true UFO believers lies in his sympathetic understanding of their fears and frailties. As psychologists are well aware, our religions are not so much systems of objective truths about the universe as they are collections of subjective statements about humanity's hopes and fears. The true believers interviewed by Curran are all around us. Over the years I have encountered several. One particularly memorable and poignant case was that of a federal prisoner who said he could leave his body at will and sincerely believed it. Every weekend he

would go home to visit his family while (physically) his body stayed behind in his cell. Then there was the female psychic from the planet Xenon who could turn electric lights on and off at will, especially traffic signals. Proof of her powers? If she drove up to a red light she would concentrate on it intently for 30 to 40 seconds and then, invariably, it would turn green!

Hypnogogic and Hypnopompic Hallucinations

Another common yet little publicized and rarely discussed phenomenon is that of hypnogogic (when *falling asleep*) and hypnopompic (when *waking up*) hallucinations. These phenomena, often referred to as "waking dreams," find the individual suddenly awake, but paralyzed, unable to move, and most often encountering a "ghost." The typical report goes somewhat as follows, "I went to bed and went to sleep and then sometime near morning something woke me up. I opened my eyes and found myself wide awake but unable to move. There, standing at the foot of my bed was my mother, wearing her favorite dress—the one we buried her in. She stood there looking at me and smiling and then she said: 'Don't worry about me, Doris, I'm at peace at last. I just want you and the children to be happy.' " Well, what happened next? "Nothing, she slowly faded away." What did you do then? "Nothing, I just closed my eyes and went back to sleep."

There are always a number of characteristic clues that indicate a hypnogogic or hypnopompic hallucination. First, it always occurs before or after falling asleep. Second, one is paralyzed or has difficulty in moving; or, contrarily, one may float out of one's body and have an out-of-body experience. Third, the hallucination is unusually bizarre; i.e., one sees ghosts, aliens, monsters, and such. Fourth, after the hallucination is over the hallucinator typically goes back to sleep. And, fifth, the hallucinator is unalterably convinced of the "reality" of the entire experience.

In Strieber's *Communion* (pp. 172-175) is a classic, textbook description of a hypnopompic hallucination, complete with the awakening from a sound sleep, the strong sense of reality and of being awake, the paralysis (due to the fact that the body's neural circuits keep our muscles relaxed and help preserve our sleep), and the encounter with strange beings. Following the encounter, instead of jumping out of bed and going in search of the strangers he has seen, Strieber typically goes back to sleep. He even reports that the burglar alarm was still working—proof again that the intruders were mental rather than physical. Strieber also reports an occasion when he awakes and believes that the roof of his house is on fire and that the aliens are threatening his family. Yet his only response to this was to go peacefully back to sleep. Again, clear evidence of a hypnopompic dream. Strieber, of course, is convinced of the reality of these experiences. This too is expected. If he was not convinced of their reality, then the experience would not be hypnopompic or hallucinatory.

The point cannot be more strongly made that ordinary, perfectly sane and rational people have these hallucinatory experiences and that such individuals

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are in no way mentally disturbed or psychotic. But neither are such experiences to be taken as incontrovertible proof of some sort of objective or consensual reality. They may be subjectively real, but objectively they are nothing more than dreams or delusions. They are called "hallucinatory" because of their heightened subjective reality. Leaving no rational explanation unspurned, Strieber is nevertheless forthright enough to suggest at one point the possibility that his experiences indeed could be hypnopompic. Moreover, in a summary chapter he speculates, correctly, that the alien visitors could be "from within us" and/or "a side effect of a natural phenomenon . . . a certain hallucinatory wire in the mind causing many different people to have experiences so similar as to seem to be the result of encounters with the same physical phenomena" (p. 224).

Interestingly enough, these hypnopompic and hypnogogic hallucinations do show individual differences in content and character as well as a lot of similarity: ghosts, monsters, fairies, friends, lovers, neighbors, and even little gray men and golden-haired ladies from the Pleiades are frequently encountered. Do such hallucinations appear more frequently to highly imaginative and fantasy-prone people than to other personality types? There is some evidence that they do (McKellar 1957; Tart 1969; Reed 1972; Wilson and Barber 1983), and there can certainly be no doubt that Strieber is a highly imaginative personality type.

"Missing" Time?

As for the lacunae or so-called "missing time" experienced by all the UFO abductees, this too is a quite ordinary, common, and universal experience. Jerome Singer (1975) in his *Inner World of Daydreaming* comments:

> Are there ever any truly "blank periods" when we are awake? It certainly seems to be the case that under certain conditions of fatigue or great drowsiness or extreme concentration upon some physical act we may become aware that we cannot account for an interval of time and have no memory of what happened for seconds and sometimes minutes.

Graham Reed (1972) has also dealt with the "time-gap" experience at great length. Typically, motorists will report after a long drive that at some point in the journey they wake up to realize they have no awareness of a preceding period of time. With some justification, people still will describe this as a "gap in time," a "lost half-hour," or a "piece out of my life." Reed writes:

> A little reflection will suggest, however, that our experience of time and its passage is determined by *events,* either external or internal. What the time-gapper is reporting is not that a slice of time has vanished, but that he has failed to register a series of events which would normally have functioned as his time-markers. If he is questioned closely he will admit that his "time-gap" experience did not involve his realization at, say, noon that he had somehow "lost" half an hour. Rather, the experience consists of "waking up" at, say, Florence and realizing that he remembers nothing since Bologna. . . . To understand the experience, however, it is best considered in terms of the absence of *events.* If the time-gapper had taken that particular day off, and spent the morning sitting in his garden undisturbed, he might have remembered just as little of the half-hour in question. He might still describe it in terms of lost time, but he would not find the experience unusual or disturbing. For he would point out that he could not remember what took place between eleven-thirty and twelve simply because nothing of note occurred.

In fact, there is nothing recounted in any of the three works under discussion that cannot be easily explained in terms of normal, though somewhat unusual, psychological behavior we now term *anomalous.* Different and unusual? Yes. Paranormal or otherworldly, requiring the presence of extraterrestrials? No. Diehard proponents may find these explanations unsatisfying, but the open-minded reader will find elaboration and illumination in the textbooks and other works in anomalistic psychology. Strongly recommended are Reed (1972), Marks and Kammann (1980), Corliss (1982), Zusne and Jones (1982), Radner and Radner (1982), Randi (1982), Gardner (1981), Alcock, (1981), Taylor (1980), and Frazier (1981).

If one looks at the psychodynamics underlying the confabulation of Hopkins's contactees and abductees it is easy to see how even an ordinary, non-FP individual can become one of his case histories. How does Hopkins, for instance, locate such individuals in the first place? Typically, it is done through a selection process; i.e., those individuals who are willing to talk about UFOs—the believers—are selected for further questioning. Those who scoff are summarily dismissed. Once selected for study and permission to volunteer for hypnosis is obtained, a response-anticipation process sets in (Kirsch 1985), and the volunteer is now set up to supply answers to anything that might be asked. Then, during the hypnosis sessions, something similar to the Hawthorne Effect occurs: The volunteer says to himself, "This kindly and famous writer and this important and prestigious doctor are interested in poor little old unimportant me!" And the more the volunteer is observed and interrogated, the greater is the volunteer's motivation to come up with a cracking "good story" that is important and significant and pleasing to these important people. Moreover, as we have long known, it is the perception of reality not the reality itself that is truly significant in determining behavior. If the writer and the doctor-hypnotist are on hand to encourage the volunteer and to suggest to him that his fantasy really happened, who is he to question their interpretation of his experience? Once they tell the contactee how important his fantasy is, he now—if he ever doubted before—begins to believe it himself

and to elaborate and embellish it every time it is repeated.

Consequences and Summary

Many readers might feel compelled to ask: "Well, what is so bad about people having fantasies anyway? What harm do they do? You certainly cannot deny they are entertaining. And, as far as the psychiatrists' clients are concerned, whether the fantasies are true or false is of little matter—it's the clients' perceptions of reality that matter and it is this that you have to treat." True, if the client believes it is so, then you have to deal with that belief. The only problem with this lies in its potential for harm. On the national scene today too many lives have been negatively affected and even ruined by well-meaning but tragically misdirected reformers who believe the fantasies of children, the alienated, and the fantasy-prone personality types and have charged innocent people with rape, child molestation, assault, and other sorts of abusive crimes. Nearly every experienced clinician has encountered such claims and then much later has discovered to his chagrin that none of these fantasized events ever happened. Law-enforcement officials are also quite familiar with the products of response expectancies and overactive imaginations in the form of FPs who confess to murders that never happened or to murders that did happen but with which they have no connection. Another problem with the UFO abductee literature is that it is false, misleading, rabble-rousing, sensationalistic, and opportunistically money-grubbing. It takes advantage of people's hopes and fears and diverts them from the literature of science. Our journeys to the stars will be made on spaceships created by determined, hardworking scientists and engineers applying the principles of science, not aboard flying saucers piloted by little gray aliens from some other dimension.

Need we be concerned about an invasion of little gray kidnappers? Amused, yes. Concerned, no.

Should we take Strieber, Hopkins, Kinder, et al. seriously? Not really. They are a long, long way from furnishing reliable and replicable data and their rather shaky hypotheses are miles from anything resembling proof.

Should we insist that such semi-hysterical and poorly informed journalistic efforts not be published? Only if we all are a bunch of wet blankets and party-poopers. After all, it has been dull lately and these pseudoscientific thrillers have added a welcome note of excitement. And without these works there would be no puzzles to solve. As the old disclaimer says, "It's fun to be fooled, but it's more fun to know!"

Is the human mind a weird and wonderful place and human behavior a billion-ring circus of astounding events? Unquestionably, yes!

One cannot help but be struck by the thought that, in their way, the UFOnaut creations are of some redeeming value. They, besides their value as entertainment, do provide the useful—albeit unintended—service of directing our attention to the extremities of human belief and the perplexing and perennial problem we have in detecting deception. In spite of all our vaunted

scientific accomplishments, we have today no absolutely certain, accurate, or reliable means for getting at the truth—for simply determining whether or not someone is lying. Not only are the polygraph and the voice-stress analyzer notoriously unreliable and inaccurate; but the professional interrogators, body-language experts, and psychological testers are also the first to admit their lack of predictive skill. If these abductee claims do no more than stimulate greater efforts toward the development of better "truth detectors," then they will have made an important contribution.

When one man has a private conversation with an angel in the corner, we consider it hallucinatory; when twenty people simultaneously see and talk with this angel, we then have good reason to suspect it may not be hallucinatory. When one man *never* sees an angel in the corner until and unless he is hypnotized and regressed, even then such reports are not considered hallucinatory. They are merely confabulations. Nor do we classify him as psychologically disturbed or even as lying. He most likely is as normal and mentally healthy as any one of us. If he has been properly primed with powerful suggestions, he may sincerely believe in the truth of his confabulations.

When all things are considered, we shouldn't be too upset with the creators of and believers in what Martin Gardner (1987) calls "the new science-fiction religion." Tolerance *is* the mark of a civilized mind. We can nevertheless demand that the bookstores and supermarkets classify all such material properly. All UFO, UFO-abductee, past-life, and hypnotic-regression accounts should be taken from the nonfiction counters and moved to the science-fiction shelves.

Notes

1. People familiar with the unreliability of the polygraph will not be impressed. As for Strieber's sanity, there can be no doubt of this. As *Omni* magazine reported, he received a million-dollar advance from his publisher.

2. The dictionary defines an alien as "one who is strange, wholly different in nature, incongruous. . . ."

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