

Magonia

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THE AMERICAN WAY Truth, Justice and Abduction

THOMAS E BULLARD

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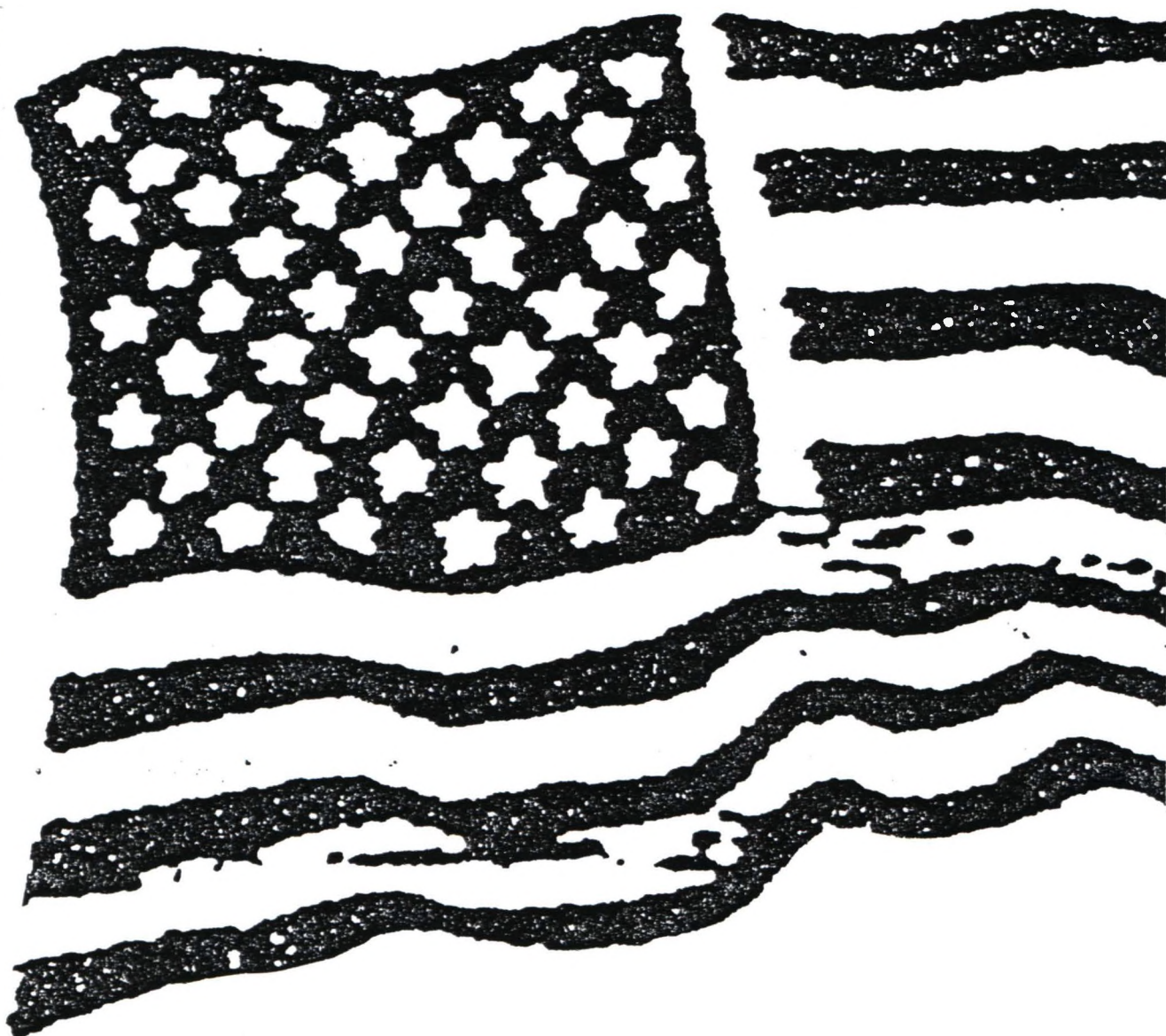
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LETTERS FROM AMERICA

A number of articles in recent issues of *Magonia* have alluded to the growing split between European and American approaches to the UFO mystery. At the Lyon conference in May this year the differing attitudes produced something of a culture clash (although one which was conducted with great *politesse*), and the BUFORA International meeting in London again showed evidence of the widening rift. Walt Andrus's presentation of documents and photographs from Gulf Breeze encountered much more sceptical comment from the assembled European ufologists than Mr Andrus was apparently used to in the States.

Having said that, it is easy to over-estimate the differences. Although the Gulf Breeze presentation produced a sceptical response from the ufological glitterati at the London conference, it was interesting to note that when the chairman asked for a show of hands on whether the audience thought the photos genuine or not, there was a silent majority (oh well, a silent 40%) who voted yes.

Similarly, not all American ufologists are in thrall to the

ETH. In these pages Martin Kottmeyer has challenged the major assumptions of the post-modernist American ufologists, and we are happy to note the return of one of the major voices of the humanist ufology of the 1970's *Caveat Emptor*, after a hiatus of over a decade, renewing its challenge to establishment thinking, and recalling the days when your editors exalted the progressive thinking coming from the US and berating the hide-bound ETH domination of British ufology!

Now *Magonia* presents papers by two leading American ufologists, neither particularly noted as hard-core nuts and bolts proponents, who ask whether the American emphasis on ETH, physical abductions, and government involvement are really as out-of-bounds for serious discussion as many Europeans seem to think. Many aspects of the American UFO scene may seem bizarre or naive to us, but when seen within the context of what is actually happening in America and American ufology, there may be justification for the attitudes taken, even if we cannot accept the conclusions that others have drawn.

● 2. KLASS, Philip J. *UFO Abductions: A Dangerous Game*, Buffalo, NY, Prometheus Books, 1988, 51-63.

BAKER, Robert A. 'The Aliens among us: Hypnotic Regression Revisited'; *Skeptical Inquirer*, 12, 1987, 147-162. 'Q: Are UFO Abduction Experiences Real? A: No, No, a Thousand Times No!'; *Journal of UFO Studies*, 1, 1989, 104-110.

BARTHOLEMEW, Robert E. and BASTERFIELD, Keith, 'Abduction States of Consciousness', 'Abductions: The Fantasy-Prone Personality Hypothesis', *IUR*, 13/2, 3 (March-April, May-June, 1988), 7-9, 15, 9-11.

KOTTMEYER, Martin, 'Break a Leg! The UFO Experience as Theatre', *Magonia*, 27 (September 1987), 3-6.

LAWSON, Alvin H., 'Hypnosis of Imaginary UFO Abductees' in FULLER, Curtis (ed.), *Proceedings of the First International UFO Congress*, New York, Warner Books, 1980, 195-238.

ROGO, D. Scott, 'The Abduction of Sammy Desmond', *IUR*, 12/4 (July-August 1987), 11.

GROSSO, Michael, 'The Secret Symbolism Behind UFO Abductions', *UFO Universe*, November 1988, 44-45, 62-63.

DEVEREUX, Paul, 'Earth-lights', in SPENCER, John and EVANS, Hilary (eds); *Phenomenon*, New York, Avon Books, 1988, 316-328.

KEEL, John; *The Eighth Tower*,

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to manifest physical or quasi-physical objects, the induction of abduction visions by the electromagnetic energy from tectonic stress in rocks, or intervention by unknown powers to alter our habits of thought and behaviour for reasons beyond our ken.²

What the literalist approach offers is a largely self-evident reading of the reports. In a few cases where witnesses invoke religious or other ideas out of step with modern beliefs, interpretation is sanctioned, but seldom needed. Many reports conform to the ETH outright. They describe encounters with alien beings who arrive in spaceships and kidnap humans for purposes that include physical examination. The craft is clearly a product of advanced technology and the examination shows proper signs of scientific curiosity. Hints of planetary disasters and an interest in reproduction suggest that a pragmatic survival motive underlies these visits. The beings seem to control their captives by some form of mental influence, and this control may carry over beyond the abduction as major life changes follow in its stead.

No opponent denies that the ETH account of abduction stories is superficially plausible. The literalist reading certainly offers a self-contained answer. What opponents seem to reject is the naivety of that reading. It simply takes too much at face value without cracking a smile at how close such an explanation comes to science fiction mythology, or how much the stories resemble old lore in modern guise. Deaf and blind to all parallels or similarities, the ETH proponents exist in a vacuum. Since Americans seem to preserve this vacuum with a will, their adherence to the ETH looks to an outsider like a fool's errand instead of a rational choice.

A case can be made that the literalist view is less naive than it seems, and subjectivist sophistication is equally debilitating to rational decisions. Taking witnesses at their word may seem rash. Yet it is just as rash to reject their stories simply because they are fantastic. Some investigators of extraordinary experience narratives, such as David Hufford in his work with Old Hag encounters, break with received wisdom to conclude that witnesses sometimes describe such events with remarkable fidelity.³ Experience may give rise to belief, rather than belief to experience. Ufology offers many good reasons to doubt eyewitness testimony and demonstrates that presuppositions can exert remarkable influence over observations and reports. An anomalous event may be subjective in origin and culturally influenced in description, but this outcome is not inevitable. The liter-

alist looks with sympathy on abductees as the people closest to a strange event, and looks askance at the subjectivist who takes their error for granted.

Much blame has fallen on hypnosis as the real cause of abductions. This is well founded. Expert opinion is unanimous that hypnosis throws open the door to fantasy and confabulation, so that hypnotic testimony can combine fact and error into an inseparable, plausible unity. The risk is clear, but is it realised? If hypnosis truly shapes and distorts abduction testimony, some evidence of this influence should remain. Most critics ignore the reports that have emerged without use of hypnosis. They make up a substantial minority, and compare so favourably with reports obtained by hypnosis that almost no differences in form or content appear. If the hypnotist influences witnesses with his own beliefs, each investigator should leave some distinctive mark on the cases he investigates. Again a comparison shows that the cases of various investigators are all pretty much alike.

The trump card against hypnosis has been the experiments with non-abductees described by Alvin Lawson. Under hypnosis these non-abductees told stories very much like those of 'real' abductees, so the subjectivity of the reports seems sure. In fact these experiments convict neither hypnosis nor abductions. In a comparative test the accounts of non-abductees differed considerably from the accounts of real abductees, a difference best seen in descriptions of the beings. None of the experimental subjects reported the same type of being, but populated their narratives with a varied array of 'aliens'. The range of variety compares with that of the real cases, but the frequency of each type corresponds to chance distribution, and in no way approximates the regularity with which small grey humanoids appear among real cases. The similarities are of the more obvious sorts and assertions that the two bodies of reports are alike express more hope than reality.⁴ Americans may keep the faith with hypnosis for all the wrong reasons, but in fact there are sound reasons for that faith.

The same distrust applies to Jungian theories. They are beguiling, and Dennis Stillings can sweep up much of the abduction story into the Jungian scheme, but his argument remains unconvincing. The present world situation is supposed to be so dreadful that a salvation myth emerges into our consciousness, but when has the world ever not been in dreadful shape? If abductions seem too real to be dream-like, Stillings has the answer - they are not ordinary dreams but archetypal dreams. If abductions have a physical

component, he has an answer for this eventuality as well - the psychic and physical realms become one and indistinguishable.⁵ Joseph Campbell's myth of the hero follows a pattern of separation, initiation (ordeal, assimilation, and adoption), then return of a wiser, improved person. This pattern clearly fits abductions, but it just as well fits the life of a youth who goes off to college. As Freud is supposed to have said, sometimes a cigar is just a good smoke. An interpretation of abductions in terms of symbols and psychodrama is quite possible, but what makes it compelling? This psychological theory is broad enough to encompass almost anything, as speculative as the ETH, and little better credited by establishment science. In a standoff of faith against faith, little wonder that Americans reject the ornate schemas of Jungian thought for the simplicity of aliens.

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The more down-to-earth psychology of predisposition to fantasy is far more believable, but also far from proven. We understand all too little about abductees as individuals. What their personality traits and life circumstances may contribute to the story remains an unknown quantity and our scant knowledge impressionistic at best. Yet abductees seem to be a diverse group, not obviously prone to fantasy or boundary deficiency except by the circular argument that they report an abduction experience. A psychological profile of Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker shows no inclination to fantasy.⁶ The Slater study of nine abductees is cited by Kottmeyer as evidence that these subjects display boundary deficit symptoms.⁷ A sample of nine is sufficient to refute the charge that all abductees are psychotic, but hardly adequate to demonstrate that many of them have boundary deficit personalities. In fact the description of these individuals as 'distinctive, unusual, and interesting' suggests that they are more different than alike. June Parnell, whose doctoral work under Leo Sprinkle included personality testing of some 200 participants in his annual 'contactee conferences', found significant evidence for creativity and fantasy among subjects who reported communication with aliens, but no significant evidence among subjects reporting various UFO encounters. Considerable care must be taken in interpreting her work, since these

subjects are not all classical abductees by any means. Of those subjects I read as most likely to be abductees, their 'fantasy' scores are actually among the lowest, no higher than scores for people reporting only lights in the sky. In any case the expected hierarchy of scores fails to appear - there is no increase in fantasy indicators as the strangeness of UFO stories increases.⁸ Alexander Keul and Ken Phillips seem to find enhanced creative and artistic abilities among UFO reporters in general and not just among abductees.⁹ Any conclusion must be of the most tentative sort, but the meagre and oblique evidence available suggests no radical psychological departure of abductees from narrators of less fantastic UFO stories.

The search for parallels is dear to the hearts of folklorists who have engaged in it for decades on the premise that world-wide likenesses in narrative reflect a similarity of psychological experience among all humans, not a similarity of literal experience. A list of parallels between abductions and other cultural phenomena is impressive, including diminutive beings, kidnap, torture, enchantment, changelings, and a subterranean other-world. Probably no other discovery gives as much pause to proponents of literal abductions.

In comparing folklore and abductions, many features fit but at the same time many do not. The temptation is strong to call attention to the successes and ignore the failures. No reliable standards say how many hits against how many misses justify a comparison, but abduction reports differ in many ways from the cited parallels. Fairies do not fly spaceships or use eyelike scanning devices, for example. When abstracted to general terms, the features of the abduction story can match folklore or symbol systems with impressive fidelity. Yet the truth is, we have traditions for all occasions. Whatever the abduction story described, whether the beings roasted their captives on a spit or played pinochle with them, an equally appropriate tradition could be found and the parallel would look just as impressive.

The case for literal abductions stands on its merits as well as on the shortcomings of its adversaries. Multiple witnesses report some abductions, a significant criterion for objectivity. The explanation that shared fantasy or influence of one witness on another is responsible for these reports founders in as prominent an example as the Hill case, where Barney's experience took an independent course and complemented Betty's account without duplicating it. Accounts sometimes claim physical evidence in the form of body

New York, Dutton, 1975. VALLEE, Jacques; *The Invisible College*, New York, Dutton, 1975. EVANS, Hilary; *Gods, Spirits, Cosmic Guardians*, Wellingborough, Aquarian Press, 1987.

●● 3. HUFFORD, David J., 'Ambiguity and the Rhetoric of Belief', *Keystone Folklore*, 21, 1977, 11-24.

●● 4. SMITH, Willy, 'A Second Look', *Magonia*, 6, 1981, 3-5. ROGO, D. Scott, 'Imaginary Facts: The Case of Imaginary Abductions', *IUR*, 10/2, March-April 1985, 3-5. BULLARD, Thomas E., 'Hypnosis and UFO Abductions: A Troubled Relationship', *Journal of UFO Studies*, 1, 1989, 3-40.

●● 5. STILLINGS, Denis, 'Missing Time, Missing Links', *Magonia*, 28, Jan. 1988, 3-6.

●● 6. HICKSON, Charles and MENDEZ, William; *UFO Contact at Pascagoula*, Tucson, Arizona, Wendelle C. Stevens, 1983, 245-260.

●● 7. *Final Report on the Psychological Testing of UFO 'Abductees'*, Mount Rainier, Md, Fund for UFO Research, 1985. KOTTMEYER, Martin, 'Abductions: The Boundary Deficit Hypothesis', *Magonia*, 32, March 1988, 3-7.

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its mould, adapting even personal experience to the form and stereotype of prior examples until distinctions between truth and fiction blurred beyond recognition. Theories, methods and comparisons can identify the rhetoric and formulas or point up the art and artifices of the genre. but the central dilemma remains unresolved: Is the story true or false? Any text can claim to be true, and if the only evidence is a text, fiction counterfeits truth to perfection. Theoretical positions suggest probabilities, but gain little purchase to separate the true from the false in any definitive way. If any one approach was always reliable, philosophy of science scholarship could fold up, but it stays a healthy enterprise.

We know the complexities surrounding the Indian narratives. Most of the abduction evidence is again in the form of texts, and non-literal interpretations have paid almost exclusive attention to this frustrating class of evidence. Abduction stories carry an added burden because we do not know if even one of them is true. Rival theories can flourish because no one has an infallible, all-conquering answer. Each solution has its strengths and weaknesses but none has proof, so choices may rely more on temperament than epistemological soundness.

Mark Rodeghier pointed out recently that different styles characterise European and American ufological enquiry.¹⁴ Europeans tend to work from the top down, starting with fully articulated, highly abstract theories and methods, seeking a place for the subject phenomenon within a broad scope of meanings. The phenomenon is secondary to the theory. It orders knowledge of many phenomena and neither stands nor falls on its success with any one of them. Success itself seems to have an aesthetic dimension, so that elegant integration of a phenomenon into the architecture of the system counts for more than close adherence to the facts. This primacy of the theory justifies taking a few liberties with the evidence, selecting, bending or abstracting it until the result is an idealised phenomenon matched to the theory, but perhaps no longer an accurate reflection of the original sources.

Americans reverse this order and work from the bottom up, wallowing in facts, often content just to accumulate and enumerate them. Explanations follow as an after-thought, on the grounds that the evidence speaks pretty much for itself. Suspicious of abstractions that range very far from the empirical base, Americans often feel satisfied to cobble together a few unsystematic generalisations and prefer to isolate phenomena rather than relate them. In

European eyes this approach is narrow and intellectually unadventurous. American devotion to the ETH looks like an urge to impose an outworn idea on abduction reports, an unimaginative literalism that downplays their fantastic character and refuses to give serious attention to alternatives. To American eyes Europeans are too impatient with evidence. They rush off in unseemly haste to abstract, theorise and debate theories without ever confronting the factual base on its own merits.

All right, while being true to their inclinations Europeans choose psychosocial explanations and Americans the ETH. Can we leave the matter there? I think not, because these choices have consequences. If any criterion of preference can be found between the European way and the American way of looking at abductions, that criterion lies in the treatment of evidence. Americans start with the more complex assumption when they opt for the ETH, and thereby violate the principle of parsimony; but Europeans enter a labyrinth of theoretical arguments where the phenomenon itself gets lost all too easily. The lure of comparisons and symbolic interpretations leads theoreticians into the errors of 'stewpot thinking', which Budd Hopkins has warned against.¹⁵

Right or wrong, an ETH interpretation of abductions keeps attention on the reports themselves. Some Europeans complain that abductions are largely an American phenomenon. Can they honestly say that they have actively sought abductees, or that European abductees would know where to turn for a sympathetic hearing of their suspicions or stories? Failure to find abductions may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Respect for the ETH assures that investigators will welcome, value and seek out reports, whereas other assumptions may stifle enquiry and redirect research efforts toward sterile infighting over theoretical stances.

Given our present state of knowledge, recognising the tentativeness of any explanation is necessary on both sides of the physical and intellectual Atlantic. The reasons against the ETH are also many, but more diffuse and subtle, and poorly served by the plethora of unpersuasive alternatives raised thus far. Too often these proposals appear even more naive than the ETH in their treatment of texts, testimony and comparison. If taking witnesses at their word sets the literalist belief on a foundation of shifting sand, that base is still firmer than the thin air of theoretical speculations.

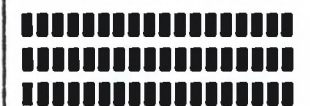
Ask any red-blooded American!

●● 14. RODEGHIER, Mark, Review of UFOs 1947-1987, *Journal of UFO Studies*, 1, 169-172.

●● 15. HOPKINS, Budd, 'Stewpot Thinking: Obstacle to Science', *MUFON UFO Journal*, 251, March 1989, 8-9, 12.



Thomas E. Bullard has a degree in folklore from Indiana University. He has written a major comparative study of the abduction mystery, which is available from the Fund for UFO Research, price \$90. He is also the author of The Airship File, a massive compilation of original documentation of the 1897-98 airship scare.





MOORE AND THE M I L I T A R Y

Dennis Stacy

In the July 1989 *Magonia* Peter Rogerson postulates an interesting, but largely incomplete scenario regarding John Lears's UFO ravings, particularly the latter's call for the impeachment of the President and Congress for having entered into a 'diplomatic' arrangement or treaty whereby the little 'greys', the malevolent aliens, were allowed to abduct humans for their own purposes in exchange for advanced 'alien', i.e. UFO technology.

When a witness in this country is called before a judge in the course of a criminal trial, he or she is asked whether they testify they are about to give is "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" Or at least that's the way it's presented on the TV, and we know the telly wouldn't lie.

And so it is with Rogerson's interpretation of the influences at work on Lear's psyche. It might well be true, too, that Lear is driven by archetypal, psychological demons that cause him to cast the UFO in paranoid terms. But it is not, to quote the bailiff of the court who does the swearing-in, the *whole* truth. That, as always, is more, or in this case Moore, complicated.

Just *how* contorted events can be surfaced at the summer symposium of MUFON held the first weekend in July in Las Vegas, the giant casino gambling strip and oasis in the desert considered the quintessential American crap-shoot. The theme of the symposium, to give Rogerson his due, was 'The UFO Cover-Up: A Government Conspiracy?' William Moore had been scheduled to speak Saturday night in front of Stanton Friedman, but was nowhere in evidence, nor had his paper been submitted previously to MUFON for publication in the symposium proceedings. Instead, Friedman and Moore switched slots, Moore arriving only about 15 minutes before his talk was scheduled to begin.

To the dismay of many, and the active consternation of several, Moore's talk turned out to be a lengthy refutation of, and 'confession' to, charges made by one Robert Hastings, which appeared in an article in the June issue of *MUFON Journal*. Hastings questioned, in part, whether Moore might not be a 'mole' or other agent in the hire of a government or military intelligence agency. Moore confessed that, indeed he had been, but largely in an unwitting role, an entirely unexpected revelation that resulted in angry cat-calls from some of Lear's more fervent followers, and once or twice threatened to bring the whole thing to a confused standstill.

Space may not permit a complete sorting out of the personalities and events involved but I'll try to be as brief and succinct as possible for those operating under the handicap of not being backgrounded in the intricate twists and turns of contemporary American ufology. Our summarised story begins ten years ago in the summer of 1979. Flush from having co-authored (with Charles Berlitz) the successful *Philadelphia Experiment*, Moore moved his family from Minnesota to Arizona, where he joined the board of directors of APRO. One of their more colourful constituents or contacts was a man named Paul Bennewitz, a physicist of sorts with his own small electronics concern. Thunder Science, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, home to Kirtland Air Force Base, the Manzano Nuclear Weapons Storage Facility and nearby Sandia Laboratories. Albuquerque then was a hotbed of government-military activity and research, particularly relating to SDI, the so-called 'Star Wars'. Bennewitz's house in the fairly affluent Four Hills section of town actually overlooked Manzano and Kirtland, which adjoins the city's municipal airport. It is not uncommon for commercial visitors to see the B-1 take off and land, as I have, at one of the runways Kirtland shares with the city. Kirtland is also the site of one of the world's largest wooden structures, a hangar sometimes used in the testing of EMP effects, the electromagnetic pulse storm associated with a nuclear explosion and capable of fusing the delicate electronic components employed in most space age weapon and communication systems.

It was also not uncommon for Bennewitz to see UFOs from his rooftop; in fact, he had countless stills and feet of film to 'prove' it. Unfortunately, according to Moore Bennewitz also had an overactive imagination and an absence of any sort of psychic governor that might have turned off or reduced some of his more extravagant and outrageous speculations. To others however, especially the flood of eager (and eventually influential) ufologists and researchers who soon

as well as his mental and physical health, suffered a serious decline. Moore said that Bennewitz was hospitalised under psychiatric care, but I heard this disputed by someone who said they had spoken to Bennewitz's son. Other eyewitnesses to events agreed, however, that his mental state deteriorated considerably, even if stopping short of actual confinement.

On the face of it, most Europeans may be already baulking, not necessarily given, as are their American counterparts, to an inherent distrust of government and military officialdom. Even Europeans who do routinely take official pronouncements with a grain of salt, may well want to stop short of ascribing such behaviour to anything remotely involved with UFOs. Fortunately, the sceptics, in the form of James Oberg, have already ridden to our rescue. Oberg, for one, has long argued that the pre *perestroika* Soviet hierarchy routinely engaged in the manipulation of UFO reports, mainly as a way of letting pass reports that were actually civilian observations of covert military activities not subject to shielding.

The important point to remember here is that said government officials and policy were not actively engaged in a conscious cover-up of the UFO phenomenon itself. *But that UFO reports, as a category, are much easier to dismiss and ignore than the real phenomena!* As evidence, you have only to ask yourself, "where do UFO reports go?" and its corollary, "Whatever becomes of them?", and the answers are nowhere and nothing, not to the investigative media, not to the Houses of Congress (or Parliament), and certainly not to the military authorities themselves. They are *sui generis* dead-end, in and of themselves, save for socially 'safe' and 'acceptable' civilian UFO organisations and individuals, which can be dismissed as misguided 'crackpots', who, after all, are only exercising their rights within a democratic society, even if that right is the privilege of self-delusion.

European ufologists as a whole have a way of looking down their snouts at Americans who mention the military and conspiracy in the same breath as UFO, which we all know is only space age folklore. But even as I write, the Sunday *New York Times* ("All the News That's Fit to Print") of August 9, 1989, is before me. On the front page is an article headlined 'Retribution Seen in Atom Industry' followed in smaller type by '4 Who Cited Safety Say They Were Told To See Therapist'. May I quote the first two paragraphs:

"At least four workers who complained about safety and environmental problems at four military nuclear plants run for the government by private

contractors say they were ordered by their superiors to see psychiatrists or psychologists.

"The workers and their lawyer all say that they believe the orders came as retaliation for the allegations they made. In two highly publicized cases the allegations against the contractors were confirmed; in the others they have been rejected."

The Land of Opportunity is also where we learned, twenty years after the fact that the Army in the early 1950's experimented with LSD on the citizens under their nominal protection, resulting in at least one known suicide. If we have a collective proclivity for paranoia maybe it's justified and maybe it's not. Colonel North is either a national hero or a political scoundrel, depending on who you interview.

None of the aforementioned is by way of saying that the government *knows* more about UFOs than the average civilian ufologist, or that there is anything about UFOs to know, least of all that they represent the vanguard of an alien invasion force, hell-bent on mutilating humans. But it is to say that the scenario outlined by Moore, in its generalities and particulars, has its own peculiar precedents and in no way lies outside the realm of everyday possibility. In short, no deep psychological interpretation of the individual and collective American psyche need be conjured up or called forth to explain the events described by Moore other than real-time occurrences involving real time people.

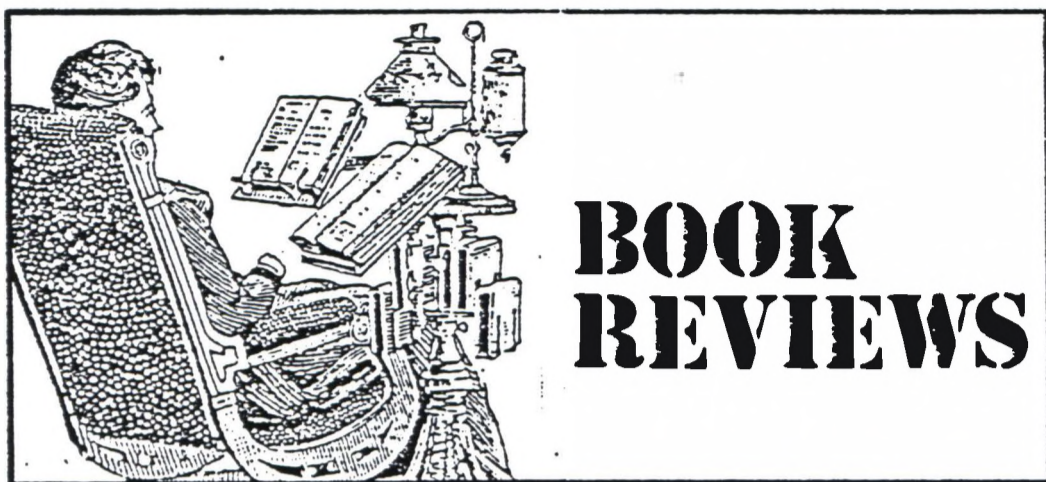
The fly in an already sticky ointment at this point was Bennewitz himself. Obviously the Air Force knew they had a loose cannon on the deck, and just as obviously they underestimated the degree of looseness by a magnitude or two. The best that can be said in their favour is that they probably had no way of knowing their own activities would drive Bennewitz over the edge. In any event, should the case ever come to court, their defence would be that Bennewitz had driven himself crazy. Knowing he was the subject of AFOSI surveillance only confirmed Bennewitz's penchant for paranoia.

By mid-1982, according to Moore, "Paul's story contained virtually all the elements found in the current crop of rumours being circulated around the UFO community. there were two groups of aliens, one malevolent, one more friendly. the malevolent ones, which Paul referred to as the 'greys', were really in control, and they were the ones responsible for the cattle mutilations, for human abductions and the implanting of sinister control devices in humans, for maintaining a secret underground base under Archuleta Peak near Dulce in northwestern New Mexico, and for having supplied



UFO reports as a category are much easier to dismiss and ignore than the real phenomena!





■ EVANS, Hilary. *Alternate States of Consciousness; unself, otherself and superself*. Aquarian Press, 1989. £6.99.

In his latest book Hilary Evans discusses the altered states of consciousness in which we encounter Magonia, and where reality is deconstructed. Previous studies of ASC have tended to come from a medical/academic background, and concentrate on states induced by drugs, meditation and other techniques; Evans on the other hand discusses primarily spontaneous ASC's, especially those on the debatable frontier between psychopathology and parapsychology. These states, which Evans sees existing in contradistinction to the 'Usual States of Consciousness' (USC) - the world of daylight reason and commonsense - he divides into the unself, otherself and superself of the subtitle, and paradoxical states.

In unself there may be either a lowering of the state of consciousness as in sleep or somnambulism, or fugue states such as highway hypnosis; or a diminution of the personality and activity such as occur in schizophrenic or depressive apathy. In extreme cases this can take the form of nihilistic delusions, the belief that one is dead or is diminishing like the Incredible Shrinking Man.

It is perhaps the other three states which tend most to attract the attention of the psychical researchers, ufologists and the like. Unself states are states in which the experient becomes 'someone else', as in possession

trance, multiple personality or hypnotic past life regression. These states may be associated with physiological changes, the surfacing of hidden talents or the resurfacing of lost knowledge, etc. In some cases these other states can be seen as examples of symbolic suicide.

Higher Self states might be characterised by feelings of 'absolute possibility' or inflationary states. They may range from transient peak experiences to fully-fledged mania. The enhanced powers may be those of physical endurance, such as the fire walkers or the increased productivity of the 'inspired artist'. Also associated with this inflationary scenario is the hyperaesthesia which it has been suggested is caused by malfunctioning of the brain's information filtering system. People with mild, generalised hyperaesthesia may well come to think of themselves as psychic or especially empathic, which adds to the inflationary over-confidence and sense of specialness. Often, highlighted powers in one area may be accompanied by a narrowing or lowering elsewhere, as in many hypnotic or hysterical states: the person with hysterical paralysis yet with extraordinary visual or auditory hyperaesthesia would be a case in point. Extreme examples are provided by the *idiot-savants* discussed by Darold Treffert.

Evans leads us through a variety of strange experiences, all suggesting that ASC are natural (everyone dreams), and in their more extreme forms can be triggered by a

variety of physical and/or psychological stresses. In different people these produce greater or lesser alteration, blurring the line between the pathological and the non-pathological. The nocturnal UFO encounter and abduction provide a good example of how ASC can develop in the crucial brew of drowsiness, hyperaemias and anxiety, with diminished sensory input, which can generate near paranoid anxiety states in the most stable, with distortions of sensory experience. In some vulnerable people the loss of continuous intense sensory input may lead to transient depressed and fugue states with extreme feelings of helplessness and "being trapped". These feelings may be translated into abduction fantasies with their imagery of forced medical inspection, rape and bondage.

If one has a criticism of this book it is the over-dependence on antique sources such as Charcot, while the highly relevant works of Ian McKellar are passed over in surprising silence. Hysteria, like witchcraft and UFO abductions, was probably a demand-produced reality in which the 'patient' acted out the fantasies of the interrogator. This should not blind us from realising that Hilary Evans is one of the few interesting and stimulating writers in a field plagued by dullness. We might cavil about the odd detail here and there, but reading Evans's books in succession you get the impression of someone who is thinking new thoughts and groping towards something which may liberate our field from its many straitjackets

Peter Rogerson

■ MOODY, Robert. *The Light Beyond*. Macmillan, 1988. £9.95.

In his latest study of the near-death experience, Moody comes out of the closet and declares himself a survivalist, but as with a number of these books it is difficult to know just how literally the author interprets the experience. For instance, does Moody believe that out-of-the-body experiences involve quasi-ethereal etheric bodies which perceive the environment by means of photons falling on etheric retina? If so he clearly does not realise that this would make it impossible for the etheric body to be invisible! Equally, it is not clear whether he regards the transcendental locations as being quasi-physical locations.

A major point overlooked in such studies is that they are not directly studying experiences, but are dealing with narratives which have been socially constructed, in which experiences which may not be describable in detail, are reconstructed using the idiom of popular culture and cliché in an effort to communicate something of the ineffable.

Moody follows in a long tradition of pietistic tracts in making healing and conversionary claims for his previous books, such as in the story of the crippled old lady who was given the strength to get out and about again after reading a copy of *Life after Life* given to her by a neighbour.

Much of the book has a typical atmosphere of American 'new-ageism' as in the extraordinary claim that acceptance of an afterlife would put an end to war. Absolute religious faith in afterlife certainly did not deter the Iranians or the Crusaders. Many of the claimed post-experience character changes seem to resemble those of members of encounter groups etc., and the "feelings of being enveloped in an ocean of love", "loving everybody" and going about with a fixed smile, would be seen by many as classic denial symptoms. This does not of course invalidate the phenomenological character of the experiences which, even if subjective, are proudly meaningful to the experient. Peter Rogerson

■ DELGADO, Pat and ANDREWS, Colin. *Circular Evidence: a detailed investigation of the flattened swirled crops phenomenon.* London, Bloomsbury, 1989. £14.95

■ FULLER, Paul and RANGLES, Jenny. *Controversy of the Circles: an investigation of the crop circles mystery.* BUFORA, 1989

■ MEADEN, George Terence. *The Circles Effect and its Mysteries.* Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts, Artetech, 1989. £9.95

Crop damage has numerous causes, such as strong winds, hail, plant diseases, pests, or trampling by persons and animals. But when the damage takes the form of sharply defined circles, ringed circles and even symmetrically arranged groups of circles, then some more elaborate explanation is called for. These three new books complement one another in that they present and interpret the evidence in different ways.

Circular Evidence contains excellent photographs, mainly in colour, and detailed descriptions, which make it useful as a work of reference. However, its treatment of theories is weak and highly speculative. The theory that they may be caused by whirlwinds is dismissed as 'a joke'. The authors conclude, after discussing various unlikely explanations, that 'the circles are created by an unknown force manipulated by an unknown intelligence'. Of course, if you accept that theory, then you don't have to bother thinking about it any further, as such a theory can explain practically anything.

Dr Meaden, in *The Circles Effect and its Mysteries*, refuses to take such an easy way out. He has been working on the circles problem since 1980. He is a physicist with a strong interest in meteorology, especially the more unusual or poorly researched kinds of meteorological phenomena is editor of the *Journal of Meteorology*, which contains many interesting reports on such topics. Meaden has developed the theory that crop circles are caused by 'a previously unrecognized kind of atmospheric plasma vortex'. Ordinary fair-weather whirlwinds, sometimes observed in

England on hot summer afternoons, would not leave regular circles in crops. Meaden attributes this regularity to intense ionisation. Under the right conditions, separation of electric charges in the rotating column can lead to ionisation intense enough to cause powerful electric fields which constrain the air to move in a highly regular manner. Meaden's descriptions of the processes involved are rather hard to follow, and there is no mathematical treatment of the theory given in the book. This is hardly surprising, as mathematical descriptions of the behaviour of rotating fluids are somewhat complicated, and will be made even more so when the effects of electric charge separation have to be taken into account!

The theory is still being developed and Meaden has to keep making adjustments to account for newly discovered features of the circles. The attitude of professional meteorologists to his work is somewhat sceptical and aloof, most of them rejecting the circles as the work of hoaxers. Meaden's reply to them is: 'But as with all specialist topics in science, those who are unqualified to judge should refrain from comment. No-one, but *no-one*, should adopt a posture on the circles problem without first examining, in the company of an expert guide, at least a few circles in the field.'

If the theory of plasma vortices should turn out to be correct, it would explain a great many UFO reports, much to the chagrin of ETH enthusiasts. Such vortices would

glow in the dark and produce alarming electrical effects, such as those described in many UFO encounters. A number of examples are given in the book. Meaden also gives three eyewitness accounts of circles actually being formed, including one by Arthur Shuttlewood, who was with a large number of other witnesses at the time. There are a number of bizarre reports in Shuttlewood's writings that could be attributed to sightings of plasma vortices.

In *Controversy of the Circles*, Fuller and Rangles give an excellent review of circles reports, theories and field investigations. All of the theories are discussed, but Meaden's is by far the most favoured by BUFORA investigators. The authors are well aware of the various objections to the theory, though, and there is no tendency to be dogmatic about it. Considerable space is devoted to revealing the activities of the myth-makers, and the more irresponsible ufologists who constantly air their absurd notions in the tabloids and in the barmier UFO journals.

The authors of all three books are in agreement in dismissing hoaxing as a major cause of circle formation. They point to the great complexity of the manner in which the crops are laid down and various other details which are difficult or impossible to produce artificially. This leaves us with only Dr Meaden's theory worthy of serious consideration, unless we prefer to start burbling about mysterious forces and alien intelligences whenever the subject is mentioned. John Harney



Circles in a field of rye at Winterbourne Stoke
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■ OWEN, Alex. *The Darkened Room; women, power and spiritualism in late 19th century England.* Virago, 1989, £11.95.

Alex Owen studies the lives of a number of women who were associated with 19th century spiritualism. She sees mediumship as a way in which women could improve their social status, independence and circle of friends. It was one of the few semi-respectable careers open to working-class women, and even for the middle classes it could lead to an escape from the confines of the drawing room and being an adjunct to a male world. Instead the woman medium could become a figure of power and influence in her own right, and could associate with the rich, famous and intellectual.

British spiritualism, though generally progressive in outlook was considerably less radical than in the United States, where free-love was discussed and sometimes practiced. Despite liberating women, spiritualism still held to traditional notions of femininity, in which women were seen as submissive instruments of spiritual power.

If women became too progressive and independent however, their husbands and other relatives might be tempted to have them placed in lunatic asylums. Two women who suffered in this manner were Georgina Weldon, who turned her home into an orphanage organised on progressive lines, and Louisa Lowe, who acted too hastily on the advice of automatic writing. It must be admitted that both women were probably manic-depressive, and Mrs Lowe had periods of severe paranoid psychosis - but as the saying goes, "just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you", and locking your wife in a lunatic asylum was a de facto form of divorce in the 19th century. It was of course much harder for wives to have their husbands locked up. In Mrs Lowe's case it is difficult to tell whether the automatic writing (a dialogue between an Old Lady and God, in effect dialogue between depression and mania) exacerbated her psychosis or provided a safety valve. Some of her activities recall those of modern day 'psychic questers'.

