Alien Implants: The New 'Hard Evidence'

Science fiction author Whitley Strieber continues to promote the notion of extraterrestrial visitations. His *Communion: A True Story* (1987) told of his own close encounter—actually what psychologist Robert A. Baker has diagnosed as "a classic, textbook description of a hypnopompic hallucination" (or "waking dream") (Baker and Nickell 1992). Now, several money-making books later, Strieber offers *Confirmation: The Hard Evidence of Aliens Among Us.* The evidence is threefold: UFO sightings *(yawn)*, close encounters *(been there, done that)*, and—the hard evidence, quite literally—alien implants!

Implants are the latest rage in UFO circles, and Strieber marshals the diagnostic, radiographic, surgical, photographic, and analytic evidence that supposedly indicates—but admittedly does not prove—extraterrestrials are implanting devices in human beings. To put Strieber's claims into perspective, we should first look at the development of the implant concept.

The notion of induced mind/body control is pervasive, with paranormal entities typically having some means of monitoring mortals as a prelude to control. Examples range from mythological beings—like Cupid, whose magical arrows infected men's hearts with love, and Morpheus, who formed sleepers' dreams—to superstitious belief in angelic guidance, demonic possession, Voodoo hexes, and zombie slaves. Folklore told of abductions to fairyland from which people returned with addled wits or sapped vitality. Popular literature brought such examples as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1891) and the mesmerizing Svengali in George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). Science fiction helped develop the alien-takeover concept, with such movies as *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). A 1967 *Star Trek* TV episode, "Errand of Mercy," featured a "mind-sifter," a device used by the alien Klingons to probe prisoners' thoughts during interrogations (Okuda and Okuda 1997).

Meanwhile, Kenneth Arnold's 1947 "flying saucer" report touched off the modern era of UFOs and with it an evolving mythology. By the 1950s "contactees" were claiming to receive messages from the Space People. Then in 1961 came the first widely publicized abduction case, that of Betty and Barney Hill. (Their psychiatrist concluded the couple had shared their dreams rather than having had an actual experience [Klass 1974]).

With the publicizing of the Hill case—notably by John G. Fuller's *The Interrupted Journey* in 1966 and NBC television's prime-time movie "The UFO Incident" in 1975—claims of alien abductions and "medical" examinations began to proliferate. So did another phenomenon, the abduction guru: a self-styled alien researcher and often amateur hypnotist who elicits fantasy abduction tales from suitably imaginative individuals (Baker and Nickell 1992, p. 203).

Reports of alien implants may have begun with the alleged abduction of a Massachusetts woman, Betty Andreasson, which supposedly took place in early 1967. However, the case was not publicized widely until 1979 when Raymond E. Fowler published his book *The Andreasson Affair.* Andreasson, who seems to have had a predisposition to fantasize under hypnosis, claimed the aliens had removed an apparently implanted device, in the form of a spiked ball, by inserting a needle up her nose. Fowler speculated that the BB-size implant could have been "a monitoring device" (Fowler 1979, p. 191). About this time, the concept of "psychotronic technology"—i.e., mind control by means of physical devices—entered UFOlogy (Sachs 1980, pp. 200, 262).

Andreasson's abduction report was followed by that of a Canadian woman named Dorothy Wallis. She described a similar implant under hypnosis, which seemed to explain an earlier "compulsion" to meet with the aliens (Klass 1989, p. 122). When we appeared together on the Canadian television talk show program *The Shirley Show* (which aired April 15, 1993), I suggested that Mrs. Wallis's story appeared to imitate Andreasson's. She countered that her

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abduction came first, but I observed that she did not come forward until about 1983 and that Andreasson's much earlier publication gave the latter the stronger claim (Nickell 1995; Wray 1993).

In time, David Jacobs, a historian-turned-abduction-researcher, found the Andreasson/Wallis-type implant to be stereotypical among abductee claimants.

> The object is as small as or smaller than a BB, and it is usually smooth, or has small spikes sticking out of it, or has holes in it. The function of this device is unknown: It might be a locator so that the targeted individual can be found and abducted; it might serve as a monitor of hormonal changes; it might facilitate the molecular changes needed for transport and entrance; it might facilitate communication . . . Sometimes nosebleeds occur after this procedure. Both child and adult abductees have seen physicians for nosebleed problems, and have discovered *odd holes inside their noses.* [Jacobs 1992, pp. 95–96]

Alas, Jacobs relates,

> Several abductees have reported that a ball-shaped object either dropped out of their nose or was expelled when they blew their nose. All of these *expulsions happened before they* knew they had been abducted; in each case they thought they had inexplicably inhaled something and discarded the object or lost it. [p.96]

Actually, one of these items did survive and was thoroughly investigated by the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) in the late 1980s. Possessed by a self-claimed abductee, the "implant" had supposedly been stuck up the man's nostril by his extraterrestrial abductors, but was later dislodged when he caught a cold and blew his nose. CUFOS investigator Don Schmitt accompanied UFO historian Jerome Clark, editor of CUFOS's journal *International UFO Reporter,* to meet the man in an Illinois restaurant. As Clark relates the incident, after brief exchanges, the man unwrapped the object. "Don and I stared at it incredulously. *It was a ball bearing."Despite the obvious identifica*tion, the CUFOS team sought the man's X-rays, which "showed nothing out of the ordinary," Clark states. Nevertheless, CUFOS went on to have the alleged implant scientifically examined, whereupon it proved to be "an utterly ordinary terrestrial artifact" (Clark 1992).

In contrast to Jacobs's similar-but-generally-unavailable brain/nasal implants are the current devices. The change in the situation is remarkable. Since 1994 alleged implants have been surgically recovered but they've become notably diverse: one looks like a shard of glass, another a "triangular" (or possibly "star-shaped") piece of metal, still another a carbon fiber, and so on. None was located in the brain or nasal cavity, instead being recovered from such extremities as toe, hand, shin, external ear, etc.; some were accompanied by scars while others were not (Linderman 1998; Strieber 1998, pp. 171–247).

Indeed, so varied are the implants, their sites, and other characteristics that they recall a similar craze of yore. *During the witch mania of the sixteenth* and seventeenth centuries, inquisitors identified certain "witch's marks" which could be almost anything. As one writer explains, "Papillomas, hemangiomas, blemishes, warts, welts, and common moles were seized upon as authentic witch's marks, and these marks invariably determined the destiny of the suspect" (Rachleff 1971).

Several disparate implants are described in the bestselling *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* by Harvard psychiatrist John E. Mack. For example, two small nodules that appeared on an abductee's wrist were surgically removed and analyzed in a pathology laboratory. The lab found the tissue unremarkable (Mack 1994, pp. 27–28). Another implant was supposedly placed at the base of an abductee's skull. Under hypnosis the man—who believes he has an alternate identity as a humanoid named Orion—described a small, pill-shaped object with protruding wires that, he said, would make it easier for the aliens "to follow me." Astonishingly, Mack makes no mention of any subsequent attempt to locate and remove the *reported implant (Mack 1994, p. 172).*

Many of the removals have been performed by "California surgeon" Roger Leir. Actually Dr. Leir is not a physician, but a podiatrist (licensed to do minor surgery on feet). He was accompanied by an unidentified general surgeon (who did not want to be associated with UFO abduction claims). The latter performed all of the above-the-ankle surgeries.

A critic of implant claims, Dr. Virgil Priscu, a department head in an Israeli teaching hospital, observes that a foreign object can enter the body unnoticed, as during a fall, or while running barefoot in sand or grass—even as a splinter from a larger impacting object (Priscu 1998). Such foreign objects may become surrounded by a membrane, like several of the "implants" removed by Dr. Leir et *al. (Lindemann 1998);* depending on the material, they may also degrade over time, leaving only a small bit of "reaction" tissue in place of the foreign object—"No mystery, no 'implants,'" says Dr. Priscu. He challenged Dr. Leir's associate, a hypnotherapist named *Derrel Sims, to provide specimens, or at* least color slides of them, for analysis at a forensic medical institute, but reported he received no cooperation. Dr. Priscu also noted the lack of the scientific peer-review process in the case of implant claims. Although he is himself an admitted UFO believer, he states, "I also firmly believe that meticulous research by competent persons is the way to the truth" (Priscu 1998).

In *Confirmation* Whitley Strieber describes several of the implants including one removed from his own external ear by a physician. It turned out to be collagen, the substance from which cartilage is formed (Strieber 1998, p. 228). Strieber admits that the promised "hard evidence" provided by implants is not so hard after all: "I hope this book will not cause a rush to judgement," he writes, "with skeptics trying to prove that evidence so far retrieved is worthless while UFO believers conclude that it is proof. Both approaches are a waste of time, because the conclusive evidence has not yet been gathered" (Strieber 1998, p. 255).

A similar admission comes from UFOlogist David E. Pritchard, an M.I.T. *physicist who, with Mack, hosted the* 1992 Abduction Study Conference at M.I.T. (Pritchard emphasized that the conference was merely held there; it was *not an M.I.T. conference.)* Pritchard gave a

presentation on a suspected implant, a tiny object with a collagen sheen that he acknowledged might have grown in the alleged abductee. (It had supposedly been implanted in the man's penis, but worked itself out over time.) Pritchard conceded:

> I don't have anything conclusive. What I have is just what you usually get in this business: it will provide more beliefs for the believers and will be instantly skeptified by the skeptics, and it's not very good evidence if it won't move the lines at all. The point is to convince the jury . . . (Bryan 1995, pp. 50–51)

Of course, it is not skeptics but implant advocates who have the burden of proof—a burden they have emphatically failed to meet. Indeed, the implant concept—like the larger alien abduction phenomenon itself—lacks proof that it has an objective reality. Instead, the evidence indicates it is simply part of an evolving UFO mythology. Its theme of entities exerting influence over humans is one seen in many variants, ranging from ancient mythical lore to modern science fiction and persisting in some form in popular culture. There have always been individuals—fantasizers as well as paranoid schizophrenics—who have heard voices that directed or controlled them, voices that are expressions of hopes and fears. Therefore it seems safe to predict that, as the millennium draws near, there will be further claims of "hard evidence" of extraterrestrial visitation. We may also expect that misperceptions and exaggerations of natural phenomena, as well as hoaxes, will abound.

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