

20

**Is it tomorrow or just the
end of time?**

Connie Samaras

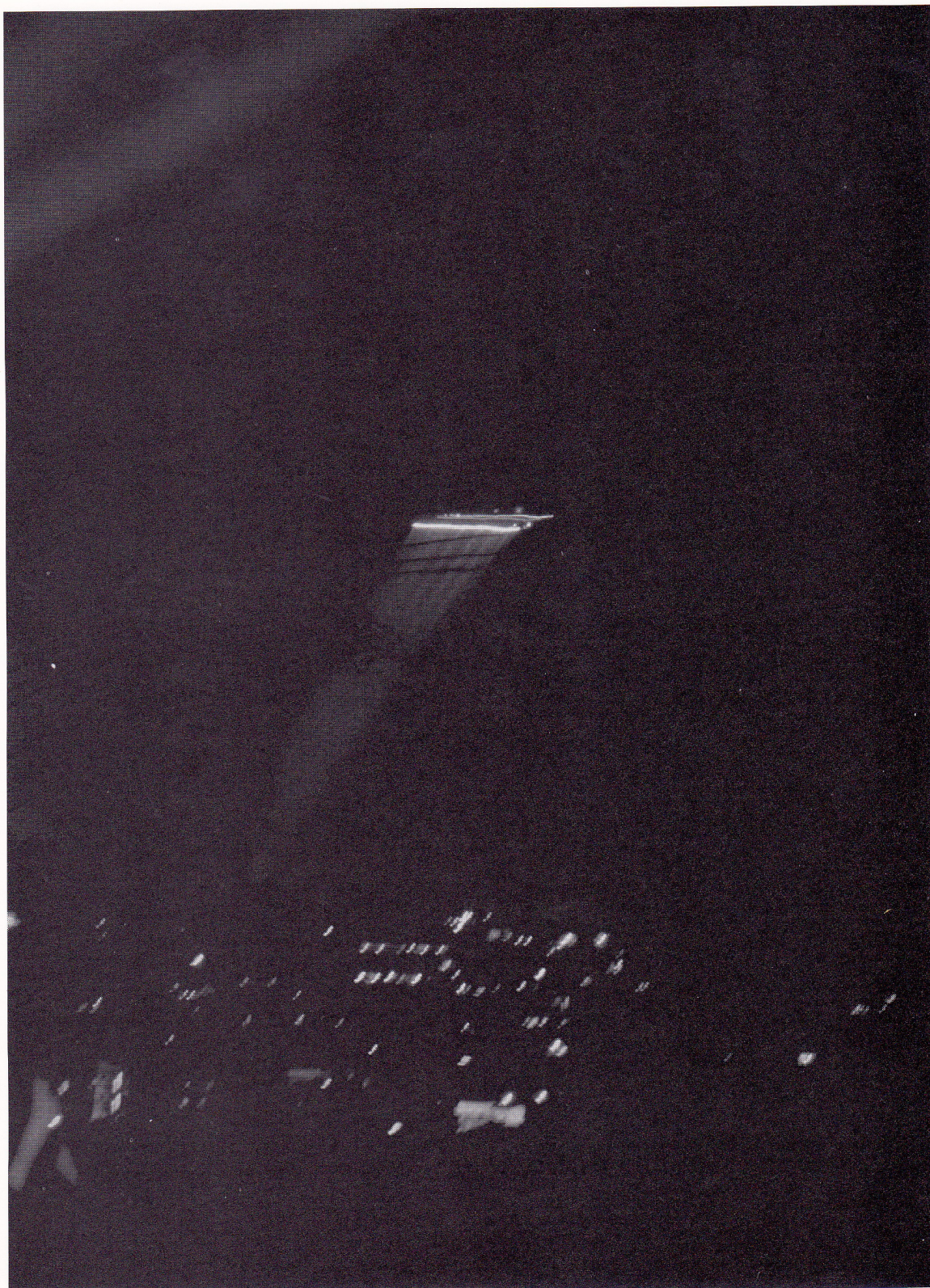


Figure 20.1 Identifiable Flying Object, LAPD helicopter in pursuit, Hollywood/Silverlake border

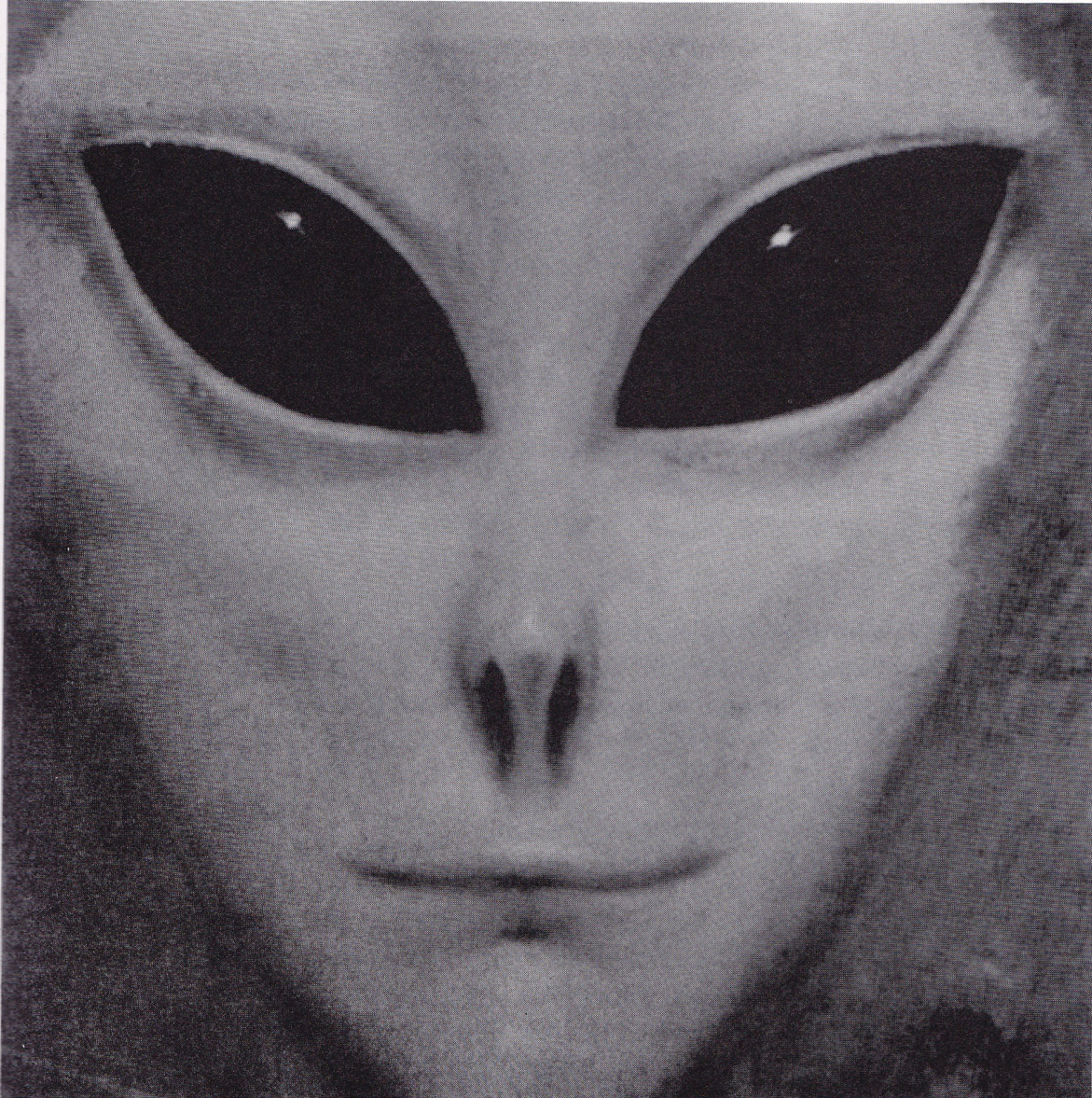


Figure 20.2 Alien head – first mass produced and distributed in the US 1987

ABDUCTION EXPERIENCE: IMPRESSIONS OF ABDUCTION NARRATIVES
READ BY THE CORRECTOR, RECORDED 17-19 MAY 1994, L.A., CA, USA

(1)

"On the world stage the white man is just a microscopic minority."
(Malcolm X, 1964)

(2)

Since 1990, the corrector has read numerous accounts of abduction experiences. She has also watched all recent US films on the subject and has attended various conferences and forums devoted to ufology as well as abductions. What follows are a few initial observations.

(3)

In 1992 the Intruders Foundation funded a Roper Poll to determine what percentage of the US population has been abducted by aliens. In looking over the test questions, the corrector noted that she had a yes response to the majority of the questions targeted to identify abductees. Sample questions included:

- Have you ever seen a ghost?
- Have you ever had an out of body experience?
- Have you ever experienced missing time?
- Have you ever woken up paralyzed sensing a stranger in the room?
- Have you ever seen balls of light illuminating your bedroom at night?
- Have you ever seen a UFO?
- Have you ever had unexplained scars or wounds?
- Have you ever felt like you can fly?

(4)

The highest percentage of people responding yes to such questions turned out to be, according to Budd Hopkins (abductee therapist and visual artist), "trend setters, intellectual leaders, and liberals" because "these people tell the truth."

(5)

The majority of reported abductions take place in industrialized countries located in the Northern Hemisphere of the planet. The overwhelming majority of these abductees are taken from the United States.

(6)

The vast majority of abductees tend to be white (a category of ethnicity/race that is, at present, inadequately defined) and middle class (a class strata in the US which is diminishing in size). However, the accuracy of this figure, as well as any other mentioned here, is dependent on an analysis of the methods used by recorders to gather abductee stories.

(7)

Although most abductees are assumed to be predominantly white, the first legitimate case of an alien abduction was that of an interracial couple, Barney and Betty Hill – an African American male and a white American female. They were abducted late at night on 19 September 1961 from their car on a country road near Lincoln, New Hampshire.

(8)

At first it was assumed the Hills had suffered a joint delusion (a *folie à deux*). But because they were an upstanding couple in their community (Barney Hill was president of the New Hampshire National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP) and because their narratives were too closely matched in bizarre detail, the country's leading ufologists decided that this was not a shared delusion.

(9)

Betty Hill is the first woman abductee on record to have reported an examination by aliens involving female anatomy and human reproduction. She stated that alien examiners inserted a long needle into her abdomen with the explanation that they were performing a "pregnancy test."

(10)

The majority of abductees are women. Except for a 1970s' film about the Hills starring James Earl Jones, to date, the majority of Hollywood motion pictures dealing with abduction experiences are about men. Only a recent made-for-TV movie about abductees (made in consultation with the Intruders Foundation) is primarily about women.

(11)

In the last few years there have been numerous reports from female abductees about forced pregnancies. Initially the aliens will often harvest a given human female's eggs and, on a subsequent abduction, will re-implant a fertilized egg back into her uterus. After about 1–2 months, the woman is abducted again and the fetus is harvested and raised *in vitro* on the spacecraft. Sometimes the aliens will also harvest a human fetus from a female abductee, genetically alter it, and raise it *in vitro* on the ship.

(12)

Sometimes these women report being introduced to their offspring. The corrector has only ever read descriptions of these alien/human hybrids as being grey and ugly with patches of blond hair.

(13)

Two types of aliens are typically described by abductees. Those that fetch the abductees from earth are described as under five feet tall and grey with big heads and sometimes, as Betty Hill first reported, with big noses. Once in the examination area, the abductee meets what seems to be the head alien, or head examiner. This alien is taller with almond-shaped eyes, a little mouth and almost no nose.

(14)

The description of the "head" alien is the image most typically reproduced in the United States. The corrector has noted that this image is similar to that of a human light-skinned aborted fetus and/or the head of her cat Leo when she pulls back his ears.

(15)

The examiner alien is said to communicate with the abductees telepathically. Unlike the greys, the examiner seems a bit more compassionate in its attempt to help the abductee overcome her or his terror. Both types of aliens, however, are far less emotional than human beings. Many abductees report that the aliens are both intrigued and repelled by our inability to background our emotionality.

(16)

The majority of material on abductions examined by the corrector often leaves the impression that the greatest horror is the alien probing of human orifices and the sometimes subsequent implantation into the body of various alien devices often resembling double-coiled IUDs in their description.

(17)

The corrector has noticed that the probing of male orifices is given particular attention over the probing of female orifices in abduction literature. The violation of the male body is discussed in language developed on earth in the late twentieth century used first to discuss the sexual abuse of women. In *Communion*, the 1987 autobiographical account of abductee, heterosexual family man, and horror story writer Whitley Strieber, careful attention is paid both in the book and film to the anal probe performed on Strieber by the aliens and his feelings of violation.

(18)

At the 1992 UFO ExpoWest in Los Angeles, held next to LAX, Budd Hopkins, in discussing his 1993 made-for-TV-movie *Intruders* (made in collaboration with a TV network and the Intruder Foundation) mentioned Strieber's *Communion*. Hopkins proclaimed, "Strieber's an abductee but confused" and followed up with this joke: "If you run into an alien who gives you a high five don't bend over."

(19)

In 1993 Hollywood made a film, *Fire in the Sky*, about the abduction of a regular guy. Macho, virile, white and working class, the lead character's unwavering masculinity was presented as proof that the abduction phenomenon is real. During the alien probe scene, all orifices were penetrated except for the anus. This scene was one of the most horrific and brutal ever witnessed by the corrector on film. In fact, the corrector's movie companion, a horror movie buff and niece of a B-horror film actress, was so repelled that she left the theater during this scene.

(20)

In addition to directing the probing and reproductive manipulation, the examiner alien is also the one who sometimes seduces the abductees. Both male and female humans have reported a sexual attraction that they cannot resist. There are descriptions of men ejaculating in response to the alien (often interpreted as means of harvesting sperm). The corrector, however, has yet to read any serious account of a given human female's arousal.

(21)

In all accounts read by the corrector of sexual attraction to the alien examiner, the men are described as perceiving the examiner as female. Similarly, when discussing female abductees' desire, these women are said to perceive the examiner as male. The corrector therefore concludes that no lesbian, gay male, transsexual or bisexual has been abducted to date and are, thus, representative of segments of the human population safe from alien abductions. However, the corrector also recognizes that this, again, may reflect an error in the methodology being used to gather and record abductee narratives.

(22)

Abductees who have not yet accessed their memories suffer an incredible level of anxiety and are said to suffer from post-traumatic syndrome. They have terrible nightmares, nagging fears, panic disorders, the feeling that something is not right, and a deep sense of shame.

(23)

In his 1994 book *Abduction*, Harvard psychiatrist John Mack states that he believes abduction memories are not masks for early sexual abuse, incest and/or other traumatic abuse. He insists these narratives are authentically about alien abduction. He has found, however, that "sexual abuse appears to be one of the forms of human woundedness that, at least from the experiencer's standpoint, has led the aliens to intervene in a protective or healing manner."

(24)

Dr Mack has also discovered that his clients, although terrified by their initial abduction experiences (recent research claims that abductees are taken repeatedly throughout their lifetime – additionally, abduction experiences are often found to run in the family) eventually make their peace with their trauma through the realization that they have been chosen by aliens to communicate to humans that the earth is in grave danger of a complete eco and/or political collapse.



(25)

This collapse is imminent and, once it happens, aliens will intervene with the help of enlightened abductees in assisting with a global re-organization.

(26)

The corrector is frequently asked whether or not she believes in aliens. This she cannot yet answer conclusively. She does feel, however, that grass roots organizing and radical politics have become increasingly difficult endeavors for a number of reasons. She sometimes wonders if the inability to imagine social change as something other than the result of a total apocalypse is a constant source of deep anxiety.

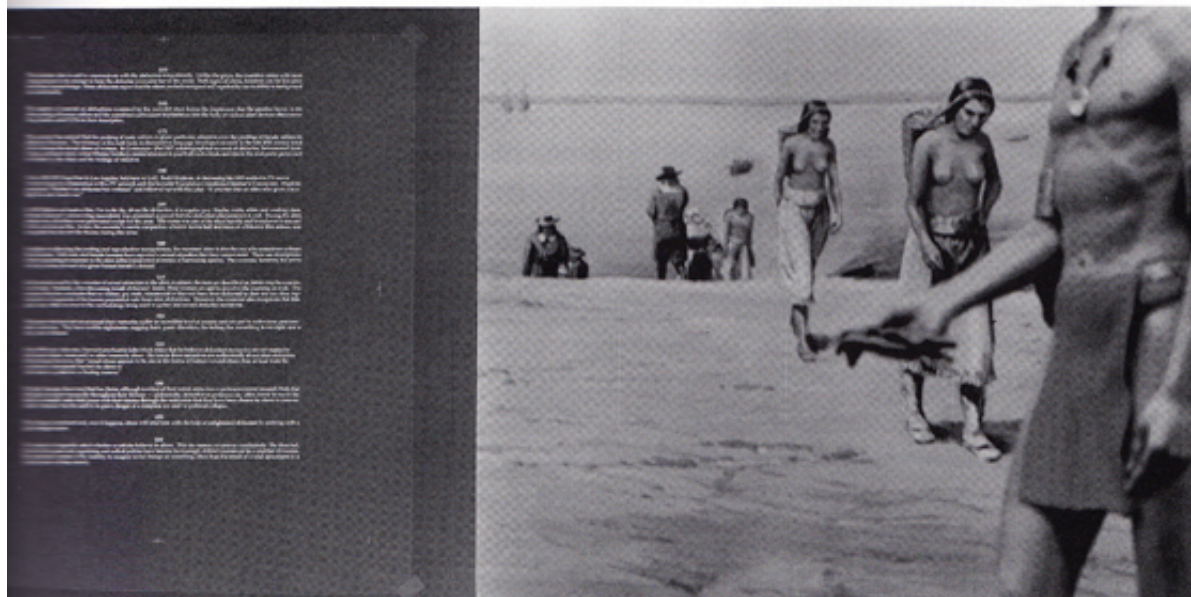


Figure 20.3 New category-abduction experience: impressions of abduction experiences read by the corrector, recorded 17–19 May 1994, L.A., CA.
Source: The Natural History Museum, NYC.

MISSING TIME¹

The text above and the images surrounding it are from a recent body of work I'm doing correcting the representations of earth culture sent out to extraterrestrials by the US in 1977 on the Voyager interstellar space probes. These two spacecraft, containing copper-etched images, writings and audio recordings as a salutary overview to "possible extraterrestrial civilizations," have currently reached our solar system's end and continue to purposefully travel on. Predictably erased are any vestiges of that era's social change movements e.g. civil rights, women's liberation, anti-war, lesbian/gay liberation, nuclear disarmament. The result is a privileging of elite white male American/ Eurocentric culture where women's bodies are depicted as reproductive vessels, non-Western communities are timelessly portrayed as outside of technology and where whiteness and heterosexuality are naturalized because, once again, they are not commented upon. However, the Voyager selection team, headed by astronomer Carl Sagan, saw themselves as having made every attempt to be as rational and inclusive as possible. In contrast, my archive acknowledges its limitations, partiality and irrationality as a means, in part, of addressing the sorts of cultural anxieties produced by the fear and inevitability of psychological and social change.

This is a wide-ranging work. As corrector, I found I had to add several new categories as well as amplify in more complicated and confusing ways, those designed by Sagan and his team. The passage above draws from Harvard psychiatrist John Mack's 1994 publication *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*.² As a means of both addressing and asking the question – Why is it that white middle-class US women are being abducted from their homes, in the middle of the night by a technology so advanced that it's beyond our perceptions but, whenever described, is metaphorically steeped in the technologically mundane like kitchen appliances and car parts? – I'd like to discuss both Mack's work and that of his colleague David Jacobs, a history professor at Temple University who published, in 1992, *Secret Life: Firsthand Encounters of UFO Abductions*.³

In a truly surreal *fin-de-siècle* illustration of Foucaultian theory, these two experts have come forth with sympathetic medical and academic definitions of these abduction tales i.e. what the abductees say is what it is. I remember when I first heard about Jacobs and Mack. I was at a UFO convention near the LA airport. It was packed with several hundred people. As you entered the lobby, a convention sign guiding you upstairs perkily sat next to a baby grand piano belting out, completely on its own, "I'm Just Mad About You." Inside, Budd Hopkins, hypnotist and legitimizer of abduction narratives, but who doesn't really count because he was trained as an artist, was rhapsodizing

about how these books, coupled with the 1993 production of the TV movie *Intruders*, were about to revolutionize the perception of abduction lore and ufology from the domain of crackpots and ex-CIA agents to institutional and professional credibility. I, too, awaited these books with bated breath (but not for the same reasons). Predictably, as with Sagan, cultural critique, historical circumstance, political realities and semiotics are out the door here (or, in abductee-speak, out the window).

These narratives and descriptions of events may seem quite humorous. But, having been to so many conventions and forums on the subject as well as having consumed so many of these narratives, I'm hesitant to have a good laugh over them since the overriding sense one comes away with is that there is a great deal of pain being expressed here. It's true, as some therapist friends of mine have remarked, that these UFO groups serve as a kind of containment field for schizophrenia and other mental disorders. But the main drive of people like Mack, Jacobs and Hopkins is to assure us that these are not the delusions of psychotic people, primarily women, but, rather, the true experiences of normal, everyday people suffering great anguish, silence, and stress about having absolutely no control over repeated violations of their psyches and bodies. They must be believed in order that they can bear witness.

I agree with these new experts that the mass administration of psychotropic drugs is not the solution. However, I depart from their attempts to aculturalize, ahistoricize and apoliticize these narratives as the road to recovery since I don't believe that what we are bearing witness to is a bipedal alien race, so technologically advanced they leave no material residue whatsoever but so scientifically retarded that their primary preoccupation is with endless ethnographic probes of the "mysteries" of human reproduction and procreative sex. Instead, we are seeing vast and complex metaphors of, and real psychic anguish and confusion over, massive social change and upheaval. As evidenced by science fiction, perceptions of outer space and alien life embody both a reactionary nostalgia for the seamless hegemony of traditional power relations as well as the heterogeneous imaginings of different social spaces crafted by the articulations and longings of oppositional cultures and historically marginalized peoples.

Embedded in these narratives are complex and overlapping amalgamations of desire for both reactionary and progressive social order. Obviously, from my corrector's piece alone one can detect racism, homophobia, heterosexual angst for the kinds of kinship structures and means of sexual contact created, invented, and imagined by queer culture, a fear over the loss of white dominance, a desire by white people to be dominated and taken, an essentialist conviction that gender is based on biology, a dysphoria with the rigidity of a two-sexed gender

system, an anxiety over the double-bind of how one who feels marginalized can speak of their rights without speaking of biology, a crisis of national identity and the fear of a corporate global reorganization, a fear of miscegenation, an anxiety about rapid, unregulated developments in new technologies such as computers and genetic engineering, sexual shame and repression, a terror over the escalating erosion of rights to privacy by a state which subordinates human welfare to corporate welfare, a hatred of feminism and women, and an anxiety over the assault on reproductive rights for women.

But why is it that the feminist language of sexual abuse has been appropriated by these new experts to legitimize these accounts of victimization? Also, why is it that the female body, specifically the white body, is the tableau on which these anxieties are written?

In answering these questions, I'd like to begin with three observations. First, Jacobs states that "no investigator has ever been abducted as a result of his [sic] research." In other words, not unlike my joke that we queers are safe from abductions because these aliens seem only to be interested in procreative sex, these researchers are made safe by their power to define. Second, in all the reading I've done, there has not been any way to stop these repeated abductions until I read Jacobs. It seems that if you train a running video camera on an abductee while she is sleeping, nothing happens. But alas, the tape runs out and the human gets napped or else, mysteriously, the subject will get up and go to sleep on the couch out of the camera's eye and, poof, they're gone. My third point follows this last. For all the sorts of sci-fi, high-tech imaginings this subject would seemingly lend itself to, there is no real technology here just like there's no photographic evidence no matter how many TV shows they air on the subject. Technology, in fact, is stripped away and what we are left with are the naked machinations of human power relations and struggles. It is no coincidence that, when the middle-aged men who dominate UFO conferences are not busy at the podium with abduction horror tales, they are hard at work on government conspiracy theories.

What interests me here is the fear being expressed by these new experts. The fears of the abductees are quite evident. For example, descriptions of these women being taken through windows (while the aliens, like the electronic impulses of TVs, computers, and surveillance systems magically enter and exit through the walls) speak volumes about the disintegration of rights to privacy and the undeniable collapse of public and private. Gone are the days of simplistic separations of public and private spheres. But why is it that the definers appropriate feminist language on sexual abuse? It is because they see themselves as victims but without a hope in sight of change, because, on their planet, to politicize, to put aside biological determinism throws a spaceship-sized wrench into the workings of an imagined manifest

destiny which, in reality, is no longer vertically shaped and erect with an American flag planted on top?

But Mack and Jacobs are not the cartoon constructions of militaristic, spook masculinity one normally encounters among male ufologists. They literally weep for their subjects because they are literally weeping at their own paralysis, a product of the predicament of disorientation which inevitably emerges when one no longer occupies the center position. On the one hand, there's the terror of losing political power by investing it in the "other," a necessary condition for the survival of humanity. On the other, being liberal, they weep for the fact that, despite their investment in the familiar order of things, it is arranging itself daily into the hands of fewer and fewer with a rapidly shrinking winner's circle.⁴ Just as I like to imagine more than two sexes, here I imagine more than two hands: one which gestures in lament to disappearing public access to political dialogue and exchange; one always busily at work trying to dismantle gains made by people of color, women, sexual minorities, and labor; one which beckons in the distance to a fascist breeding ground.

The female body is a perfect projection screen for these reaction formations, the perfect fetishistic foil. First of all, something's terribly wrong, it doesn't really make sense, but we must believe it. However, it's really crazy sounding and, after all, who could really believe a woman? But then again, these are *white* women, not women of color because, if they were, who would possibly believe them? But, ultimately, who even believes white women, especially middle- and upper-class women? It brings to mind a quote from Alice Echols's insightful essay, "White Feminists and the Jackie O. Problem."⁵ In the early days of women's liberation, white male leftists' contempt for feminism and denial of the politics of gender were "encapsulated in that taunt-posed-disingenuously-as-a-question, 'You mean, you think Jackie O. is oppressed?'"

But it's not just the abductees that are gendered female. So too are the aliens despite Jacobs' feeble attempts to determine their gender in light of the irritating handicap that they have no identifiable genitalia. The aliens are short, thin, light, hairless with no discernible muscle structure and opaque, unreadable eyes which seem to transfix – sounds like the Twiggy look. Comfortingly, though, they seem to have no teeth. They are super technological but descriptions of examination equipment read like an inventory of Julia Child's kitchen. Additionally, they are highly racialized, mostly constructed in the form of Asian stereotypes. They are short, inscrutable, unfeeling, industrious, task-oriented, organized by mass consciousness not individualism, able to invade us with their technology against our inability to invade them. Their leaders are colored yellow/tan with slanted eyes. Add to this, as many theorists such as Rey Chow⁶ have pointed out, that a hallmark of Orientalizing is the Western feminizing of all Asian bodies because, in

the hierarchy of gender, woman is lesser, and we are back to the human-snatching alien as a female construction.

Some of Mack's colleagues have surmised that he has gone over the deep end because of a broken heart. As someone who has been over that cliff myself, I can empathize. I am not a believer in a hierarchy of pain and abuse, it's all relevant, it's all important. For example, is physical abuse any less traumatic than sexual abuse? Is law professor and anti-porn feminist Catharine MacKinnon correct in assuming that "genocidal rape" in Bosnia is a greater trauma than date rape in the US? But even though there is a sensitivity to the experts Mack and Jacobs (thank you feminism), it is cut short (thank you gender, race, and class asymmetry) by the protectionist rhetoric of a colonizer who can't get to his colony because it's in another dimension. A colonizer terrified of yet mesmerized by the realization that more than one dimension has always existed, that time and space are forever in flux, that social order is forever multidimensional.

I'd like to close with a remark by one of the aliens. Jacobs points out that abductees rarely overcome their trance-like states to ask any questions they may have. In this particular instance, a woman was able to ask an alien "Do you sleep?" The answer: "We are always sleeping."

NOTES

- 1 All illustrations are from the series "Partial Correction to the Representations of Earth Culture Sent Out to Extraterrestrials on the 1977 U.S. Voyager Interstellar Space Probes," Connie Samaras, 1994-6.
- 2 John Mack, MD, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (New York: Scribners, 1994).
- 3 David Jacobs, PhD, *Secret Life: Firsthand Accounts of UFO Abductions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).
- 4 It is interesting to note here an article which appeared in the *New York Times* shortly after I gave this talk at the Wexner Center: "Professor Writing of Aliens Is Under Inquiry at Harvard," William H. Honan, 4 May 1995. Honan states that a peer review committee was formed by the Dean of the Harvard Medical School, Daniel Tosteson, to investigate whether Mack's work was in accordance "with Harvard's standards of scholarly investigation." Headed by an emeritus professor of the medical school and a former editor of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr Arnold Reiman, the committee included two lawyers from the Harvard counsel's office. Honan states: "A faculty member who has seen the committee's draft report said it vigorously defended Dr Mack's right to pursue any subject he finds of interest but deplored his scholarship methods. Dean Tosteson has several options once he receives the report. They range from initiating procedures to cancel Dr Mack's tenure and remove him from the faculty to congratulating him for his bravery in following his inclinations in a line of exploration sure to invite ridicule." The article goes on to say that "Dr Mack has retained a Boston lawyer, Roderick MacLeish Jr, who says the review is far from benign. 'It's an issue of academic freedom . . . History has not been kind to individuals and entities that tried to

suppress controversial or unorthodox viewpoints, and this is that kind of case." Honan also notes that Mack's non-profit research organization, the Center for Psychology and Social Change, has received \$250,000 a year for the past three years "about two-thirds of its annual budget from Laurance S. Rockefeller." (Thanks to Douglas Crimp, Paula Allen, and Carole Vance who each individually brought this article to my attention – New Yorkers who know my California-based loyalty to the *LA Times*.)

- 5 Alice Echols, "White Feminism and the Jackie O. Problem," forthcoming in Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: Sexual Politics and Cultural Transformation in Postwar America* (Columbia University Press).
- 6 Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East* (Minneapolis, MINN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

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