ALIEN IMAGINARIES: TRACING THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL IN AMERICA

A Dissertation Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Science

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ABSTRACT

Alien Imaginaries:
Tracing the Extraterrestrial in America

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This dissertation offers a cultural analysis of UFOs and extraterrestrials in the United States. In it I look at what I call *real* aliens — extraterrestrials believed to be real and interacting with humans on Earth. Beliefs in *real* aliens are often denigrated and dismissed in official discourse, yet they continue to not only persist, but thrive, in American society. Hence, this dissertation asks: Why do so many people believe that extraterrestrials are visiting our planet? Part One begins by tracing the invasion of *real* aliens in the United States using Orson Welles's 1938 radio broadcast "The War of the Worlds" as a starting point. Here, I look at how and why the broadcast registered with listeners' anxieties and created a fantastic and uncanny effect that made it possible for some to conceive of aliens invading the United States. In Part Two, I trace the rise of ufology, which involves the study of extraterrestrials currently interacting with humans on Earth, and I consider how the social and political climate of the Cold War, as well as the cultural environment of postmodernity, provided the necessary conditions for stories about aliens to be made believable. Part Three explores the case study of the Roswell Incident, a conspiracy theory about the origins of an alleged flying saucer crash and government cover-up. I look at the reasons for why many individuals have come to believe in this conspiracy theory and I reflect on the tensions between "official" and "unofficial" discourses surrounding this case. I also consider how and why Roswell has become such an important *site* for ufology, and I examine the performances given by ufologists at the annual Roswell International UFO Festival to appreciate how ufologists offers seductive explanations of why things are the way they are; for many, their stories offer a *better* version of

events than the purely rational and positivist explanations offered by official sources, especially since they tap into the disillusionment and mistrust that many Americans feel about contemporary politics.

Keywords: Aliens, Extraterrestrials, Conspiracy Theories, Ufology, Storytelling, Public, Belief, “Official” and “Unofficial,” Cold War, Modernity, Postmodernity, America

Dedication

To my parents, Janet and Reg, and to all my friends and family, without whom none of my success would be possible. Words cannot express how much I love you all.

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Though this dissertation is authored as an individual work it certainly would not have been possible without the help, support, guidance, patience, understanding, and efforts of a lot of people. It has been very challenging for me to keep these acknowledgements concise and this has made me reflect on how very fortunate I am to have such a long list of people to thank.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that Trent University is situated upon traditional territories and I would like to give thanks to the Anishinaabe and Mississauga Peoples for the ability to learn and work on their traditional lands.

Further, I am grateful to Trent University and the Office of Graduate Studies for allowing me the opportunity to study here and I would like to acknowledge the generous financial support provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship program. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Cultural Studies department and all the faculty and staff who have guided me over these past several years and who have always made me feel so welcome.

In particular, I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my dissertation committee members who have provided me with both personal and professional guidance. I have been extremely lucky to have such dedicated committee members who have cared so much about my work and I feel privileged to have them all on my side. I always felt as though I could reach out to them whenever I needed advice and their feedback was always *very* thoughtful and *very* helpful. There have been many occasions where I remember feeling completely stumped about the direction of my research, but inevitably a meeting with my committee would always leave me feel invigorated, inspired, and ready to tackle my project from a new direction. I also very much

appreciate how each of them took the time to read and edit numerous drafts of this project, even when those drafts got *very* long!

The first person who deserves my gratitude is my dissertation supervisor Dr. Veronica Hollinger, who has been both a teacher and a mentor to me, and who has taught me more than I have the space to give credit for. She has challenged me at every turn and has pushed me just a bit further with every new draft. She never gave me the answers but always showed me where to look for them, and she guided me along but made sure that I learned how to do the heavy lifting myself. It is because of her that I have grown as an intellectual, and I thank her very much for this. I also thank her for instilling in me the importance of an editor's eye. Veronica painstakingly read over my dissertation with a fine-toothed comb to help me get it *just right*.

I would also like to thank my other two committee members, Dr. Jonathan Bordo and Dr. Finis Dunaway. I could always count on Jonathan to throw big ideas my way. At times they overwhelmed me, but after agonizing and pondering over them for hours on end these ideas ultimately came to form the core of much of this dissertation. I so appreciate the spirit of adventure he encouraged in my research, as well as his constant faith in my work; even when I was doubting myself, I always knew he was in my corner. While I could count on Jonathan for hurling those big ideas my way, Finis was always there to help me ground these ideas in something concrete. He made sure that I supported and rooted my positions carefully in their historical context and I owe to him my understandings of the complexity of American history. He shared his expertise so willingly and I very much appreciate his timely feedback and his lists of helpful sources to read to expand my knowledge. Each of my committee members were always dedicated to their role and I would not have been able to complete this project without them.

I would also like to extend thanks to my external committee member Dr. Susan Lepselter. I am so lucky that I came across her work early on in my academic career, as it was her writing that inspired me to engage in this research topic. She has taught me to appreciate the power of storytelling and the way that fantastic stories both reflect and shape our social worlds. Further, I would like to thank my internal-external examiner, Brent Bellamy, for his helpful comments and his suggestions for future avenues to explore as I develop this research.

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The process of earning a doctorate and writing a dissertation is onerous and long — but it has also been an amazing journey. In addition to the opportunity to learn and grow intellectually, this process has also made me realize how fortunate I am to be surrounded by such warm and caring people. Thanks to all of you.

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Introduction:

Apprehending the Alien

Situating the Strange in Stories

This dissertation tells a story. It is, in part, an incredible one about strange, luminous objects seen floating in seemingly organized formation against the dark sky; shiny, silver metallic disks observed hovering above open fields; opaque, cigar-shaped figures seen suspended in midair atop city skylines. It is also a story about the supposed occupants of these craft — invading Martians, friendly space brothers and sisters, sinister aliens lurking among us in human disguises, vile reptilian overlords who have penetrated our political institutions, and mysterious grey creatures who stalk us in the night — and it tells of the suspected motivations of these ambiguous beings. Some say they are benign, friendly, and omnipotent, and are here to offer us salvation by alerting us to our destructive ways, while others have supposed that their presence is more nefarious. Some have speculated that they are working toward a total planet takeover and they may be stealing our DNA to breed their own army of slaves. Others have gone so far as to suggest that they may be conspiring with earthly leaders to make this happen. Others still have found fault not with these strange beings but with the government, which is accused of covering up the crashed remains of fallen spacecraft, as well as the feeble bodies of these otherworldly creatures buried in the wreckage. This dissertation tells a fantastic story, one about enigmatic beings, mystifying secrets, and unexplainable encounters.

And yet it is not just a story of the strange and otherworldly; it is also a story about what is familiar and close to home. The UFO, which is just-glanced in the night sky, is framed by the Earth's horizon; the human contactee, who is greeted by the benevolent space brother, is enticed by his *humanoid*-appearance; the unwitting captive brought aboard the alien spaceship is struck by her abductors' intense fascination with her *human* reproductive processes; the disguised reptilian, dressed all in black, is said to have penetrated *our* governments and is interfering with *our* political

systems. This is a story about fantastic alien beings and unidentified flying objects, but it is less about the extraterrestrial than it is about the terrestrial. It is a story set in the United States of America, [1] a place where ideas about aliens have invaded, especially during the second half of the twentieth century.[2] As I will show, there seems to be something peculiar to the American context that has given rise to ideas about extraterrestrials — something deeply rooted the imaginary of the nation itself — and throughout this project I question how ideas about UFOs and ETs emerge from a set of American ideologies and connect to various events in American history.

In looking at the invasion of aliens in the United States, I provide a historical overview and cultural analysis of American UFO sightings and alien contact reports, and I examine the establishment of ufology, which involves the study of extraterrestrials currently interacting with humans on Earth. While ufology is considered a field of study by its practitioners, called ufologists, it is at the same time a largely citizen-led movement; ufologists commonly assert that UFOs are real, of extraterrestrial origin, and are routinely visiting Earth, and they seek to convince others of this claim (Cross, 2004, 4).[3] Throughout this dissertation, then, I look at the stories people have

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[1] I use the term "United States" when referring to the sovereign country and geographic territory, but I use the term "America" when referring to the symbolic and imaginary ideas that have come to define the nation. America is therefore not simply a country territorially situated in North America between Canada and Mexico (with some exceptions, such as Alaska and Hawaii), but rather it is an imaginary site formed by a set of distinct ideas about its symbolic place in this world. In other words, the imaginary of America is a cultural construct created from a sense of shared ideas and collective understandings that commands "profound emotional legitimacy" for its members (Anderson, [1983] 1991, 4).

[2] While tales of alien beings exist all over the world, I agree with Bridget Brown (2007, 11–12), who argues that these phenomena in other countries exists in large part as an American "export" as with other "mass-produced cultural forms," and the most prominent and popular stories of alien interactions with humans emerged in the US, and the US government has taken the lead on drafting policy to deal with UFOs and ETs (Margolis, 1967, 40). While it would be an important initiative to consider the way in which these stories have been discussed in other countries, and while a cross-cultural comparison might turn up some fruitful observations about how these stories adapt and develop in different national contexts, this is outside the purview of this dissertation, which focuses on the distinct relationship that UFOs and ETs have to the United States and its history as a nation.

[3] Ufology is an umbrella term that covers a broad spectrum of different ideas and practices. From the suggestion that the government has conspired to withhold information about an ET presence on Earth to the assertion that aliens are routinely abducting unwitting human beings for the purposes of a secret, intergalactic breeding program, the claims of ufology are diverse and quite often discordant. Ufology includes more conservative approaches, like the documentation and investigation of unidentified aerial phenomena, to more "far-out" ones, such as the claim that aliens are conspiring with a secret human elite and are manipulating unwitting human masses for their nefarious

told about their encounters with aliens and UFOs, as well as the arguments presented by ufologists to persuade others of the belief that extraterrestrials are visiting our planet, and I consider the rhetorical functions of their stories. Two underlying questions inform this project: What makes these stories about extraterrestrials and UFOs so enticing to those who believe in them? And how do these stories both come to reflect and shape the world?

Real **Aliens and the Powers of Storytelling**

One thing that has always struck me when describing my research to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances is how often I am asked, "do you believe in aliens?" or "do you think extraterrestrials and UFOs are real?" Those with a deeper interest might follow up with more specific questions: "do you think people are *really* being abducted?" or "do you think the government *has* covered up these crashed saucers?" It is telling that these are nearly always the first questions that I am asked. When I explain that my research is not so much about proving the objective nature of extraterrestrials but is more about exploring the reasons for the widespread belief in them in contemporary American society, the asker usually presses on: "Well, you must have an opinion. Are aliens *real*?" It is as if the person asking wants me to take a definitive side in the debate in the hopes that through my research I have achieved some clear conclusion on the matter, but my answer is never straightforward. So much hinges on what we mean by *real*. "Sure, aliens are *real*," I typically reply. Just look around. From supermarket tabloids, to best-selling books, to popular

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agenda, and the degree of conspiratorial undertones varies immensely based on whom one asks. It is important to recognize that there is much internal debate as to what counts as legitimate and appropriate ufological research (a point which I will address in Parts Two and Three of this dissertation); with that said, the claims of ufology are often underscored by the notion that UFOs on Earth are real and are most likely operated by alien intelligences. At the same time, not all individuals who describe themselves as ufologists are certain that UFOs are operated by intelligent alien beings, and some self-described ufologists take a much more moderate position when speculating about the nature of UFOs. Despite some notable exceptions, the field as a whole has typically come to associate UFOs with ETs, and so I refer to ufology with the understanding that it is usually informed by an underlying assumption about alien life interacting with human beings on Earth.

online forums, to the mainstream news, aliens can be found almost everywhere. It would be safe to say they have invaded the United States.

Throughout this dissertation I attempt to expand upon this answer. It would be wrong to say that ideas about aliens and UFOs are entirely made-up tales told by overly imaginative individuals, just as it would be wrong to proclaim that these stories share undeniable truths about an extraterrestrial presence on Earth. While the believer takes the alien as an absolutely true external reality, the unbeliever (or, in ufological slang, the debunker[4]) sees it as absolute fakery, a product of a fanciful delusion inspired by popular culture. Neither of these approaches seem quite accurate to me; instead, I argue that the stories told about extraterrestrials and UFOs are lodged between fact and fiction, where the figure of the alien sits precariously on the borders of the true and the false, the real and the fake. Extraterrestrials, I contend, are disturbers of our carefully erected binary categories and they serve to remind us of the fragility and artificiality of these categories.

With this in mind, I focus on what I call *real* aliens — not those fictional "little green men" from pulp sci-fi comics — but rather extraterrestrials that are *believed* to be real. I italicize *real* to complicate any straightforward understandings of the term. Aliens are *real* because they blur those boundaries between the real and the fake and make it difficult to distinguish between reality and fiction. They are *real* in that they are all around us, exerting a force on the world, despite the fact that there is no concrete proof of their objective existence in the classic epistemological sense of the term. From the ability to generate tremendous profits from films, television shows, and other commercial ventures, to stakes in the scientific community, such as multi-million-dollar space explorations and telescope projects, to seriously affecting a believer's mental, social, and physical state, ideas about, and beliefs in, aliens have given rise to very real effects. Consequently, I argue

[4] I will elaborate on the use of this term in the ufological community in my third chapter.

that aliens are *real* in the sense that they are believed, and these beliefs leave profound impressions, both on the individual believer and on the wider society of which they are a part.

As far as I know there has not been any public revelation on the discovery of extraterrestrial life in the universe, let alone that alien bodies have been found on Earth. While many scientists have acknowledged the likely possibility that extraterrestrial life exists elsewhere in the vast expanses of our universe, there is no verifiable, objective proof that little grey aliens have physically entered our homes to steal us away for their strange experiments, or that evil, ophidian creatures walk among us in disguise, and there is no concrete evidence that the American government has captured flying saucers and alien bodies on Earth and is simply covering it up, as many typical alien conspiracy theories argue. The orthodox position taken by mainstream science is that if aliens are out there then they are pretty far away and, if we do discover life on other planets in our own lifetime, it is likely that these lifeforms will be microorganisms and not complex, civilized beings. Hence orthodox scientific institutions have concluded that ufology lacks legitimacy, and most scientific, academic, and governmental authorities emphasize that there is no good evidence to show that aliens definitively exist and are interfering with human beings.

And yet, as I will show in the pages that follow, there *have* been many sightings, numbering the hundreds of thousands, of strange and unidentified flying objects seen in the sky since the end of World War II, some that have been reported by multiple witnesses, and many that have been disclosed by senior military personnel and pilots who have detected these strange objects on their radars and on film. These UFOs have even been known to leave physical traces on the ground and they appear to display perplexing flight patterns and shape-shifting feats that far exceed current human capabilities. As such, they have stumped many scientists and military experts and, on more than one occasion, high-ranking individuals who have worked on classified UFO projects for the

American government have come forward stating that UFOs are real and could possibly be the result of extraterrestrial intelligences. What is more, it is no exaggeration to say that hundreds of thousands of Americans have claimed to have experienced contact with aliens.[5] Several of the stories told about human-alien contact, such as abduction encounters describing the strange grey creatures who seize unwitting captives and bring them aboard their spaceships (the subject of Chapter Four), are often recollected with intense emotions and they leave abductees feeling very real and profound feelings of pain and trauma.[6]

Throughout this dissertation I emphasize the importance of taking these stories seriously, without necessarily taking them entirely literally. That is, I acknowledge that many people have reported experiencing strange phenomena that they could not understand, and it is important to keep in mind that something is motivating many of these experiences and sightings — they are not necessarily made up out of nowhere. This does not mean that we need to accept these beliefs as entirely true, but it does complicate any straightforward rejections of them as false, and it does raise the important point that many of those individuals reporting these experiences *have seen or experienced something*.[7] This is, of course, not to say that events like alien abduction are really

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[5] Jeffrey Kripal (2017a, 10) offers this estimate of the number of self-described alien abductees.

[6] For instance, Jeffrey Kripal (2014, 901–902) acknowledges that a phenomenon like alien abduction can leave lasting scars, cause mental and physical disturbances, and even make people move from their homes, suggesting these deeply intimate encounters are not simply ruses or made-up fantasies, even though they are frequently derided and dismissed as such. Moreover, throughout the course of my research, I have spoken with numerous thoughtful, intelligent individuals who have shared with me their stories, and I have read countless narratives written by alien contactees and abductees, whose reports are told with a sense of authenticity and sincerity. While some of the accounts that I have come across have certainly struck me as likely deceptions by attention-seekers, or as possible misidentifications on the part of the observer, many seem to be honest and genuine reflections made by individuals trying to make sense of often traumatic and confusing experiences that, for them at least, were very real. Both Jeffrey Kripal (2014; 2017a) and David Hufford (1982; 1995) offer compelling reasons to reject the usual dismissal of these stories as false, pathological nonsense. They suggest that many people are entirely reasonable for holding beliefs and ideas in supernatural and otherworldly beings, because their ideas are often rationally derived from their own phenomenological experiences and observations.

[7] Kripal makes this point when he asks, "what are we to do with monsters, 'real' monsters?" (2014, 902). By "real," he is not talking about some sort of biological entity, such as an alien with a physical, tangible body that is hidden in a top-secret government facility in the middle of nowhere: to borrow his phrasing, he does not think that "we will someday shoot a Sasquatch or net the Loch Ness Monster" (899); by "real," he means that we need to look at things like aliens as things that are "really experienced" (Ibid.). In his work (2014; 2017b, 43–45) he begins with a

happening in the exact ways that they are described by abductees or that UFOs are undoubtedly piloted by extraterrestrials, but that there often is *something* underlying these experiences, and that not all accounts of human-ET contact can be cast aside as hoaxes, made-up stories, or fantastical delusions.

However, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to get at the underlying cause or objective reality of these sightings and contact experiences, if such a clear explanation is even possible. Whether they are caused by beings from outer space, by some part of our external environment that we do not yet understand, or by something internal to the human mind itself, I do not know. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which human beings have used *ideas* about aliens to explain all sorts of strange, mysterious, and unexplainable phenomena. As such, I consider why many individuals have come to identify the unidentified — the *Unidentified* Flying Object, or *U*FO — *as extraterrestrial,* even though there is no concrete empirical evidence to support this supposition.

With this in mind, I propose that the alien is a locus through which many different meanings are filtered, and part of this project is to dissect these various meanings that have become associated with extraterrestrials and to explore how this connects to the broader cultural contexts from which these stories about *real* aliens draw their substance. Throughout this dissertation then, I investigate how these alleged encounters with aliens become articulated and understood by experiencers and I describe the very consistent subjective patterns that underlie these incidents. I also trace how the figure of the alien has changed over time. For instance, the physical image of the alien has evolved, as have ideas about the suspected motivations of extraterrestrials and their alleged interactions with

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phenomenological approach that allows him to recognize and appreciate that many people across human history — including modern people like ourselves — have experienced monsters and other strange entities such as aliens not simply as fictional ideas, but as actual beings.

human political structures, so I analyze what it is about the specific historical moment that seems to shape the way the alien is imagined.

I also pay careful attention to the ways in which people have gone about sharing their stories of UFO sightings and alien contact. Accordingly, my project is fundamentally about storytelling and I contend that stories about extraterrestrials are not simply neutral and indifferent accounts that passively report a state of affairs. Instead, they tell of *real* aliens — beings believed to be real, but that cannot be proven so due to a lack of concrete empirical evidence — and in this respect, there would be no aliens if there were no stories told about them. Keeping this in mind, I draw inspiration from J.L. Austin's theories on the performativity of language. In his *How To Do Things With Words* ([1962] 1975), Austin looks at how language is a social process which does not simply convey information, but also contains a performative function. Not all utterances simply make statements about the world: some also perform an action. By piecing together a coherent tale about extraterrestrial beings coming to Earth, these stories actually work to conjure aliens into our world. As I will show with more concrete examples, stories about extraterrestrials also work to create order in a disordered world by providing the teller (and often the listener) with a model for thinking and acting. These stories do not simply describe an objective reality; they give aliens substance and weight and actually make them *real,* and these *real* aliens then act on and influence the world in return.

Occupying a murky spot on the border of the real and the unreal, stories about *real* aliens must find ways of "ringing true" to those who hear them, otherwise they will become relegated entirely to the realm of fiction. As I have already mentioned, these stories are often dismissed as fictional accounts by official institutions such as the government, the scientific establishment, and academia, which have all come to the consensus that there is no concrete proof to support the

notion that aliens have already made their way to our planet.[8] These official bodies are invested with significant power and resources to support their position. Those who side with these official bodies remain skeptical of the possibility that extraterrestrial life has made its way to Earth and they dismiss as absurd fantasies the testimony of individuals who claim to have seen or interacted with alien beings. From their perspective, the alien is a fiction and stories about human contact with aliens are merely irrational residues of superstitious and spiritual beliefs that continue to linger in the peripheries of our modern, rational society.

With these official institutions unanimously supporting the position that extraterrestrials have not made their way to Earth, it would seem that stories about *real* aliens might peter out — yet, they persist. This is where the power of storytelling comes into play. Throughout this dissertation, I examine what it is about these stories that makes them so believable and enticing, even though they have been deemed as irrational and are largely derided and denigrated in official discourse. I argue that those who believe in them do so because these tales offer seductive ways to explain why things are the way they are: they provide a *better* version of events than the purely rational and positivist explanations that are offered by official sources, and they take into consideration a person's subjective experiences in ways that modern science refuses to consider.[9]

Alien Affects

These stories about *real* aliens, it seems, also tap into often unspoken but deeply felt understandings about the way that power operates in contemporary society. In other words, there

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[8] Drawing from David J. Hufford (1995, 22–24), I use the term "official" to refer to those ideas that are disseminated through social institutions invested with authority, such as the government, academia, and the scientific establishment. These institutions have greater access to resources and greater power, which allows them to make authoritative statements about the world, and which enables them to establish and maintain their position outside the inferior "popular" or "folk" culture.

[9] I use positivism to refer to the dominant mode of scientific thought (and also the prevailing mode of thought in policy and jurisprudence) that require that the data used to support a theory be verifiable and/or falsifiable through repeated observation and experience.

is an affective quality to *real* aliens that can prick at unconscious sensibilities and this makes these stories appealing in a way that goes beyond conscious awareness.[10] Stories about *real* aliens are so enticing and believable because they are able to connect to affective impulses, and I see these stories as being informed by repetitions with familiar cultural memories and ideas — resemblances that are largely left unspoken and unconscious.

Here, I am influenced by Susan Lepselter's work on the uncanny resonances of fantastic stories. In her text, *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity and UFOs in the American Uncanny* (2016), she looks at why and how alien-conspiracy theories and stories about UFOs and ETs resonate for so many individuals. While she finds that the specific content of these sorts of stories varies, she argues that "their themes keep circling back to a sense that life in America is shaped by some ineffable enormous power, a power that can be seen only in the pattern of its effects" (1). As she notes, they point to underlying feelings about the pervasive — but often invisible — sources of power that seem to act on us in our daily lives. But these feelings are not *felt* on a personal level and can never be fully articulated; instead, they sit beneath the surface and have an invisible agency that can sometimes be sensed without ever being made fully conscious.

She notices the parallels between these stories about aliens and other stories, where "these stories let us follow that quick leg of the semiotic journey where the public sign is internalized, and then reproduced as another sign, or another story — one that's stained with other signs from the inner place it's been" (1–2). In other words, she looks at how narratives about UFOs and aliens connect to other sorts of stories found in American culture, like those about class, race, gender,

[10] Different from emotions and feelings, affect is felt on another level than just language; it is a "flow of forces through bodies outside of, prior to, or underneath language" (Schaefer, 2015, 4). Affect is the felt intensities that exist beyond the verbal, beyond any single utterance. In other words, affect is not so much a part of conscious thought, as personal feelings and emotions are, but is instead unconscious and unformed; it is the felt, embodied, free-floating, and often fleeting sensations that are linked to our animinity.

and power. Lepselter therefore traces the repetitions between stories about extraterrestrials and other kinds of stories and finds that these tales about aliens offer a means through which people can articulate ideas and feelings about the state of American politics and society — but these ideas become refracted in stories of fantastic things, rather than being stated directly. Alongside the fantastic and extraordinary content found in these tales of aliens and UFOs, they also tell a story of ordinary life in America, one that is marked by a contradictory sense of possibility and optimism, insecurity and disenfranchisement.

The "Master Plan"[11]

To summarize then, this dissertation is about the way in which *real* aliens have been summoned into existence by the stories that we tell about them, and it considers how these stories give meaning to the teller's (and quite often the listener's) experiences. It also examines one of the main sources for these stories, ufology, and it considers how ufologists have created their own public through the dissemination of various ufological texts; ufology has offered a platform for these stories to be told, even as they are dismissed by traditional authorities. In looking at the stories shared by ufologists, I focus on what makes them so persuasive and I analyze their rhetorical and emotional appeals that offer them an air of believability. Further, I consider the way in which these stories latch on to more unconscious feelings about the pervasive, yet invisible, operations of

[11] This heading, the "Master Plan," hints at the language of conspiracy theories, a theme which appears frequently throughout the pages of this project. Conspiracy theories endeavour to create an overarching structure with which to understand the world, and in doing so, they seek to connect the dots, unite disparate ideas, and lay out a narrative framework in a linear, coherent, and tidy way. In some respects, academic theorizing operates in a similar manner. Luiz E. Soares (1999, 225) observes, for instance, that "the rise of social science itself was based on the unveiling of the covert, the disclosure of deception, [and] the revelation of what is hidden behind the masks of ideology" and that "the Specter of conspiracy haunts the halls of academia." While conspiracy theories present some disconcerting leaps in logic and are all the more troubling because of their unfalsifiable nature (a point which will be discussed in Chapter Five), for now, I simply wish to point out some of the parallels between academic theorizing and conspiracy theorizing. Like the conspiracy theorists who weave together disparate pieces of information to create a consistent narrative, I, too, have brought together many different fragments to tell this story, and throughout the course of my research I have faced an abundance of information and have had to make careful selections of what I should include and what I could leave out. In making these decisions, I have sought to assemble a coherent narrative about the emergence of *real* aliens and the rise of ufology in the United States, but I recognize that this account remains partial and incomplete.

power in contemporary American society, and I look at how they connect back to deeper and more rooted memories and ideas in American history.

Throughout this dissertation I keep in mind that these stories about aliens are always shaped by human understandings, language, and culture. As such, my interests lie in the way in which the otherworldly is placed firmly in our own world so that these stories of fantastic things become lodged in other, much more mundane narratives of everyday life. By looking collectively at the different tropes that emerge from stories about extraterrestrials, I consider how they carry residues of familiar — though often distorted — cultural memories and experiences. From the anxious climate of the late 1930s, to the Cold War era and the Space Age, to the Digital Age and the postmodern period, I will show how stories about aliens seem to offer very poignant commentaries on shifting social, cultural, and political landscapes in the United States.

In Part One, "Extraterrestrials and the Ether," for instance, I investigate the invasion of *real* aliens in the United States by examining a specific case study, Orson Welles's 1938 radio broadcast "The War of the Worlds". Here I pick up on Carl Jung's ([1958] 2002) point that the broadcast was an important event that connected to the latent and affective emotions circulating in American society at the time, and I identify it as a key moment in the US, in which ideas about *real* aliens coalesced. In Chapter One, I begin by looking more generally at the role that modern media technologies like radio have played in giving rise to ideas about, and even beliefs in, aliens. For instance, I examine reactions to early radio, where many responded as though invisible radio waves could put them in touch with other worlds, and I question how these perceptions of the *magical* quality of radio helped encourage a fascination with extraterrestrials in the United States.

I also examine how the medium of radio helped to reach a new public of listeners and, in my second chapter, I consider how "The War of the Worlds" broadcast captivated this listening public

and enticed them to believe, even if only tentatively, that aliens were invading the United States. I analyze the way that both the form of radio and the content of the Martians in the broadcast produced a fantastic and uncanny effect, which registered with listeners' anxieties and responded to tensions and fears circulating in American discourse at this time, especially concerning the possibility of another world war; and ultimately, I look at how ideas about, and even belief in, *real* aliens were inspired by the careful blending of fact and fiction, the familiar and the strange, in "The War of the Worlds."

In Part Two, "Ufology and the United States," I consider the rise of beliefs in *real* aliens that followed the radio broadcast, and I look at how these beliefs were conditioned by the turbulent social, historical, and political changes taking place in the United States at this time. I begin by offering a background of UFO and ET phenomena in the United States following "The War of the Worlds," and I focus on two related aspects: sighting reports of UFOs (Chapter Three) and purported physical contact with extraterrestrial beings (Chapter Four). In this historical contextualization, I trace the surprisingly active role that the US government played in investigating UFOs throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and I look at how its top-secret projects were frequently designed to dismiss and debunk popular ideas about UFO and ET phenomena. I also look at the rise of ufology, which emerged as a sort of rebuff to the official explanations supplied by the US government and by the scientific establishment, and I consider how the stigmatization of ufology and its exclusion from official bodies of knowledge actually invests it with significant power in contemporary American society.[12] One of the predominant focuses of this section is to historicize the pervasive mistrust within the United States that has provided an opening for stories

[12] This outline is not all-encompassing, as a comprehensive overview of UFO sightings and ET contacts in the US alone would span multiple books, but I have carefully and strategically selected some of the most popular texts and key incidents in order to present an overview for readers unfamiliar with this history.

about *real* aliens to take hold. Here, I consider how the social and political climate of the Cold War as well as the cultural environment of postmodernity has provided the necessary conditions for stories about aliens to be made believable, and I look at how ufology offers a strong indication of the disillusionment with experts and authority figures that has taken place in the second half of the twentieth century.

Part Three, “The Better Story: An Ethnography of Roswell, New Mexico,” follows with a specific case study of a supposed UFO crash that has served as the linchpin for ufology. Chapter Five tells this story of the Roswell Incident, a conspiracy theory about the origins of an alleged flying saucer crash and government cover-up, which has been widely accepted as believable by a rather large public. In this chapter, I look at some of the reasons why people have come to believe the explanation that the US government conspired to withhold information about the recovery of extraterrestrials, as opposed to believing the official report released by the government and verified by independent scientific experts. Through a consideration of the Roswell Incident, I examine the tensions between “official” and “unofficial” discourses, and I argue that the Roswell conspiracy theory often wins out over these official reports because it is able to tell a *better* story: the Roswell conspiracy theory is believable because it provides an avenue for some people to work out confusing feelings about power in contemporary American life.

In Chapter Six, I conduct an ethnography of Roswell, New Mexico, where the crash purportedly happened in 1947, and where a burgeoning community of UFO and ET believers has assembled. Roswell has become a sort of theme park–style attraction dedicated to UFO and ET phenomena and I consider how it survives because of the sustained interest and attention given to ideas about aliens and UFOs in popular culture. Here I draw attention to the way that Roswell has become a *site par excellence* for conspiracy theories and beliefs in aliens and it serves as a playful place of

pilgrimage for those with a deep fascination with the stories told about *real* aliens. In using the word *site*, I wish to emphasize how Roswell is not simply an objective location, but a symbolic one, and I consider how its particular geography and location as a military zone in the middle of nowhere helped to give rise to conspiratorial notions that an alien spacecraft and extraterrestrial bodies were recovered here and later concealed by the US government.

I also study the annual UFO Festival, which occurs in Roswell on the anniversary of the alleged crash, where conspiracy theorists, alien aficionados, ET and UFO believers, and those interested in all sorts of strange things, congregate to discuss contemporary issues in UFO and ET research. Here I pay close attention to the performative aspects of the lectures given by ufologists at the Festival and I consider how rhetoric is used during their talks. In observing their performances, I heed the way in which these presenters rely on strong emotional and often polemical hyperbole and appropriate science and rationality for their own ends, so they can create a set of "alternative" facts and evidence that works to empty out trust in traditional elites and authorities. This logic is reinforced by strong populist sentiments made by ufologists, who claim to relocate power back into the hands of everyday people.

As a conclusion, I return to that initial question that haunts this project: "Do you believe in *real* aliens?" The question compels an answer and it asks us to take a side one way or another. But it also serves as a reminder of how difficult it can be to choose, and it forces us to re-evaluate what criteria we use to make these decisions. Here I turn to Jodi Dean (1998) who argues that the alien draws attention to the ways in which it has become exceedingly challenging to determine what is true and false, real and fake in contemporary American society. For part of my conclusion then, I reflect on how ufology has come to signal a wider crisis over knowledge, legitimacy, and truth that seems to be plaguing America today, and I consider the negative effects this has had on American

society and politics. In a way, this undecidability leads to feelings of paralysis and disorientation, and to an unsettling sense of being lost in a world where many may feel unable to make decisions and enact meaningful changes.

But unlike Dean, who focuses on the negative consequences of this undecidability, I also reflect on its possible liberating potentialities. Here I question how these stories about aliens show the limitations of the rational materialist paradigm on which much of the modern world is assembled. The persistence of UFO belief suggests that there is something lacking to this purely material and instrumental worldview, and not everyone is convinced simply by claims to rationality. In this section, I reflect on how the embrace of *real* aliens in American society signals the elevation of meaningful personal experiences in a way that is often excluded by official culture. Rather than dismissing stories about extraterrestrials and UFOs as anecdotal and coincidental instances that are unworthy of attention, I recognize the value in these stories by acknowledging that some of these accounts are based on phenomenologically-inferred experiences that cannot be captured in a lab or subjected to the scientific method. I also draw attention to the importance of their affective and emotional appeal for those who believe in them. My conclusion therefore assesses both the positive and negative effects that *real* aliens have on wider society, and it looks at how the stories told about them serve as fundamental reminders that many of us live in a world that feels *alien* to ourselves — a world that is filled with hidden and oppressive forces, as well as mysterious and wonderful possibilities.

As an epilogue to this dissertation, I offer another kind of story about aliens and about Roswell. Here I consider the symbolic position of Roswell alongside the US–Mexican border where discourses on aliens, both extraterrestrial and illegal, collide. In looking at the border, I focus on another type of conspiracy theory about “alien” invaders — one which describes invasive, hostile

undocumented immigrants intent on reclaiming their former land and destroying the "American" way of life. I draw attention to the affective resonance of stories told about aliens in border towns in the US and I consider the way they parallel other familiar, and more terrestrial, memories and experiences. In this epilogue, I look at some of the more deeply rooted and ingrained ideas about the American nation which have also helped create the conditions for extraterrestrials to materialize. Here, I trace the longstanding notions of American exceptionalism and its penchant for conspiracy theorizing, and I also reflect upon its history as a nation that *creates* "aliens." In this brief (but broad) examination of what I call the "American imaginary," I look at the particular traditions unique to the United States that have helped give rise to the widespread popularity of ideas about, and beliefs in, extraterrestrials, and I reflect on how our stories about aliens often register because of their affective pull alongside these other, more familiar stories.

Border Invasions

Taken altogether, this project seeks to explore how the stories told about extraterrestrials and UFOs are usually found at the interstices — those marginal places at edges, gaps, and borders — where the structures of rational society break down, and where our binary categories become subverted. The *real* alien is no stranger to invading borders, and many stories about them seem to violate traditionally secure binaries. Those categories of fact and fiction, evidence and invisibility, the real and the fake, the familiar and the strange, religion and science, and rationality and irrationality, are invaded by ideas about the alien, and the carefully erected and supposedly impenetrable borders between them are revealed to be mere illusions. In this revelation, these fantastic stories tell us a lot about the fears and anxieties, as well as the hopes and desires, of those who tell and share them, and they point to both the possibilities of incredible worlds beyond and to the strangeness of our own world. The goal of this dissertation is to trace these stories about ETs

and UFOs and to consider the work they do, especially as they break down these borders and reveal their artificiality. Ultimately, I ask how we have come to understand our earthly existence through the stories that we tell about *real* aliens.

Part One

Extraterrestrials and the Ether

Chapter One:

ETs and Early Radio

The Great Airship Flap of 1896–97

Some of the earliest unidentified flying object sightings[13] in the United States came at the end of the nineteenth century during a brief period known as the Great Airship Flap of 1896–97,[14] when numerous individuals — reaching the tens of thousands — reported that they had witnessed strange craft floating in the upper atmosphere (Bartholomew, 1991, 2). Beginning in November of 1896 and continuing for several weeks, newspapers in California published eyewitness accounts of a mysterious light seen floating in the sky above many Californian cities. Some of these accounts described in detail what spectators thought was a solid, giant cigar-shaped craft with a strange glow emanating from its base, and it was not long before reports of this object came in from all over the West Coast — but these accounts ended abruptly in December of 1896.

Following a two-month hiatus, the sightings started up again, this time in the Midwest. Another strange craft very similar to the one described in California was reportedly seen flying across several Midwestern cities. At the time these sightings caused quite the stir, and J. Allan Danelek (2009, 1) estimates that as many as fifteen hundred individual newspaper accounts of the ship (or possibly ships, for there may have been more than one) were made between November 1896 and May of 1897. But not long after this second "flap" of sightings the craft seemed to vanish yet again, this time permanently.

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[13] At the time that the mysterious craft were sighted they were dubbed airships, not unidentified flying objects, as that specific term did not enter common parlance until the 1950s when the US Air Force used it to classify unusual and unidentifiable aerial phenomena reported in the skies; at the same time, these airships bear many similarities to those objects that are today classified as UFOs.

[14] It is also sometimes referred to as the Great Airship Wave.

In more recent years many ufologists have reignited interest in this short-lived event and have speculated that the airship was really a UFO operated by alien intelligences; here they note the similarities between the airship sightings and contemporary UFO sightings, especially in the way that the craft exhibited advanced flight capabilities far exceeding anything that had yet been engineered by humans (and that still has not been developed to this day). At the time of the initial sightings, however, most witnesses did not think the craft was a possible extraterrestrial vehicle; instead, most speculated that it was likely human made.

There were some notable exceptions to this, such an article written on 19 April 1897 in the *Dallas Morning News*, which reported that an airship had been seen flying over the town of Aurora, Texas. Supposedly the aircraft had collided with a windmill on the property of the local judge, J.S. Proctor, and according to the report, T.J. Weems, a US Army Signal Service officer, attended the collision and recovered what he identified to be an otherworldly corpse from the wreckage. This was one of the earliest incidents of purportedly real otherworldly creatures visiting the United States, but later examinations of the airship debris revealed that the ship was made of earthly material, and rumours would later circulate that T.J. Weems was not an officer but was really a blacksmith. Apparently, a creative reporter from the local newspaper concocted the story to generate hype and to sell more copies of the paper (Rojcewicz, 1984, 53–54).[15]

With this notable hoax aside, most newspaper reports speculated that the sightings were perhaps the result of an intrepid human inventor who had secretly created an aircraft and was testing out the invention by flying it across parts of the United States. Since balloon flight had been operational for nearly a century, the dirigible seemed like the most likely candidate for successful air-travel

[15] Toward the end of the flap, there was some speculation that the airships came from outer space but these suppositions were dwarfed by the vast number of theories that the airships were created by human beings, therefore these speculations left little impression on wider American culture.

technology and many ventured that some visionary had secretly created a heavier-than-air craft that could be used to transport human beings across vast distances; however, no one ever took credit for the airship that was sighted. Further, while airships — not airplanes — were predicted as the future of human flight, it was the invention of the airplane by the Wright brothers in 1903 that brought human air travel to light; despite their apparent promise, airships were largely a dead end. What is more, the descriptions of the great airship suggested that it far exceeded the technological capabilities of the time; even the Wright brothers' successful airplane was a rickety and primitive wooden flying machine when contrasted with the giant and sophisticated glowing dirigible reported during the airship flap.

It is not completely outside the realm of possibility that the airship was a human creation,[16] but there is no concrete evidence to make a conclusive determination of its origins, and many have ruled this an unlikely explanation given the technological sophistication of the craft described in the reports. It is also possible that the airship sightings originated with journalistic hoaxes carried out by imaginative reporters. Like the *Dallas Morning News* reporter who shared the sensationalized story of an alien airship landing in Texas, other reporters perhaps also played on the public fascination with airship technologies and published sightings reports to captivate their readership and foster paper sales — just without the alien spin — and these initial publications may have encouraged further sightings to be reported.

While it is difficult (and perhaps impossible) to determine the nature of the craft that what was reported in these airship sightings, Valerii I. Sanarov (1981, 164) speculates that the reports were heavily "connected with the forthcoming era of airship building" during a time when the thought of constructing flight machines like navigable balloons was becoming more widespread, and

[16] For instance, J. Allan Danelek's *The Great Airship of 1897: A Provocative Look at the Most Mysterious Aviation Event in History* (2009) argues that the mysterious vessel was possibly a terrestrial craft years ahead of its time.

speculative visions of a future populated with airships pervaded the popular press. While working airships had not yet been invented, the idea of air travel obsessed the nation and this belief that technological progress was inevitable fueled the dream of flying machines.

Sanarov postulates that this very idea of human flight inspired these visions: “the anticipation of technical capabilities of man [*sic*] is a power given not only to science-fiction writers, but also to ordinary people” (Ibid.). He reasons that these sightings suggest the power of the human mind to create events and objects, and he argues that these events and objects are then given substance through the collective sharing of our ideas about them: “human thought, reflecting a dream, leaves events behind, and the dream finds its embodiment in the ingenuous tales of unnamed ‘witnesses’” (Ibid.).

Sanarov’s speculations follow in a similar vein to Carl Jung’s ([1958] 2002) ideas about UFOs, as both argue that the sighted objects are not simply part of an objective reality, but also a symbolic one. Sanarov concludes that what was sighted in these reports was not a tangible, physical airship, but was rather formed by an idea that human beings had about the future of flying technologies that became imaginatively conjured into existence through rumours, gossip, and the sharing of stories about the strange flying machine. In other words, since these sightings occurred before any successful flight had ever been recorded, people started to see strange craft in the sky that were not actually there, or they interpreted other anomalous phenomena seen in the sky as sophisticated, human-made aircraft. These early sightings, Sanarov concludes, suggest that people’s ideas about technology could actually shape their perceptions of reality. As notions began to circulate about the possibility of flying machines, individuals looked at the sky and envisioned their existence.

I find Sanarov’s theory compelling, especially in the way that it connects back to my discussion of *real* aliens. Like *real* aliens, whose existence is conjured into our world through the beliefs

people have about them, these airship sightings also suggest that the human imagination is capable of creating objects and giving them weight in the world. The airship sightings of 1896 and 1897 were a product of the historical period in which airship flight was first anticipated, and these sightings very much connected with the desires and hopes of the American public at this time.

I also think it is quite telling that most of the witnesses of the airships did not conclude that the strange objects came from outer space, especially since this assumption is frequently made today whenever an anomalous entity is reportedly viewed in the sky. While several ufologists now classify these incidents as possible sightings of extraterrestrial vehicles, this explanation hardly registered for many of the witnesses who made the initial reports and who assumed that the object (or objects) came from elsewhere on Earth. While what was sighted in the sky (if there was, in fact, something sighted) was a mystery (and remains one to this day), it is important to look at the explanations that people have given about what it might have been, as this can reveal much about the cultural moment from which these explanations originate. It is therefore significant that most people at the time believed that the airship was a human invention, not an alien spacecraft. Despite bearing many similarities to UFO sightings that would take hold in the second half of the twentieth century, these ideas about extraterrestrial vessels were not yet realizable when the Airship Flap occurred, and it was only later that reports of unidentified objects in the sky were assumed to have possible extraterrestrial origins.

While the Great Airship Flap is sometimes still discussed in ufological channels, the wave of sightings was short lived and overall it seemed to leave very little impression on the larger public or on American culture. Aside from another brief stint of airship sightings in New England in 1909–10 that followed when a hoax news story was published in the *Boston Herald* telling of the invention of a dependable long-distance flying machine, unknown aerial craft made infrequent

appearances in American skies for the next few decades.[17] Perhaps stories about the mysterious airships were no longer necessary after the first planes took to the air in the early years of the twentieth century and the yearnings for human flight were satisfied. But something seems to have happened between this Airship Flap and the "modern era of [UFO] sightings in the United States"[18] that commenced in the late 1940s when numerous witnesses began to report unidentified flying objects in American skies (Jacobs, 1976, 31); it was at this time that many of the observers speculated that these objects were not human-made but were rather extraterrestrial vehicles from outer space.

The ability to imagine extraterrestrials occupying our skies was encouraged by ideas that many Americans held about the development of modern technologies. In the United States, more than anywhere else in the industrial world, the belief that technological progress was inevitable became a conviction held with an almost religious intensity. In this section, I look at how this faith in science and technology has helped give rise to ideas about advanced extraterrestrial beings coming to Earth. During the early years of the twentieth century, after the Great Airship Flap, the United States underwent a phase of accelerated industrialization that saw significant developments to such innovative technologies as electricity, railroads, automobiles, and airplanes. It was at this time that American industry superseded its European counterparts economically and the nation began to assert its military power. The development of these revolutionary technologies over such a short period of time led to the perception that technology was advancing at an exponential rate, and this perception seemed to encourage ideas about aliens.

For instance, Sanarov (1981, 165) historicizes the shift from imagining human airships to seeing extraterrestrial ones by looking specifically at emerging flight technologies: it was only "when

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[17] See Steven Whalen and Robert E. Bartholomew's 2002 article for a history of the Tillinghast hoax.
[18] I discuss this "modern era" of UFO sightings in Chapter Two.

man-made [*sic*] dirigibles became common and people had become accustomed to them" that "the airships in the tales began to be replaced by other luminous flying objects" — and this, he finds, inaugurated the era of flying saucers. His theory considers how the developments to human flight in the early years of the twentieth century encouraged people to turn their attention upwards and this propelled them to imagine ships being piloted by advanced beings from other planets. Further, the conviction that technologies could only become more sophisticated awakened the idea that extraterrestrials might have already reached a point of technological superiority where they could venture across the vast expanses of outer space to reach our planet.[19]

But it was not just flight technologies that encouraged these imaginative speculations; it is important to consider how other technological developments also shaped these perceptions, hence I expand on Sanarov's hypothesis by considering what other necessary prerequisites needed to be in place for some to conclude that strange objects seen in the sky were not human inventions but were alien spacecraft. In this section, I trace a largely unexplored yet essential development that needed to be in place for beliefs in aliens to take root: the development of radio. Here, I argue that the invasion of *real* aliens in the United States could not have occurred without the advent of radio, and that there is something inherent to the medium itself that inspires ideas about otherworldly beings. As I will show, the instantaneous and ethereal communication that takes place over invisible radio waves has helped collapse the boundaries of time and space, bringing together vast expanses of the world and reminding us that even the distant cosmos is perhaps not as unreachable as we had once imagined. Following the invention of radio technologies, the world (and the

[19] It also suggested that our human flight technologies could potentially become so advanced that we, too, could figure out the laws of nature to such a degree that we could travel across the cosmos. These ideas about technological progress allowed for people to imagine aliens as a projection of our own future as humans, one where we can see ourselves reaching that same level of technological superiority.

universe) seemed to shrink, and as it did, it inspired the idea that these radio waves could perhaps put us in touch with alien civilizations.

In the next chapter, I also look at a specific event that took place over the radio in the late 1930s, which seems to have inspired ideas about extraterrestrial beings occupying our earthly skies. Orson Welles's 1938 radio broadcast "The War of the Worlds" captivated the nation's attention and reignited ideas about unidentified objects invading American skies. It told the story of an alien invasion in the United States, offering a haunting reminder that the vast cosmos may be inhabited by intelligent beings capable of reaching Earth. The broadcast was a defining moment for popularizing ideas about *real* aliens in the United States, and it was after "The War of the Worlds" that many people began to imagine strange objects in the sky as being operated by alien pilots, not human ones. In that chapter, I examine what it was about the broadcast — and the medium of radio itself — that encouraged the belief in extraterrestrials and, ultimately, I locate the rise of these beliefs in the fantastic and uncanny nature of the 1938 radio broadcast.

Alien Airwaves

Before radio could inspire ideas about extraterrestrials it first had to be developed from pre-existing technologies, such as the telegraph and the telephone, which seemed to encourage magical and otherworldly ideas of their own. The telegraph, for instance, was developed through the 1830s and 1840s by Samuel Morse and other inventors, and it worked by transmitting an electrical signal over a wire laid between stations, which made it possible for individuals to communicate without requiring close human contact. With this absence of physical bodies, telegraphy revolutionized long-distance communication — and, as an unintended consequence, also inspired ideas about communicating with an even more distant realm: the spirit world.

The fact that messages could be sent across material objects and not directly through face-to-face communication created a haunted sense of disembodiment and "suggested the presence of… preternatural interlocutors, invisible entities who…could be reached through a most utilitarian application of the technology" (Sconce, 2000, 10). It was therefore not uncommon for individuals to respond to telegraphy as though it had psychic capabilities, and this new technology appeared to possess extraordinary powers, not simply for uniting people across vast distances on Earth, but also for reaching spirits from beyond our world.[20] Despite the fact that these devices were produced in a supposedly disenchanted and rational age meant to do away with magical thinking, it seems that these modern technologies have managed to inspire ideas about the otherworldly.

Soon after its invention, many began to associate with the technology the possibility of a wired world apart from but connected to our own — one that could now potentially be reached with the help of this new device. As a precursor to radio then, telegraphy initiated the idea that otherworldly beings could be contacted with the help of modern technologies; but at this time these ideas were focused more on contact with spirits and ghostly beings rather than with alien entities, and this complemented the fascination in the 1850s in the United States with the occult and the Spiritualist movement. It was not until the discovery of radio waves and the developments of radio technologies that ideas about contacting other planets in our universe really came to the fore.

Ever since the introduction of the telegraph, various inventors attempted to send signals through the air without connecting wires, and in the early years of the 1900s these efforts were successful. While the telegraph required a cable for the transmission of messages to take place, the discovery of radio waves revolutionized the history of communication in the United States and around the

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[20] It is little wonder that the singular word for media technologies, medium, came to share its name with spirit guides who communicate with the dead, as both were conceived as intervening forces that could channel messages across vast expanses, both earthly and spiritual.

world by removing barriers of distance more than any other technology before. That is, radio abolished the need for secure and physical wires to deliver messages, and instead, sound could be transmitted through the open air. This came about with the discovery of the ether — an invisible ocean of waves that somehow hovers all around us in the open air, invisible and unknown to our human perceptions, yet discernible through our modern technologies. Radio transmitters are used to impress signals onto these waves, which then travel at the speed of light and are taken in by a receiver, such as the radio set.

With the invention of radio came the awareness that we could now be immediately connected to places all over the world, and since the sound transmitted through radio is dynamic and fleeting, it conveys a powerful sense of "liveness": "[radio offers] an account of what *is* happening, rather than a record of what *has* happened" (Douglas, [1999] 2004, 6–7). The ability to reach distant places and hear about what was going on instantaneously made it seem as though the world itself was shrinking. This perception of a shrinking world served as a reminder that distances once considered insurmountable could now possibly be reached.

Further, the discovery of the abstract space in which radio waves travel (even passing through solid objects), gave the impression of an unseen parallel world floating on top of, or through, our own. As with telegraphy, which inspired beliefs in spirits, radio also stimulated fantastical imaginings; it stirred ideas about an unseen world hovering all around us, seemingly limitless in its scope. Since radio requires no wires, there is an invisibility to radio transmission that was unlike earlier technologies; this gave radio a sense of omnipresence. As Jeffrey Sconce notes, radio appears to possess the power to "atomize and disperse both body and consciousness across the vast expanses of the universe" (14). The advent of radio served as a reminder that there was much to

our own world and the wider universe that had been invisible and undetectable to our human senses, but that could now be revealed with the help of modern technologies.

The discovery of unseen radio waves seemingly emanating from "the sky" helped turn attention upward, toward outer space. "The way that receivers reel in distant voices out of that incomprehensible dimension called the spectrum and effortlessly bring them straight to us, linking us, through the air, to unseen others," evoked a sense of distance and disembodiment to communication where, for the first time, signals could be sent deep into the cosmos (Douglas, [1999] 2004, 41). As Douglas describes, listening both to the "eerie, supernatural mixture of the natural static and man-made voices" offered a sense of the human voice commingling with the sounds of the cosmos, and as *The New York Times* reported, radio "brought to the ears of us Earth dwellers the noises that roar in the space between the worlds" (Smith, 19 February 1922, quoted in Douglas, 52).

As such, radio continued along the lines of telegraphy by encouraging ideas about the otherworldly, but with the removal of wires, attention shifted from reaching the spiritual realm to reaching life on other planets.[21] This is not to suggest that everyone who listened to the radio was consciously thinking that they might make contact with alien life, and as Douglas notes, "if asked, most of them would have said they took to the air for fun, or out of curiosity, or to test their technical mettle" (Douglas, [1999] 2004, 53). At the same time, this realization that

> there was a new, invisible dimension out there — the electromagnetic spectrum — that could provide contact with others far way and that opened up a dark yet crackling

[21] Ideas about contacting spirits and other ghostly entities continued with radio as well, and many speculated that the device might be utilized to communicate with the dead; but it was with radio that people first began to imagine being able to contact beings from faraway planets.

> part of the universe to the human imagination, put people, however temporarily, into further awe of the cosmos of which they were part. (Ibid.)

The development of early radio was absolutely necessary for stimulating ideas about contacting the far reaches of the universe and for imagining extraterrestrial life as being able to communicate with us.

An unbridled enthusiasm accompanied the invention of radio. Douglas describes this early period of radio as one marked by "exploratory listening" (55). Before stations were fixed in place, before government regulations limited use of the radio waves, and before predictable programming became established, radio was viewed as an expansive realm for exploration (Ibid.). During its developing stages, radio mostly captivated the interests of amateur hobbyists, known as ham operators. These were usually boys and young men, who used their crystal sets and listened on the first headphones to voices and sounds emanating from far away (Ibid.).[22] For them, the vast ether became a space ripe for discovery.

As Douglas observes, ideas about radio in the US often became articulated through rhetoric about the open frontier. The ether was cast as a new site of uninhibited exploration, which significantly took the place of the geographic American frontier described by Fredrick Jackson Turner ([1920] 2011), which was deemed closed in 1890. Before its mass popularity, radio allowed individuals "to imagine themselves as experimental pioneers in the ether, exploring new and invisible frontiers" (Sconce, 2000, 102). From Boy Scout handbooks to articles in *The New York Times*, these ideas were reflected in popular ephemera of the day, where early radio was celebrated

[22] Radio listening soon became a popular hobby, especially DXing, which refers to the type of listening in which the operator seeks to identify distant radio signals on their radio device. The point of DXing was to try to tune in to as many faraway stations as possible, listening "not for continuity but for change" (Ibid.). That is, these hobbyists were not interested in discovering a single message, but instead searched the ether to hear as many messages as possible, and they attempted to see from how far away they could get a signal. Unlike today, early radio listening was usually a random and indiscriminate activity.

and described as an inventive new technology and the ether was understood as an open frontier ready for exploration (Douglas, [1999] 2004, 66–67).[23] The notion that radio opened up a new frontier bears significance to ideas about the cosmos. While outer space would not be described as a new frontier until the Cold War era and the Space Age, the idea of the vast and open realm of discovery made possible by early radio seems to foreshadow later discussions about the exploration of our solar system, galaxy, and the wider universe, and early radio helped encourage these ideas about space exploration to take root.

Martian Messages

Of course, dreams of contacting other planets began long before radio was determined to be the most likely and optimal form of communication, and the thought that extraterrestrial life might exist has been a point of debate from the beginnings of recorded history.[24] But it was nearing the dawn of the twentieth century that scientific and technological advances in astronomy started to make it possible to investigate life on other worlds, and a burgeoning popular press helped fuel the idea that other planets in our solar system and the wider universe could be teeming with life.

Nearing the end of the 1800s, for instance, astronomers using rapidly improving telescopes began to report certain features on nearby planets, such as Mars and Venus, which might have been created by intelligent life. One of the most popular of these discoveries was made by Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli, who, in 1877, observed lines on the surface of Mars. In his

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[23] The connections between radio and the frontier played an important role in shaping radio as a significant national activity, and it framed radio listening in the United States as possessing a particular "American" quality. In 1922, the *New York Times* reported that "radio phoning has become the most popular amusement in America," and listening-in, as it was called, was hailed as the new national pastime in the US (*New York Times*, 2 March 1992, 2, quoted in Douglas, 52).

[24] See Steven J. Dick's *Plurality of Worlds: The Origins of the Extra-Terrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant* (1982) for a history of the extraterrestrial life debates from antiquity to the first half of the eighteenth century. Also see Michael J. Crowe's *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate 1750–1900* ([1986] 1999) for an overview of the deliberations that took place between 1750 until about 1900 regarding whether life existed on another body in the universe. Crowe also offers a brief overview of earlier debates about extraterrestrial life, going as far back as the fifth-century BC and the flowering of Greek civilization.

research, Schiaparelli called these features "canali," meaning "channels," but this became mistranslated in English as "canals," which implied that there was intelligent life on the planet.[25] William Sheehan (1996, 85) makes the observation that Schiaparelli's description of the canals "taught observers how to see the planet, and eventually it was impossible to see it any other way. Expectation created illusion." After Schiaparelli's findings, other scientists began to speculate that because of the canals and its Earth-like appearance, Mars seemed like a potential and reasonable planet to house life. With Schiaparelli's discovery, a preoccupation with Mars came to dominate popular culture at the turn of the century.[26]

These ideas were perpetuated by respected French astronomer Camille Flammarion, who believed in the existence of intelligent life on other planets based on the appearance of the canals. Flammarion ([1892] 2015) speculated that alien civilizations on Mars would be more advanced than we are since the canals seemed to be planet-wide in scale. He also argued that advancements made in recent human history were simply less developed versions of the Martians' capabilities, and his faith in technological progress led him to suggest that the Martians offered a model for the potential evolution of human beings on Earth.

In conceiving of the Martians as more advanced than human beings, Flammarion also suggested that this extraterrestrial life would have the capability to reach Earth long before we could reach them, and he hypothesized that these alien beings may have already attempted to contact our planet. With this in mind, Flammarion began to popularize the idea that humans should get to work on making contact with aliens in outer space, and in a widely disseminated essay he published in

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[25] The discovery of these features occurred fewer than ten years after the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 — the engineering wonder of the era — and so the mistranslation was taken to mean that large-scale artificial structures had been discovered on Mars, and this conjured images of a great civilization of life on the planet.

[26] See Robert Crossley's (2011) *Imagining Mars* for a detailed examination of the treatment of Mars in literary and scientific texts over the past century and a half. Crossley's argument is founded on the principle that the way "people imagine other worlds is an index of how they think of themselves, their immediate world, their institutions and conventions, their rituals and habits" (xiv).

1892, Flammarion opened the field of alien communication to broad participation and offered to award 100 000 francs to anyone able to communicate with another celestial body within ten years (cited in Cerceau, 2015, 215). Flammarion believed that our own technologies might soon allow us to prove his theories and confirm that human beings were not the only intelligent creatures in our solar system.

Flammarion's works were disseminated not just in France, but around the world, where they resonated with Percival Lowell, a wealthy, Harvard-educated man with interests in astronomy. Flammarion's works seemed to play an important role in directing Lowell to conceive of intelligent beings on Mars and, like Flammarion, Lowell agreed that those narrow "canals" followed perfectly straight geometric lines that suggested they were artificially produced. Lowell was quite successful in presenting himself as a legitimate voice in the Martian-life debate and he argued alongside Flammarion that Martian life was more ancient and advanced than ours and it had developed into a sophisticated civilization that trumped human capabilities on Earth. While he tried to appear publicly wary and judicious in his claims about the hypothetical Martians, he also continued to reason that the planet-spanning nature of the canals, the age of the planet, and its lower gravity, made it very likely that it was occupied by advanced lifeforms.[27] For some time, his ideas were highly promoted and disseminated in the popular press, and Lowell almost single-handedly made Mars a topic of popular interest in the US.

It was also at this time that H.G. Wells wrote his ground-breaking novel *The War of the Worlds* ([1898] 2003), which was inspired by the ideas of Flammarion and Lowell, and which further popularized the fantastical thought of an inhabited Mars to a wider audience. It first appeared in serialized form in 1897 and was published in January 1898 by William Heinemann of London.

[27] To promote his ideas, Lowell published a series of popular books on the topic: *Mars* (1895); *Mars and Its Canals* (1906); and *Mars As the Abode of Life* (c. 1908).

Throughout the novel, Wells's unnamed protagonist offers a first-person account of the Martian invasion. He describes how intelligent Martian beings attempted to colonize our planet to escape a slow death on their own by launching themselves to Earth in metal cylinders fired from a massive cannon.[28] The first Martians landed in the small English town of Woking (where Wells had lived) and, upon landing, they used their superior three-legged fighting machines to move around the countryside. They also carried heat-rays with poisonous black smoke, which they used to decimate the humans they encountered, including the military.

During the Martian takeover, the British people become refugees and the story traces the narrator's struggles to reach his wife in London while avoiding being captured himself. As he moves from one abandoned house to the next he bears witness to the invasion, including the harrowing realization that the Martians are rounding up the surviving humans to feed on their blood. Eventually, the narrator manages to reach London, where he ultimately discovers that the Martians are dead or dying from earthly diseases against which they have no immunity. At the end of the novel, the narrator reflects on how the invasion cured humanity of its arrogance, while speculating on whether another invasion will happen again.

At the time, the story became quite popular in the Victorian literary scene and it was one of the earliest speculative fiction narratives to imagine the conflict between humankind and extraterrestrials. Wells's novel stimulated the idea that Mars could possibly be inhabited, and it encouraged its readers to imagine what a Martian invasion might look like. Even though it was a fictional work, Wells's novel tapped into ideas that were already circulating about the possibilities of extraterrestrial contact, and it encouraged individuals to reflect on the potential motivations that

[28] These ideas picked up on Lowell's speculations that Mars was a dying world.

aliens might have for visiting Earth; it also helped to spread these ideas to an even broader audience.

It was not long before the thought of Martian life became a matter of great speculation both for scientists and the lay public, and by the end of the nineteenth century, the idea that life on other worlds was possible was shared by several astronomers, scientists, and speculative writers, and was disseminated in newspapers across the United States. Many suggested that Mars, the Moon, Venus, and even the Sun could be possible candidates for holding life forms, and, in imagining that these alien societies would likely be more advanced than human civilization, by the turn of the century, there was a bustle of excitement about the possibility that inhabitants from outer space would try to communicate with people on Earth.[29] Coinciding with the apex of early wireless, radio was quickly seen as the best possibility for communicating with alien life, and efforts were made at the turn of the century to devise working radio transmitters for contacting Mars.

As radio technologies developed and improved, contact with aliens no longer seemed like a remote fantasy, but rather a likely possibility; hence interest in communicating with intelligent alien life was certainly not caused by radio alone, but wireless technologies proved central to this enthusiasm, and the advent of radio prompted an important moment when people started to seek out otherworldly contact using scientific devices. For the first time in our history, we were dealing with the idea of circumventing vast distances, and this opened the possibility that we might be able to contact alien beings.

[29] For instance, several astronomers, inventors, and scientists noted occasional flashes on the surfaces of the Moon and Mars, and some began to speculate that they were the cause of intelligent alien life attempting to signal us. One of these individuals, Carl Friedrich Gauss, inventor of the heliotrope — a device using mirrors and the sun's rays for signalling — speculated that a giant heliotrope might be used to signal beings on the Moon, making him one of the first to propose a strategy for reaching far away celestial bodies (Darling and Schulze-Makuch, 2016, 167).

Further, as already mentioned, with the advent of radio came the recognition that invisible waves exist and once these waves were used for long-distance communication, they encouraged the simultaneously exciting and unsettling idea that aliens may have already tried to contact us. In the popular press, many speculated that beings on Mars, or perhaps even other, more distant planets, had been waiting for us to catch up and both discover and develop technologies to engage in interplanetary communication.

These ideas were shared by two pioneers of radio technology, Nikola Tesla (Tesla, 9 February 1901, 4–5) and Guglielmo Marconi, who both claimed to have heard interplanetary transmissions around the turn of the twentieth century.[30] At the time, their ideas were dismissed by many scientists, who argued that Mars was too far away for radio signals to travel and remain detectable.[31] Their reports of these strange signals became the source for much controversy and debate in both the scientific community and the popular press, which helped to spread these ideas to the wider public.

In 1919, Marconi publicly addressed the possibility of radio for reaching other planets in an interview that made the front page of the *New York Times* (Unknown author, cited in Bozeman, 2015, 49). In this interview, he noted that wireless signals leaving the Earth would continue on infinitely, and he hinted that this might lead to “a very big thing in the future,” adding further that “communication with intelligence on other stars… It may some day be possible, and as many of

[30] Tesla is often described as a strange, mystical figure, and a popular conspiracy theory circulating today on the World Wide Web argues that Tesla was really an alien and that his discoveries and inventions were made possible because he was actually a superior being sent to Earth to aid us in our technological advancement. Moreover, the fact that Tesla claimed to have contacted ETs with the equipment he invented has fed into this idea that he was really an extraterrestrial who had reached out to his home planet and reported this contact to encourage human beings to become more accepting of alien-human communication. Another, perhaps slightly less incredible theory does not propose that Tesla was an extraterrestrial but does find that Tesla really had made contact with aliens, who had given him information to help him come up with his inventions.

[31] These scientists also disregarded much of Tesla’s testimony, since Tesla had already expressed fantastic beliefs in mental telepathy and reincarnation, which the scientific establishment deemed impossible — or, at least, very unlikely.

the planets are much older than ours the beings who live there ought to have information for us of enormous value" (Ibid.).

At the end of the interview, he mentioned that he had often received strong signals out of the ether, and he speculated that some of them seemed to come from some place beyond Earth. While he was adamant that he was only speculating about the nature of these signals, his comments certainly gave further reason to imagine extraterrestrial beings sending signals toward our planet. While many scientists dismissed his claims, as a popular and public figure who had established his legitimacy as the "inventor" of radio, Marconi's ideas were disseminated widely and were entertained by the popular press. By the early 1920s, moreover, Marconi discovered that shortwave radio, by bouncing off the upper atmosphere, can hopscotch around the world, and this revelation again emphasized the potential of radio for long-distance communication and opened the possibility for sending signals even further than previously imagined.

By that time, however, the idea that there was life on Mars seemed more unlikely. While some scientists were skeptical of the idea in the early years of the twentieth century, by the mid-1920s, most professional astronomers overwhelmingly rejected these claims. As telescopic equipment improved throughout the early twentieth century, a rising professional community of astronomers were able to more definitively determine that the canals were not manufactured structures. These astronomers also used newer instruments to determine that Mars was a cold planet with an atmosphere low in water vapour, low in oxygen, and low in overall pressure, and so most came to doubt the existence of Martians. During the 1920s then, ideas about Martian life were no longer entertained by mainstream scientists and these authoritative conclusions were soon echoed by the popular press; it was at this time that many journalists became openly skeptical that Mars was an abode for intelligent life.

And yet, these ideas did not completely fade from the popular consciousness. John Marvin Bozeman (2015) postulates, "perhaps the editors felt that their reading public was growing permanently tired of reading inconclusive reports about the features of Mars and peculiar radio transmissions, particularly in light of newer astronomical research casting doubt on the existence of the canals" (47–48). He continues: "If so, they were mistaken" (48). Despite the firm dismissal of these ideas in the scientific community, Lowell's suggestion seemed to stick for some time in the popular consciousness, and visions of an inhabited Mars proved long-lasting.

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, for instance, some individuals continued to write in to newspapers offering their own suggestions for communicating with the Red Planet, and even up to the mid-1920s noteworthy attempts to contact Martian beings were still undertaken.[32] Further, while life on Mars may have been out of the question for many scientists, the prospects of alien life elsewhere in the universe remained a possibility — as did the idea that they could be reached by radio. This period marked a tension between scientific authority and popular opinion. While the scientific establishment largely concluded that Martian life could not possibly exist — and that communication with these beings was therefore impossible — a resounding popular opinion continued to support the possibility that Mars was inhabited by intelligent beings. Or, even if Martian life was no longer considered possible, many Americans held that other planets in the

[32] A former colleague of Lowell, David Peck Todd, for instance, attempted to contact the alleged Martians during the mid-1920s. While Todd did not have the funding or the same public celebrity as Lowell, Tesla, or Marconi, he was the only one of these individuals who was professionally trained both in astronomy and radio technology, and in 1924, he requested that the US State Department, the Army, the Navy, and the Italian, Cuban, and Argentine embassies, as well as the Radio Corporation of America, all observe a period of silence during the two days of Mars' closest approach to Earth (Bozeman, 2015, 52–53). Most of the commercial stations did not comply, but as Bozeman notes, "it appears that the Army and Navy did; the Army even offered the services of its top code-breaker, William F. Friedman" (53). While sounds and signals were recorded during this time, most were ascribed to normal radio interference or to accidental broadcasts, and no significant discoveries of Martian communication were uncovered. At the same time, the fact that Todd was able to convince the Army and Navy to participate in his experiment suggests that ideas about Martian life still retained an influence in American culture, despite their overwhelming rejection by mainstream scientists.

universe were likely occupied by alien beings that could be contacted. While most scientists argued that even if intelligent lifeforms did exist they were too far away to be reached with current technologies, that did not stop a significant public from imagining that radio technologies might soon allow us to make contact.[33]

The considerable volume of materials published around the turn of the century and into the early decades of the 1900s that debated the possibilities of contacting extraterrestrial life established a broad public with a sustained interest in communicating with alien beings. From Wells's innovative novel awaking fantastical imaginings about extraterrestrial invasions, to pulp magazines offering creative depictions of what possible alien intelligences might look like, to newspapers across the country pondering the possibilities of alien contact, these highly popular texts planted a seed in the minds of many Americans that interaction with extraterrestrial beings might soon be possible.

However, after mainstream newspapers stopped much of their reporting on the speculations about alien life, there was a notable waning of discussion in public forums about the possibility of real aliens. These debates further diminished with the deaths of Lowell in 1916 and Flammarion in 1925. It was also around this time that Tesla's career was in decline and that Marconi appeared to abandon his efforts to contact aliens. With the most active voices for encouraging ideas about alien life either dying, losing credibility, or giving up, little public attention was given to the topic in the mid-1920s and into the 1930s. While stories about Martian beings and extraterrestrials from distant planets continued to be shared, they were largely confined to fictional literature, and the

[33] This tension between expert and popular opinion significantly foreshadows ufology's exclusion in the second half of the twentieth century, when ufology is denigrated as a popular pseudoscience that fails to take into consideration the expert authority of the scientific establishment, a point that informs Parts Two and Three of this dissertation.

debates about actual alien beings lost momentum.[34] Hence, the unbridled enthusiasm about *real* aliens that captivated many Americans during the fin de siècle and the early twentieth century certainly diminished by the 1930s. With the decline of interest given to stories about Martians and other alien lifeforms, the public that was formed around these ideas largely dissipated. This did not mean that these imaginings about extraterrestrials disappeared, but they did go latent for some time, waiting for something to trigger their eruption back into popular consciousness.

The Listening Public

That came on the evening of 30 October 1938, the night before Hallowe'en, when aliens arrived to destroy human civilization. They travelled not by technologically superior spacecraft, but through radio waves directly into the living rooms of American households. Ground Zero was rural central New Jersey, and for almost an hour, some listeners across the United States became terrorized by objects and creatures that existed in their imaginations. Orson Welles's "The War of the Worlds," I argue, was a defining moment in American history, as it opened the possibility for imagining an alien invasion in the United States, and it helped propel *real* aliens into existence.

But before "The War of the Worlds" could reignite ideas about the possibility of actual extraterrestrial beings and spread these ideas across the nation, there first needed to be in place an extensive listening public linked together through the simultaneous and shared experience of tuning into the same radio programming. As I have mentioned, radio encouraged ideas about reaching otherworldly beings by making contact across tremendous distances possible, but it was also important for forming a substantial public of listeners who invested their trust with broadcasters and who were willing to entertain their messages, even ones about a fantastical alien invasion.

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[34] See, for instance, Edgar Rice Burroughs's fictionalized representation of the planet Mars in his highly popular *Barsoom* series (1912–1948).

The rise of this listening public emerged alongside radio's increasing popularity as a mass medium in the United States. While early radio was considered a hobby and many individuals from the older generation thought that radio listening would likely only ever be a fad, radio ownership took off in the 1920s and 1930s after the invention of the loudspeaker replaced the bulky headphones used by ham radio operators, which enabled families to listen to the radio together (Douglas, [1999] 2004, 78). Further, the crowding of the ether in the first few decades of the twentieth century prompted the need for greater regulation of the airwaves, leading to the development of the American commercial broadcasting system. This resulted in clearer transmissions that allowed people to listen to uninterrupted, quality programming.

Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s then, the networks turned their attention toward consistent and dependable broadcasting and they came up with regular programming schedules for the listening public. Alongside this growth of the networks, radio programming became more dependable, and people started to tune in at the same time each day or week to listen to various shows: comedies, dramas, news broadcasts, and musical performances. This marked what has been called the "Golden Age" of radio, and networks spent quite significant budgets on their programming during this time.

This transformation of radio from an open ether to a regulated and corporatized institution really took hold by the 1930s, which was a trying decade in the United States, as Americans had never encountered such widespread economic failure. While the decade proved difficult for American citizens, it was a fruitful time for radio. The Depression left citizens with hours of involuntary leisure time and the need for escape, and as a relatively inexpensive device, radio came to be an important medium for satisfying these yearnings; in fact, radio was "one of the few industries that

saw unparalleled growth during the Great Depression" (Schwartz, 2015, 104).[35] Even though radio was still a relatively new medium in the 1930s, "broadcasting was popular, commercialized, and important to the life of the nation" (Miller, 2003, 1) and Americans came to depend on radio; as David Goodman (2011, xv) argues, "radio was important for most Western nations in the 1930s, but nowhere more so than in the United States." By 1937, more than half of the radio sets in the world were located in the US.

It was at this time that radio was established as a trustworthy source for news, and listeners placed their confidence in radio broadcasting for alerting them of up-to-the-minute events happening all over the world. Some prominent political figures, such as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, even used radio as a tool to reach the American public and reassure citizens during the trying years of the Depression.[36] Radio offered a source of comfort and connection during those taxing times and helped soothe the American public by bringing the nation together like never before.

The shared and simultaneous experience of radio listening helped to create what Benedict Anderson ([1983] 1991) describes as an "imagined community," a community constituted through imagination, where most people never actually come to meet in person, yet they perceive

[35] Since radio was one of the cheapest forms of entertainment at the time, and because it was quite new and novel, its popularity grew rapidly; in 1924, there were only three million sets in homes nationwide, but by 1936, this number had increased tenfold (Brown, [1998] 2004, 2). By 1934, sixty percent of the nation's households had radios, and throughout the 1930s, one-and-a-half million cars were equipped with them (Scott, 2008).

[36] When FDR took the oath of office on 4 March 1933, the American banking system had essentially collapsed, but the president had an adept understanding of the medium of radio and used it to make his case to the American people, convincing them to have confidence to put their money back into the banks. In his "fireside chats" — the name given to Roosevelt's series of twenty-eight evening radio addresses — he reassured the sixty million people listening in that their savings were indeed safe (Schwartz, 2015, 15). Radio allowed him to communicate directly to the people, and the immediacy and liveness of radio, as well as the emotional appeal of Roosevelt's voice, helped listeners feel as though they were connected to the president. "The broadcast brought you so close to us, and you spoke in such clear concise terms, our confidence in the Bank Holiday was greatly strengthened," wrote one California woman (Miller, 13 March 1933, cited in Levine and Levine, 2010, 45). Roosevelt's strong and comforting voice, his frank and down-to-earth manner, his inclusive language, and his simple statements worked well on radio, and the medium helped to convey a sense of strength from the president.

themselves to be part of a larger group that shares a common set of features, such as a religion, language, or origin.[37] The instant and direct effects of radio became incredibly significant for uniting the nation.

Since there were only a few broadcasters with control of the airwaves, radio programming was consistent across much of the country, and people from coast to coast could tune in simultaneously and listen to the same programs. The very act of listening and knowing that others across the country were experiencing that moment in the exact same way brought individuals across the nation together in a way that was not possible before radio. As A. Brad Schwartz (2015, 14) elaborates, “never before in human history had such a great mass of people, spread over such a wide area, been able to follow events instantaneously.” He goes on to contend that “radio allowed people to be both disparate and together, isolated, yet involved; it helped foster a sense of national community at a time when economic and social turmoil threatened to tear the country apart” (14–15). As radio listening became a daily pastime that swept through the United States, it constructed an imagined community and worked to forge a strong national culture (11). Radio therefore allowed a substantial public to be reached all at once and with the same message, and this public had grown to depend on listening to the radio for the latest news. So when Orson Welles took to the air on that late October evening, Americans all across the country together heard the news that Martians had invaded the United States.

[37] Anderson emphasizes the key role of mass media in forming an understanding of the nation and the way in which people conceive of themselves as a coherent community. Radio (and other media) allow members of a country to engage in a national conversation, and as a result of this exchange, individuals become aware of their fellow citizens and their shared heritage.

Chapter Two:

“The War of the Worlds”

The Broadcast

The broadcast began at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, with little preamble. It commenced with a short monologue taken almost verbatim from the 1898 H.G. Wells novel on which it was based, before briefly moving into a description of the play’s context. The opening of the program also quotes a fake Crossley service report,[38] which ironically foreshadows the significance of radio for reaching a vast audience:

> It was near the end of October. Business was better. The war was over. More men were back at work. Sales were picking up. On this particular evening, October 30, the Crossley service estimated that thirty-two million people were listening in on radios. (“The War of the Worlds” script, published in Cantril 1940, 5)

After this statement, the play jumps into a fictitious broadcast within a broadcast, and it did not break after this point for thirty-eight minutes.

Before the broadcast moves into its main plot of the Martian invasion, it opens with a typical, routine meteorological report, which describes an unrecognizable weather disturbance over Nova Scotia. From here, the program segues to the Meridian Room in the Park Plaza where “the music of Ramon Raquello and his orchestra” is being played (“The War of the Worlds” script, in Cantril 1940, 6). A voice then disrupts the musical performance: “Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt this radio program of dance music to bring you a special bulletin from the Intercontinental Radio

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[38] Crossley ratings or services were an audience measurement system created to determine the audience size of radio broadcasts beginning in 1930. They were developed by Archibald Crossley, a pioneer in public opinion polling, and the ratings were generated using information collected by telephone surveys to random houses.

News" (Ibid.). The voice offers a short dispatch, stating that two professors, Farrell and Pierson, have observed explosions on the surface of Mars. The update is brief and somewhat banal, and the audience is quickly returned to "the music of Ramon Raquello, playing for you in the Meridian Room of the Park Plaza Hotel, situated in downtown New York" (Ibid.). Here, the orchestra plays "the ever-popular" (and appropriately named) "Stardust," but after a few bars, the song is cut short as the announcer alerts the audience that the network is going to take the listeners to the Princeton Observatory (Ibid.).

Then the actor playing on-air reporter Carl Phillips interviews astronomer Professor Pierson. With a slight chuckle, Pierson scoffs at the popular notion that there are canals on Mars, and he assures Phillips that there is no way that the planet is inhabited; at the same time, he states that he cannot account for the strange explosion seen on the planet. During the conversation, the Professor is handed a wire, which is read aloud by Phillips. The wire indicates a "seismograph registered shock of almost earthquake intensity occurring within a radius of twenty miles of Princeton. Please investigate. Signed, Lloyd Gray, Chief of Astronomical Division" (9–10).

After this brief interview, the broadcast returns to the orchestra. The music plays for a short time, only to be once again interrupted by an announcer, who informs listeners that other international observatories have confirmed seeing explosions on Mars. The announcer also reports that "at 8:50 p.m., a huge, flaming object, believed to be a meteorite, fell on a farm in the neighborhood of Grover's Mill, New Jersey, twenty-two miles from Trenton" (10–11). Commentator Phillips is dispatched to the site, and after a brief interlude of swing band music, Phillips, still accompanied by Pierson, reports from the scene to describe the strange cylindrical object that has fallen from the sky.

At the crash site, Phillips paints a picture, so to speak, of what was going on, and in doing so, he constructs an image that listeners could visualize. The "thing," as Phillips communicates, seems to have fallen from the sky and has landed in a farmer's field, creating a massive crater in the process. He informs the audience that the cylindrical object is roughly thirty yards in diameter, with a "yellowish-white" metal that seems unmarred by its descent into the atmosphere, and he is adamant that it looks like no meteor (11). Phillips continues to relay how the police have been dispatched to the scene, and the noises of sirens and squad cars in the background seem to confirm this. He also describes how the police have been keeping bystanders from getting too close, and during the scene, several of the actors speak continuously to one another in the background, with disjointed, anxious voices mimicking the sound of a crowd. Phillips also conducts an interview with Mr. Wilmuth, the farmer who owns the land where the object had fallen and, in his conversation with Wilmuth, he prods the farmer to describe what had happened.

It is at this time that the cylinder unscrews, and onlookers catch a glimpse of a tentacled, pulsating Martian concealed inside, which incinerates the crowd with its spectacular heat-ray. Phillips shouts and describes how the flames are enveloping the onlookers before his voice is cut off mid-sentence, followed by the thud of his microphone and a long, dead silence. An announcer from the station cuts in reporting that they are having difficulty with their field transmissions, and the piano interlude resumes for a short time before another announcer returns to report that forty people, including six state troopers, were massacred in Grover's Mill, "their bodies burned and distorted beyond all possible recognition" (12–14).

The regular programming and big band music is then repeatedly interrupted as the studio provides updates of the catastrophe. They re-establish contact with Professor Pierson, who has escaped the carnage and is able to provide his harrowing speculations about the Martian beings

who "have scientific knowledge far in advance of our own" and who are using this technology to destroy any obstacles in their path (14–18). After Pierson's statements, the New Jersey state militia declares martial law and attacks the cylinder. Radio transmissions are then handed over to the military and for roughly twenty minutes the Martian invasion plays out over the radio waves. Brigadier General Montgomery Smith addresses the listeners and places the "counties of Mercer and Middlesex as far west as Princeton, and east to Jamesburg, under martial law," after which Captain Lansing of the Signal Corps describes the military response to the listeners (19).

At first, he offers some relief, stating that:

> …the situation arising from the reported presence of certain individuals of unidentified nature is now under complete control. The cylindrical object which lies in a pit directly below our position is surrounded on all sides by eight battalions of infantry… All cause for alarm, if such a cause ever existed, is now entirely unjustified. (21)

But immediately after he finishes his calm delivery, he describes a solid metal structure emerging from the cylinder. He tells listeners to "Hold on!" but as he strives to get a closer look, his voice is cut off and one more profound silence follows (22). Another announcer's voice returns to alert listeners that the metal structure arising from the pit is a Martian war machine that shot the American infantry with its mysterious ray gun and trampled most of the soldiers, killing over six thousand armed men. The broadcast then connects to Washington with a special report on the national emergency by the Secretary of the Interior, who asks listeners to continue in the "performance of our duties, each and every one of us, so that we may confront this destructive adversary with a nation united, courageous, and consecrated to the preservation of human supremacy on this earth" (23–24),

After the Secretary makes his statement, the broadcast returns to the announcer, who describes how other cylinders have been discovered nationally and internationally. From here, listeners eavesdrop further on the military operations taking place over the radio waves, and they listen to transmissions from army bombers attempting to destroy the enemy tripods. At this time, listeners became privy to the description of objects taking over New York City and reaching Time Square — the symbolic cultural capital of the United States — before spreading across the country.

The announcer relays these events in a terrified manner, his voice filled with concern, until listeners finally hear a sigh and a thud, as his body hits the floor. They then hear the voice of a single ham-radio operator trying to establish contact with another station. He exclaims, "2X2L calling CQ" and repeats this call three times, before asking, "Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone…? 2X2L---" (31). His voice is cut off and listeners are left with no more voices — only silence. After this final, terrorizing silence, an announcer returns to alert listeners that the play will commence after the station break: "You are listening to a CBS presentation of Orson Welles and the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* in an original dramatization of *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells. The performance will continue after a brief intermission. This is the Columbia Broadcasting System" (32).

Upon its return, the show dropped the news-broadcast format and re-established itself as a fictional performance. Here, Welles narrates the rest of the story as Professor Pierson, and he recounts how his character wandered the countryside attempting to flee the aliens. As Pierson continues, he eventually discovers that the Martians have all died from earthly bacteria. This part of the broadcast has a different pace, and it would have been nearly impossible for listeners to misrecognize this part of the play as factual; however, this shift in tone did not occur until almost

forty minutes after the program began, and the damage had already been done — *real* aliens had landed in the United States.

Orson Welles and the Magic of Storytelling

For the broadcast to inspire ideas about an actual alien invasion taking place across the nation, it first had to convince listeners of its realism, and this was made possible largely because of Welles's effective use of the medium of radio to tell this story. Welles was certainly cognizant of the powers that radio broadcasting had for stimulating the imagination and he adapted certain conventions common to 1930s radio to create the illusion that the broadcast was an authentic report of an actual alien invasion. Throughout the broadcast, Welles employed a series of techniques, like imitation, interruption, sound effects, and pacing, to play on the listeners' imaginations and force upon them a particular reading of the broadcast, one where extraterrestrial beings really could be conceived as occupying American skies.

Welles and Wells

Here, it is helpful to draw a comparison between the original *The War of the Worlds* and the later broadcast to consider the differences between the novel and broadcast, and to reflect upon why the broadcast, and not the novel, came to inspire ideas about *real* aliens coming to Earth. As mentioned, the broadcast was based on H.G. Wells's [1898] 2003 novel of the same name, and interestingly, Orson's last name is a strange iteration of Herbert George's (H.G.) surname — an unintentional coincidence, but one that would amusingly highlight the way in which Orson Welles would maintain, yet also completely transform, H.G. Wells's original story.

In his novel, Wells uses the idea of a Martian invasion to critique Western imperialism and to question assumptions about evolutionary progress and development. That is, he pessimistically addresses the idea that human evolution is positively assured by having the "nineteenth-century

European man as the summit of nature and culture … subjected to a 'surprise attack' from the unknown universe that European models have excluded from consideration" (Morson, 2006, 12).

Drawing from recent Darwinist evolutionary principles, moreover, Wells suggests that the Martian creatures would be "different beyond the most bizarre imaginings of a nightmare" (Wells, [1898] 2003, 177), and throughout his novel, he draws on the latest scientific discoveries from the time to make the story seem modern and plausible. His tale foregrounds the realization that we do not know much about the universe and we may be insignificant beings in the vast cosmos; as the narrator states: "It was never a war, any more than there's war between man and ants" (Wells, [1898] 2003, 167). Wells's work can, therefore, be read as a great anti-imperialist allegory, where the English become colonized by a technologically superior Martian species; in other words, Wells used his narrative to force his readers to confront what it would be like to be on the receiving end of imperial occupation.[39] As Gary Saul Morson (2006, 11) writes, Wells successfully used "the concept of an apocalypse for thinking about history and society without believing that a literal apocalypse will ever take place," and the Martian invasion allowed him to transmit his didactic messages to a wide audience.

In the broadcast version, Orson Welles would play on the journalistic sense inherent in H.G. Wells's novel, and he would borrow similar plot points — but here, the similarities largely end. Rather than telling a didactic story and using ideas about alien invasion to make a political commentary that tackled the concepts of evolution and colonization, as H.G. Wells did in his novel,

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[39] The novel was apparently inspired by a conversation between Wells and his brother about the recent extinction of native Tasmanians by English colonizers, which the narrator addresses in the story, stating: "The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?" (Wells, [1898] 2003, 43).

Orson Welles's version was less about the message *per se*, and instead worked, even if only briefly, to create a sense of an actual Martian invasion.

In order to do this, Welles first needed to make the story seem modern to contemporary listeners. While Wells's Martian invasion in England seemed futuristic to audiences in 1898, as radio writers worked on the script for CBS to play on the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* program on Hallowe'en eve, they felt that the forty-year gap had made the story seem a bit dated for American audiences.[40] Orson Welles, therefore, allegedly instructed screenwriter Howard Koch to "revise the [Wells] story somewhat," by updating the language, by refashioning the dialogue, and by presenting the original tale through a series of fictional newsflashes (Koch, cited in Brown [1998] 2004, 204). The Martian invasion was also moved from the popular English locales to Grover's Mill, New Jersey, and later in the story to New York City, to update and modernize the play and captivate American audiences.

Aside from the relocation from the 1890s to the 1930s and the changes in geographic location, the plot elements of the story were kept very close to Wells's original version. For instance, the descriptions of the spaceships, the Martians, and their heat rays were recycled, and the *deus ex machina* of the terrestrial bacteria destroying the alien invaders stayed the same in the *Mercury Theatre* adaptation. Yet, Orson Welles eliminated many of the pessimistic and didactic elements of the novel, focusing instead on the delivery of the story through the medium of radio.[41]

Welles was certainly aware that listening to the radio was a very different experience than reading a novel. Whereas the frame of the novel is always physically present, and a reader may

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[40] As "The War of the Worlds" playwright and screenwriter, Howard Koch, later admitted, there was no possible way "such an antiquated epic could be effectively adapted for modern radio" (Koch, cited in Brown [1998] 2004, 204).

[41] The United States, which was geographically isolated and was itself at one point a colony, did not have the same history of colonization as did its British counterparts, and so the instructive and revolutionary elements of the story did not have the same effect on American audiences; as such, the direct and didactic messages of the story were not included in the broadcast version.

simply return to a passage later on, the frame of the radio is more difficult to locate, and a listener cannot choose to re-hear a broadcast in the same way that a reader can re-read a novel. Furthermore, there is a linearity to the novel that is not in radio, and a temporality to the radio that is not in the novel. One can hold a book and recognize that a certain amount of time and energy has been put forth to get the book published and in print; the very physicality of the book suggests a process that has gone into its creation. It also suggests that there is a beginning, a middle, and an end to the story. Radio broadcasting, on the other hand, appears spontaneous and temporary. The actual work that goes into a broadcast can become hidden much more easily. Even if a significant amount of energy has been devoted to the broadcast, as in the planning for "The War of the Worlds," the instantaneous and transitory nature of radio tends to hide this effort, making the broadcast appear to be given *as is*. This sense of immediacy afforded by the medium of radio allowed Orson Welles to create a story that could be — at least tentatively — believed.

The Artifice of Reality

So, when Orson Welles reworked the script, he did not just retell H.G. Wells's novel on the radio; instead, he adapted it for radio. While it retained many similar parts of the novel, they became twisted, manipulated, and reworked for entirely different effects. Orson Welles's use of the medium of radio allowed him to entirely transform the original *The War of the Worlds* narrative into something completely different and he was successful at convincing listeners of the broadcast's believability because he so cunningly adapted the story to take advantage of the medium itself.

For instance, Welles possessed a cunning and adept knowledge of how individuals listened to radio and he used this understanding to convince listeners that the Martian invasion was taking place. Even though he opened the broadcast with an announcement stating that the program was a

dramatic adaptation of "The War of the Worlds," not all who tuned in heard this message. Since many radio shows began with commercials at the top of the hour, many people tuned in late, or did not begin listening until the fictitious broadcast was already underway, which made it challenging for many listeners to recognize its artifice.[42] Further, unlike most radio dramas, where the station break came at the halfway mark, "The War of the Worlds" did not break until close to two-thirds of the way through, so listeners who might have entertained the thought that the broadcast was fictional may have been made more anxious when the program did not follow typical conventions and pause at the half-past the hour mark (Schwartz, 2015, 59).

Since the brief opening announcement was quickly followed by a musical performance, Welles situated the broadcast in typical radio conventions of the time; big band music dominated the airwaves during this time-slot and the music in the broadcast sounded like any other live band that would have played at this time on the airwaves. Thus, the Welles broadcast began with very familiar and well-recognized content, suggesting to listeners that the program was a typical one. This framing seemed especially ordinary to those who tuned in late and missed the initial announcement that the broadcast was performing H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*; yet, as Gary Saul Morson (2006, 17) found, even some listeners who "heard the initial announcement that this was to be a *Mercury Theatre* dramatization *still* mistook the fictive broadcast for a real one." Several listeners reported that they had thought the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* show was supposed

[42] Welles was keenly aware that listeners would often tune in late to radio programming, and that many in the radio audience would listen inattentively since they were doing other things as the broadcast played. As Cantril (1940) famously argued in his text, many listeners were late-tuners, who had changed stations at about 10 minutes past the hour just as the opening comedy routine of the more popular Chase and Sanborn Hour, featuring Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, came to an end. The Hooper rating company concluded that over 12 percent of the McCarthy audience switched to CBS at this time, only to hear Carl Phillips arriving at the Wilmuth Farm in Grover's Mill (Hooper rating, cited in Crook 1999, 111). Having missed the opening, this audience was greeted with what seemed to be a strange, otherworldly invasion. As Gary Saul Morson (2006, 18) notes, "radio demands redundancy" and the few widely spaced announcements did not offer much redundancy.

to be the musical program, and they were shocked when it was interrupted by news flashes about the Martian invasion.

Not only was it common to turn on the radio to hear big band music being played in the late 1930s, it was also common to have this music interrupted by late-breaking news bulletins. During this time, radio listeners were on edge whenever their routine broadcast became interrupted by a special bulletin. For instance, following the Hindenburg explosion in May of 1937, in which the German passenger airship — the LZ 129 Hindenburg — caught fire as it was attempting to dock in Lakehurst, New Jersey, killing several of the passengers, updates on the catastrophe disrupted musical programming and provided the audience with information of the tragic event as it emerged from the field. Urgent radio announcements also followed after a hurricane severely devastated the East Coast in 1938, which came as an unexpected and unsettling surprise for many listeners.

Moreover, by the end of the decade the entire world stood on the threshold of World War II, and “The War of the Worlds” was broadcast only a month after the Munich Pact was signed, in which Britain and France gave away a sizable piece of Czechoslovakia to Hitler to avert conflict. Despite this temporary stability, Europe still seemed to teeter on the brink of war, and the role of the United States in the European conflict remained uncertain; hence, many US citizens grew worried as radio news flashes regarding the situation continued to interrupt their programming. Anxieties amplified with each news bulletin and many were fearful of what might be indicated by the next breaking newsflash. The interjection of these serious and often quite alarming news bulletins clashed with the often light and frivolous popular music and entertaining soaps, making these announcements seem all the more jarring. Welles played up on these anxieties by carefully copying the news bulletin format and presenting “The War of the Worlds” as a broadcast within a broadcast. According to John Houseman (1979, xii), it was Welles’s suggestion to tell the story in

the form of news bulletins and on-the-scenes reporting. This technique certainly worked to blur the lines between radio news and radio drama and it gave the feeling of authenticity to the broadcast, which contributed to its believability.

This style of reporting had become quite familiar in American news coverage, especially after the Hindenburg explosion. Herbert Morrison, the reporter on scene, captured eyewitness statements from the landing field, which were broadcast on radio waves the next day. Even though the broadcast was not actually played until a day later, the eyewitness recordings gave a sense of unrehearsed immediacy that profoundly disturbed many listeners, who were hearing for the first time an individual's live reaction to the catastrophe. Orson Welles endeavoured to capture this disconcerting proximity in "The War of the Worlds" production, and he even situated the Martian landing site in New Jersey, close to the original Hindenburg explosion. In fact, Welles also advised Frank Readick, the actor playing the reporter Carl Phillips in the broadcast, to listen and to study Herbert Morrison's ad-libbed reporting in a CBS booth during the play rehearsals (Crook, 1999, 109). Readick complied, tracking down a copy of Morrison's recording and listening to it again and again. In the Hindenburg recording, Morrison struggles to control his emotions as he reacts to the unfolding scene; as he reports the initial disaster, he is at first unable to speak, and he seems to experience a communicative breakdown in his reporting.[43] Edward D. Miller (2003, 124–125)

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[43] "It's burst into flame!" Morrison shouts during the Hindenburg explosion, before his mike cuts off. His voice cuts back in: "it's crashing… It's crashing terrible!" he stammers. As he tries to get a closer look, Morrison asks those around him to "Get out of the way, please!" and soon after, he relays the scene to the listeners: "It's bursting! It's burning, bursting into flames and — and it's falling on the mooring mast and all the folks between it. This is terrible, this is one of the worst catastrophes in the world… It's a terrific crash, ladies and gentlemen. It's smoke and it's flames now. And the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring mast. Oh, the humanity, and all the passengers… I can't talk ladies and gentlemen. Honest, it's just laying there, a mass of smoking wreckage… I'm going to step inside where I cannot see it. Charlie, that's terrible… Listen, folks, I'm gonna have to stop for a minute because I've lost my voice. This is the worst thing I've ever witnessed" (cited in Schwartz, 2015, 18–19). After Morrison regains his composure, he proceeds to describe the scene and interview survivors, and while the recording was not being broadcast live, he continues to address the audience as if he were speaking to them directly, even though no one would hear the recording for several hours.

identifies how this harrowing moment is repeated in the Orson Welles broadcast, as the on-the-scene commentator, Phillips, upon seeing the Martians, initially cannot find the words to depict the creatures: “It… it’s indescribable… I can’t find the words…” (“The War of the Worlds,” 16–17). Dead air and silence are a cardinal sin for radio, since the medium relies entirely on sound to articulate events; but Welles carefully incorporated this offence into the broadcast to create a moment of sublime fear for listeners and to make the event seem unrehearsed and real.[44]

The deliberate use of silence recurs throughout the broadcast. For instance, after the Martians emerge from the cylinder, Phillips frantically recounts the devastation as they aim their death rays at everyone in sight, until finally listeners can hear the thud of his microphone as it falls to the ground, followed by an agonizing period of silence. Welles held this silence for six full seconds before returning to the program, and it creates a haunting moment of suspense that felt like an eternity to many listeners. Silence is used again when the military takes over the airwaves, and the last of the radio operators unsuccessfully attempts to establish contact with other stations. The repeated, strategic silences in the broadcast become more effective and more haunting than any scream could ever sound; they provide agonizing moments of uncertainty and ambiguity as the voicelessness of radio renders the medium entirely strange and unfamiliar. As Schwartz (2015, 76) notes, “no radio drama had ever used dead air to artistic effect like this,” and this effect allowed listeners to entertain the idea that the broadcast could be real.

Conversely, Welles used creative sound effects to manufacture a sense of chaos happening throughout the fake Martian invasion. For instance, when Phillips and Pierson first arrive at Grover’s Mill, Welles directed his ensemble to speak loudly and on-top of one another to create

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[44] As the top of the Martian cylinder unscrews and is heard crashing to the ground, Phillips is at a loss for words, stuttering to express the horrific nature of the event. Miller (2003, 125) identifies this moment as a key one for making the broadcast seem believable to the listeners: the silence “serve[s] as proof to the listening public that he is not tricking them: the alien exists. Expressions of disbelief and the inability to speak are tantamount to the proof of its existence.”

the impression that the strange event was unfolding live. He also instructed the actor playing farmer Wilmuth to relay his statements to Phillips in an awkward, unrehearsed, and messy manner. Sounding as though this was his first time on the radio, Wilmuth seems to struggle to answer Phillips's questions; Phillips asks the farmer twice to get closer to the microphone and he has to interrupt him when he goes off topic. This messiness was certainly rare for fictional radio broadcasts at the time; actors never struggled with the microphones and were well-rehearsed for their performances, so this further contributed to the program's realism.

Moreover, the arrival of the Martians in the broadcast is followed by the creatures unscrewing the top of the cylinder, which is trailed by a loud, metallic clatter. This moment signals one of the many powerful uses of sound effects to enrich the broadcast and to involve listeners in the seeming reality of the event. While the actual sound may be produced from something as simple as opening a jar of jam in a toilet bowl, the lack of visual clues dissociates the sound from its original context and allowed listeners to imagine the sound as being part of the unfolding events.[45] Thus, from this clanking of the opening saucer lid, to the hissing, humming sound of the Martian spacecraft, to the microphone feedback, which suggested the "live" nature of the broadcast, to the frantic and layered voices of the witnesses viewing the aliens as they emerge from the ship — Welles demonstrated with ease how "a few effective voices, accompanied by sound effects, can so convince masses of people of a … fantastic proposition as to create nation-wide panic" (Thompson, 2 November 1938).

[45] As Brian Holmsten ([2001] 2005, 91) mentions, this effect of opening a jar and having it echo in a toilet bowl "has become part of the broadcast's legend, though it is debatable if this was how it actually happened." Even if this was not precisely how the sound was created, it was the use of mundane materials like these that would produce such extraordinary effects.

The script was also strategically designed so that a multitude of voices speak through the broadcast, and no single voice is privileged above the other.[46] As the Martian invasion takes place, alternating voices of announcers, reporters, scientists, regular folk, and military personnel take over the transmissions, leading to a plurality of voices, where it becomes impossible to settle upon only one perspective. The use of many different narrators meant that there was no particular voice for listeners to identify with, and it made it impossible to predict who would survive and who would perish; the very reporter that is giving the account could be zapped by alien rays at any moment, and there are no clues as to who will survive — even the listener seems to be in jeopardy. This made "The War of the Worlds" broadcast an apocalyptic reality for many in the listening audience and it led to a disorienting effect that would encourage listeners to open up to the possibility of a Martian invasion.[47]

The script was also designed in such a way that listeners could "jump" from one location to another. The pacing of the program is quite gradual — it begins slowly, but progressively increases to become more alarming, as the musical programming becomes frequently interrupted by late-breaking news bulletins from many different locations. Through this strategic pacing, time and space become compressed, and geographic distance is dissolved as the broadcast easily moves from the ballroom to the newsroom to Grover's Mill. The aggregation of several disconnected

[46] The dialogic nature of the broadcast encouraged listeners to believe in the unfolding events. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) uses the term dialogism to denote the kind of discourse that acknowledges that it is defined by its relationship to other discourses, both past and future, which it both responds to and anticipates. Bakhtin contrasts the monologue, or single-voiced speech, with the dialogue, where more than one voice is engaged in different points of view (345–355). In the monologue, a single voice speaks a single truth, but with dialogic speech, there are multiple voices lending multiple perspectives, which makes truth something that becomes negotiated and difficult to establish (279, 326, 426). Dialogism, then, describes speech that is conversational, alive, organic, and fluid, and that both debates and offers different worldviews and ideas.

[47] Again, this emphasizes how the retelling of *The War of the Worlds* over radio created a very different impression than was given by the novel. For instance, Wells uses the device of a first-person recollection in the novel and because of this it becomes clear from the outset that the narrator will survive the ordeal because he is supposedly writing the account that is being read. In the radio narrative, however, the story is presented spontaneously and in the present, with many different voices, and it becomes impossible to know who will survive.

locations made it difficult for listeners to "know" where they were and who they were listening to, leaving the audience disoriented and confused. As many listeners later reported, it was not always so clear that things were happening sequentially, and several contended that the unbelievable events of the broadcast, like the decimation of the American troops, seemed possible because they thought that these events were not happening one-by-one, but had been going on simultaneously.

What is more, Welles was able to produce such an anxious response because of the cognitive effects of listening to radio. Since radio denies sight to its audience, those listening in were able to produce in their own minds a spectacular vision of the Martian invaders and the apocalyptic destruction. For instance, when Carl Phillips relays his brief description of one of the Martians, saying "the eyes are black and gleam like a serpent. The mouth is V-shaped with saliva dripping from its rimless lips that seem to quiver and pulsate. The monster or whatever it is can hardly move" ("The War of the Worlds," 16), the brevity of this description meant that listeners had little time for consideration and so their imaginations could take over to create a mental picture of these horrific creatures.

The brief description of the aliens was completed in the mind of the listener, which brought the aliens into being, and many listeners were able to imagine what they were hearing; some even began to see and hear strange things as a result. For instance, some New Yorkers later admitted that they actually believed they heard Martian flying machines or weapons firing; others said that they looked out and saw the city on fire. The police reported that in stations in Queens, Morningside Heights, and Harlem, New York, frightened citizens ran in shouting that they had seen enemy planes and poisonous gas billowing over the Hudson (Holmsten, [2001] 2005, 13). While the Martians in Orson Welles's broadcast were described in almost the same way as in H.G. Well's version, the aliens in the broadcast became particularly horrific because they were produced

in the minds of the listeners. The lack of visual cues about the aliens meant that they could be as grotesque and horrible as the listener's mind could imagine.

The broadcast therefore presented information in a series of disjointed pieces, and many individuals had no way to verify what they had just heard. This jumpy narrative frame of the broadcast made it seem much more realistic than Wells's narrative ever could and Welles keenly paced the Martian invasion so that he could move the broadcast from reality to fantasy, without the audience necessarily realizing this transition. With the medium of radio, Welles was able to tell the story in a non-linear way, and the dizzying sequence of multiple, layered voices, as well as the rapidly shifting points of view made it possible to entertain the idea that these events were really happening.

Trusting the Expert

The believability of the broadcast was also owing to the use of experts and officials, who lent an air of credibility to the unfolding events. Authority figures pepper the broadcast: journalists, academics, policemen, military personnel, political leaders, and other traditional arbiters of "truth" function as narrators of the Martian invasion, and many listeners invested a great deal of trust in their messages. For instance, the program begins with Professor Pierson, who scoffs at the idea that Martian life is possible. Importantly, Pierson appears to have institutional backing from the Princeton Observatory, and his cynical delivery frames the broadcast with a skeptical tone, making the unfolding events seem even more jarring. Pierson's initial response to the idea of the Martians conformed to the recent and heavily popularized scientific consensus that the existence of life on Mars was entirely unlikely. By reproducing the established scientific consensus, Professor Pierson seems like a believable and realistic character, and his complete surprise about the invasion fits in with what one might expect from a professional astronomer.

The program also draws its believability from authorities external to the broadcast itself. Even though scientific consensus had determined that Martian life was highly unlikely, the legitimacy of the Martian invasion was supported by ideas that had been in circulation about the habitability of Mars leading up to the broadcast. As I have already shown, these ideas had been shared in the popular press for decades and were at times promulgated by popular scientists like Marconi and Tesla, which made them seem more believable to some listeners. Since these ideas about Martian life had been a significant point of debate in both scientific and popular channels, many were able to make the leap in imagining that the Martian invasion was real: "There have been articles by scientists published from time to time which say that they believe Mars to be inhabited by people," one woman wrote to the FCC after hearing the broadcast: "When one considers the advances and progress that have been made, which our forefathers would not believe, even a sane person might believe such a thing is possible" (Smith, 31 October 1938, cited in Schwartz, 2015, 74). Even though most scientists had dismissed the idea at the time, since the Martian life debates involved many active and authoritative voices speaking in very public channels, countless Americans were still willing to entertain the possibility that life really could exist on Mars.

The use of experts therefore allowed some listeners to entertain the idea that the Martian invaders were real; these authority figures also allowed listeners to believe some of the more mundane elements of the plot that seemed quite outlandish and impossible. For instance, Welles and Koch were acutely aware that the condensing of time and geographic space in the broadcast were sometimes so rapid that they could seem unreal, and the short trip from the Princeton Observatory to Grover's Mill appeared incredible; hence, in the script, Phillips acknowledges how "Professor Pierson and myself made the eleven miles from Princeton in ten minutes" ("The War

of the Worlds," 11). This statement, made by the authoritative announcer, perhaps compelled listeners to believe the reporter and assume that the trip was possible.

At the time of the broadcast, radio bulletins had always been used to communicate factual information, so announcements like these held a certain authority for many listeners, who believed the broadcasters when they stated that they were moving from one location to the next: "the impossible speed of Phillips' arrival convinced some late listeners that the broadcast was fake, but not many" (Schwartz, 2015, 72). As A. Brad Schwartz argues, listeners were "swept along by Phillips's rapid-fire description of the impact site," and many did not notice the speed at which the events were taking place (Ibid.).

But perhaps the most effective use of an authoritative voice came when the broadcast connected to Washington with the special report offered by the Secretary of the Interior. Welles advised the actor playing this role to speak in his most presidential voice, and his intonation was made to sound hauntingly like Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (Holmsten, [2001] 2005, 20). The speech also strongly echoes Roosevelt's appeals to the American people in his "Fireside Chats." At the time, mimicking famous voices on the radio was considered fraudulent and dangerous, which is why Welles used the title of Secretary of the Interior to deflect from the fact that the actor sounded uncannily similar to the President of the United States; this is also why many individuals believed that the broadcast was taking place, as they did not think that the radio networks would mislead them in such a manner.

"The War of the Worlds" was one of the first instances in which the medium of radio was used so deceptively, and the believability of the Martians worked so well because the broadcast exploited the trust that had developed around the medium. Radio — because of its liveness — had established itself as the first point of information during national catastrophes and was seen as an

important device to turn to for important and up-to-the-minute news; since newsworthy events happened so quickly, radio was the only medium able to keep up. Radio used live news bulletins more effectively than other media technologies and had become known for fashioning an unprecedented social collective in which news of social catastrophe could be rapidly transmitted across the nation. As these late-breaking announcements became more common, listeners got used to hearing them, and they began to trust them implicitly (Schwartz, 2015, 26).

While many of the listeners who had tuned in late finally realized what was up when they heard Phillips's descriptions of the slimy, tentacled creatures, "thousands of others were listening in astonishment and stunned disbelief" (Schwartz, 2015, 74). As A. Brad Schwartz notes, "they may have not trusted the message, but they saw no reason to distrust the messenger," and "if it seemed hard to believe that aliens had landed in New Jersey, it was even harder to accept that CBS, America's 'news network,' would so violate the public trust" (Ibid.).

"The War of the Worlds" therefore signalled an important moment in American history, when the use of authoritative voices could so effectively exploit public trust and lead listeners to believe that such a fantastical event was taking place. Throughout, the broadcast toyed with listeners by offering them moments of comfort and reassurance, trust and faith, before it completely shattered this security by providing descriptions of horrific, apocalyptic destruction. This emotional journey would leave a lasting impression on many Americans and the broadcast would lead to enduring imaginings about an extraterrestrial invasion on American soil.

Conjuring Aliens from the Airwaves: The Fantastic Invasion of *Real* Aliens

Most importantly, "The War of the Worlds" demonstrates the power of storytelling in shaping reality, as Welles successfully conjured up a fantastical alien invasion through his effective telling of this story. By making the broadcast appear to be spontaneous and "live," Welles left his listeners

spellbound and unable to decide on the reality or unreality of the unfolding events, which gave the radio broadcast a liminal quality. This produced a particular moment of uncertainty — a strange effect — that would ultimately lead to an ambivalent, and in some cases hysteric, reaction and to a tentative belief that the alien invasion could, in fact, be real. During "The War of the Worlds," listeners collapsed the ordinarily maintained boundaries between fact and fiction, making the broadcast archetypal of a real-life event where the distinctions between reality and unreality are temporarily effaced.

This liminal space of hesitation reminds me of the works of structuralist literary critic Tzvetan Todorov ([1970] 1975). In his writings, Todorov offers a definition of what he calls "the fantastic," a specific literary genre that incorporates *something* inexplicable and impossible into an unfolding narrative, and this unsettles the reader and makes them doubt what they are reading. Todorov uses this term to denote a story in which the boundaries between reality and unreality are not fully resolved, and where this inexplicable *something* is not found to be natural, unnatural, or supernatural; hence the fantastic creates a space between the real and the imaginary as it reveals the tensions that exist between them.[48]

Significantly, Todorov argues that the fantastic is the result of a certain irreducible indeterminacy that it is caused by wavering between the possible and the impossible; essentially, it characterizes the hesitancy that one experiences when faced with an inexplicable event. He therefore uses the term to describe a type of narrative that features a clash between what the reader perceives as real and unreal:

[48] Todorov's definition draws from the canonical work of Roger Caillois, who writes that the fantastic signals "a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality" (Caillois, cited in Todorov, [1970] 1975, 26).

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of the same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he [*sic*] is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination — and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality — but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. … The fantastic *occupies the duration of this uncertainty.* Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre ….

What sets the fantastic apart, then, is the hesitation that the reader experiences when confronted with two or more explanations for a seemingly impossible event, and the fantastic is ultimately defined by this uncertain reaction produced in the mind of the reader: "'I nearly reached the point of believing': that is the formula which sums up the spirit of the fantastic. Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life" (31). The category, Todorov acknowledges, is a slippery one, and may not extend the entire span of the text; however, it exists for the duration of the reader's hesitation.

In the case of "The War of the Worlds," it was not the reader, but the listener, who experienced this fundamental hesitation. As mentioned, the broadcast started off like any other typical broadcast, which contributed to its realism and verisimilitude. Welles also used real place names, real dates, and real events to integrate the listener into the fantastic world being portrayed. By situating the alien assault in a narrative that relied so heavily on familiar and comfortable radio conventions at the time, and by using the real world as a backdrop to the unfolding Martian invasion, the broadcast was rendered both strange and recognizable. While it was ultimately made

known that “The War of the Worlds” is a fiction, for most of the play, its fictionality remained hidden, which made it possible for many listeners to become confused. Of course, when the broadcast returned after the station break and the dramatization commenced with Professor Pierson surveying the post-apocalyptic destruction caused by the Martians, the fantastic quality of the program dissipated. Even the most naïve and gullible of listeners could not mistake this account for reality — but at this point, listeners were already left anxious after nearly an hour-long imaginary confrontation with extraterrestrials invading their nation and destroying their fellow citizens.

As Todorov explains, once the reader resolves her or his doubt and ceases to feel hesitation, the narrative is no longer fantastic: “It will pass, instead, into a neighboring category” and “the fantastic … lasts only as long as a certain hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from ‘reality’ as it exists in the common opinion” (Duncan, 2010, 20; Todorov, [1970] 1975, 41). The pure fantastic, then, is fleeting, since most readers will move past their initial hesitation and reach a decision, and sometimes that decision will be made explicit by the story itself; however, for the duration of the Martian invasion, the actuality of the event was relegated to a disturbing place of uncertainty — and this uncertainty, though transitory, seems to have created an opening to consider the possibility of alien invaders coming to Earth. Even though the broadcast is ultimately exposed as a fiction, its fantastic nature manifested in the minds of listeners the idea that alien invaders really could come to our planet, opening a space to imagine aliens in the United States. Even after the broadcast had ended (and the news report was revealed to be a play), people across the country remained fascinated by the

idea of the Martian invasion, and stories about ambiguous alien beings have since captivated the American public.[49]

It is for this reason that I see “The War of the Worlds” as a foundational text for giving rise to ideas about *real* aliens. The broadcast produced a fantastic moment of uncertainty during which many individuals were unable to determine if the invading extraterrestrials were real or not. Significantly, this tentative appraisal of the alien has come to characterize contemporary ET and UFO phenomena, which are entirely anomalous and ambiguous. The stories shared about *real* aliens in ufological channels are so attractive because of their fundamental undecidability; they blur the boundaries between the real and the fictional and they make it challenging, if not impossible, to decide on their reality or unreality — and this undecidability invests them with a staying power since their status can never be fully resolved one way or another. Hence, the “The War of the Worlds” serves as a precursor to the rise of *real* aliens in the United States; the blurring of reality and unreality in the broadcast inaugurated a sublime moment of suspense and apprehension about the possibility of extraterrestrials coming to Earth, and, in this fantastic space, aliens were able to invade the nation.

Uncanny Aliens: The Familiar and the Strange

The fantastic quality of the broadcast, as well as the ambiguity of the Martian invaders depicted in it, also evoked a creeping sense of dread that can be characterized by the Freudian concept of the uncanny, where the boundaries between reality and unreality, the familiar and the strange, are effaced. As I will argue, it was the telling of the story over the medium of radio that helped produce such a disturbing and unsettling effect, and I find that the uncanniness of the broadcast and its alien invaders further enabled ideas about *real* aliens to take hold in the United States.

[49] Later on, I will discuss in more detail how the broadcast captivated the public’s attention, when I will consider the myth of widespread panic that allegedly commenced with the airing of “The War of the Worlds.”

The uncanny is a specific type of anxiety that often emerges from a fantastic experience. The term was first referenced by Ernst Jentsch, in his 1906 [1997] essay, *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, where he refers to the psychologically distressing feeling caused by an uncanny experience. He writes that the uncanny is the product of "intellectual uncertainty," so that the uncanny "would always be an arena in which a person was unsure of his [*sic*] way around" (Freud summarizing Jentsch's argument, [1919] 2003, 125). Jentsch's use of the term is like the fantastic, in the sense that it is marked by a moment of ambiguity and hesitation, and he finds that the uncanny impulse is a result of the anxiety and discomfort that accompanies an uncertain reaction to a thing or event.

Sigmund Freud, the founding father of psychoanalysis, addresses Jentsch's identification of the particular haunting feeling of the uncanny in his 1919 essay of the same name. Here, Freud looks at the uncanny as an aesthetic category that describes "the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (123); however, the uncanny is not what arouses fear in general, but what evokes a specific quality of anxiety. The uncanny is therefore different from ordinary fear, which has a basis in reality; instead it is caused by the collapsing of the boundaries between the real and the unreal, and it emerges from a liminal space where unconscious impulses bubble up to the surface. Since it is a product of the unconscious, the uncanny is made even more disquieting because it cannot be explained either rationally or supernaturally. For these reasons, I see the uncanny as fundamentally linked to the fantastic.[50]

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[50] Todorov uses the uncanny to describe one of the neighbouring categories of the fantastic, with the marvelous as its other neighbour. For Todorov, the uncanny means that the strange and perplexing event is resolved by the end of the story through its attribution to natural causes. In the marvelous, the uncertain effect is found to be the result of a supernatural or magical world; however, Todorov's fantastic genre appears most like Freud's notion of the uncanny in its unresolved and ambiguous qualities.

And yet, as Freud finds, the uncanny experience does not simply arise from uncertainty; here Freud differs from Jentsch, who argues that uncertainty alone arouses the anxious dread of the uncanny. Freud criticizes Jentsch's argument for not going "beyond relating the uncanny to the novel and unfamiliar" (Ibid.). While Freud does acknowledge that uncertainty is surely sometimes part of an uncanny experience, he does not think that it is the defining characteristic of the uncanny. While it might seem that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar, Freud points out that not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening, and while some things that are novel may be frightening, this is not always the case: "something must be added to the novel and the unfamiliar if it is to become uncanny" (125). He argues, then, that the uncanny is not just a product of intellectual uncertainty; instead, it is "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124).

To describe the uncanny, Freud offers an etymology of the term and traces the semantic content that has accrued to the German word for uncanny, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is the antonym of *heimlich,* which contains various related meanings: the familiar, the intimate, and the homey; *unheimlich,* then, can be characterized as its opposite: the strange, the unfamiliar, and the unhomey. After offering several definitions of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, however, he observes that "among the various shades of meaning that are recorded for the word *heimlich* there is one in which it merges with its formal antonym, *unheimlich*, so that what is called *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich*" (132). In this way,

> this word *heimlich* is not unambigious, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other — the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other what is concealed and kept hidden.

> *Unheimlich* is the antonym of *heimlich* only in the latter's first sense, not in its second. (Ibid.)

In other words, *unheimlich* is not exactly the opposite of *heimlich*, or the direct antonym of the familiar and homey, and "*Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich.* The uncanny (*das Unheimliche,* 'the unhomey') is in some way a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homey')" (134).

Hence, the *unheimlich* does not simply mean the unfamiliar, and it is actually related to the familiar; for Freud, it "applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open" (132). Consequently, Freud finds that an uncanny experience does not simply arise from uncertainty, but from the return of the repressed; it is a fear generated by the unexpected return from the unconscious of something that was once familiar.

He argues further that the uncanny is caused by the return of surmounted stages of development or of repressed infantile complexes that human beings had long thought they had overcome. The main sources of the uncanny, he elaborates, are those things our "primitive forebears … once regarded as real possibilities" (149): things like doubles and doppelgangers, the strange recurrences of events (déjà vu), wish-fulfillments, the omnipotence of thoughts, dismembered limbs, inanimate objects possessing a life of their own (animism), magic and witchcraft, and the return of the dead, all evoke uncanny impressions.[51] As Freud argues, while we think we have surmounted such modes of thought, we are not secure in our new convictions: "the old ones live

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[51] For instance, Freud uses E.T.A. Hoffman's short story "The Sand-Man" as an example of an uncanny text. According to Freud, it is not uncertainty that gives the reader of Hoffman's tale an anxious feeling; instead the haunting nature of the story comes from the recurring motifs of losing one's eyes. According to Freud this is a substitute for the fear of castration, which is linked to the death of the father; hence, Freud traces back the uncanny element of the tale to the anxiety caused by the infantile castration complex. Further, he notes that the uncanny feeling seems to come from the idea of the "double" or "the doppelganger," which manifests time and again in the tale, which he finds evokes our repressed fears of magic and the "spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other — what we could call telepathy — so that one becomes the co-owner of the other's knowledge, emotions, and experience" (141–142).

on in us, on the lookout for confirmation," and "as soon as something happens in our lives that seems to confirm these old, discarded beliefs, we experience a sense of the uncanny" (154).

While his theory of the uncanny is at times essentialist and problematic,[52] it would be rash to dismiss Freud's oeuvre entirely, and his recognition that the uncanny is derived from the return of the repressed remains tremendously insightful for understanding the anxious fascination many individuals often have with *real* aliens. As I will argue, many of the stories told about aliens tend to latch on to familiar, though distorted cultural memories and experiences, and it is the simultaneous familiarity and strangeness of the alien that has the potential to register a profoundly uncanny shock.

For Freud, the uncanny is possible not simply in fiction, but also in real life, though it comprises few instances in our living experiences. I argue that "The War of the Worlds" was, for many listeners, one such instance of an uncanny situation in real life. "The uncanny effect," Freud writes, "often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred," as was the case with "The War of the Worlds," and in this blurry and indistinct space "we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth" (150–151). In its blurring of boundaries, "The War of the Worlds" brought to mind the idea that aliens could actually be real, and it stirred an uncanny response by reminding listeners of the paradoxically strange, yet familiar, nature of these extraterrestrial beings.

Hence, I argue that both the broadcast and the invading aliens depicted in it created an uncanny impression, a feeling that fundamentally captivated the interests of many Americans and inspired

[52] There is no question that Freud's model relies on ethnocentric and phallocentric ideas –especially his rooting of the uncanny experience in the castration complex —so I take much of what he writes with a grain of salt. Keeping in mind the context in which Freud made his propositions, I recognize that many of his theories belong to an outmoded paradigm that was fashioned roughly a century ago.

ideas about alien beings in the United States. Certainly, some of the individuals listening to the radio broadcast reacted with a very real fear of invasion and believed that their impending death was possible, and some assumed that the Martian raid was actually a misreported German invasion; in other words, they knew why they were afraid, and so their fear reaction cannot be characterized as uncanny. However, many other listeners responded to the broadcast with an anxious hesitation. Part of this response was due to their uncertainty over what was going on, but another part had to do with the uncanniness of the broadcast and the idea of a Martian invasion, which latched on to nascent fears and anxieties that had been buried away and that became reignited with the help of Welles's drama.

Before looking more closely at how "The War of the Worlds" brought about a return of the repressed, it is worth spending a moment to consider the significance of the uncanny for the modern experience, as this will help elucidate why and how the radio broadcast came to trigger such an uncanny response. As with the fantastic, the uncanny requires that it take place in the familiar and real world and, because of this, the uncanny posits a notion of modernity. Jo Collins and John Jervis (2008) elaborate on this point. Since the uncanny is experienced as a return of primitive and infantile ideas, they argue that it must be grounded in a distinctly modern experience:

> Although [Freud] postulates a transhistorical 'castration complex' as one underlying causal mechanism [of the uncanny], the other — the apparent experiential confirmation of 'surmounted beliefs' is by definition culturally specific to the modern (and could, indeed, be taken to imply that the former, *in itself*, is insufficient alone to generate a sense of the uncanny). … Thus, we need to consider the possibility that the uncanny may be a fundamental … aspect of our experience of the modern. (2–3)

The modern age was meant to do away with magical thinking: animistic impulses, wish-fulfilments, secretly charged coincidences, eerie doppelgangers, and ghostly doubles were banished in modernity, and these magical ideas were replaced with the core values of rationality and materialism, which saw the world as explainable and which privileged reason over superstition. But these magical impulses were never completely buried — they were merely repressed, waiting for the right moments to erupt back into our consciousness.

We see an instance of this eruption with the inception of many new media technologies. Modernity has a strong connection to technology, which helped distinguish it from the less technologically-advanced antiquity; but there seems to be something about many modern technologies that inspires an uncanny impression. I looked more closely at the telegraph and radio earlier in this section, where I considered how the telegraph was often understood as a device that could possibly put people in touch with spirits, and where radio reminded that a strange and unseen world hovers all around, which inspired further fantastic ideas about both spirits and otherworldly beings. Even though these devices were considered part of a rational, scientific, and modern world, they still managed to inspire a strange and mysterious impression.

Of course, these perceptions became dulled as the media became more familiar. For instance, the development of the radio industry and the entry of radio into homes across the country allayed the earlier, fantastic perceptions of the medium. As radio technology developed and became more commonplace, it lost many of its associations with the magical and unknown, and it became less a device used for adventure and exploration and one more used for entertainment, information, and for making a profit.

The emerging broadcasting industry led to the regulation of the ether, so that it was no longer a "boundless ocean buoying mysterious and surprising messages" and, instead, it "became a

saturating deluge of announcements, advertisements, and regularly scheduled entertainment" (Sconce, 2000, 104). Radios were designed to resemble other domestic objects, so they became likened to ordinary pieces of furniture that could be found in any typical American household. It was not long before the fantastic and magical box that once captured stray voices and sounds from the ether became a "familiar, convenient, and wholly unremarkable presence in the home, less a bridge to the 'unknown' than a machine echoing (or, more ominously, orchestrating) the structure of daily life" (105). Radio had certainly become a familiar and ordinary part of the home by the time of "The War of the Worlds" airing; but recall that the uncanny may also arise when something familiar is suddenly charged with strangeness and unfamiliarity. During the broadcast, it seems that the repressed ideas about the animistic and magical qualities of radio were reawakened, as the entirely familiar and homey presence of radio transformed into a strange and unfamiliar intrusion.[53]

As mentioned, the broadcast began with familiar and comfortable conventions, but as it progressed it became all the stranger, and the unseen and overlapping radio voices warning of the Martian invasion came to evoke a haunting sense of the uncanny. The juxtaposition of so many different voices from so many different locations created a dizzying effect, and by the end of the broadcast, it was not the familiar voice of the newscaster or his interview subject speaking through the box, but rather the brief, muddled and intermingling voices of several unnamed and unwelcome strangers invading the intimate domain of the home.[54]

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[53] After the broadcast had ended, for instance, an enraged Texas hardware store owner wrote to the FCC, arguing that "such things should under no circumstances be permitted to disturb the *homes* of the country over the air" (unknown author, 1 November 1938b, cited in Goodman 2011, 280, emphasis mine). Another New Jersey man also wrote in, describing the invasive and uncomfortable experience of the broadcast entering into his home: "We do not permit our children to attend 'horror' movies. … The radio obligingly *barges into our homes*, with nauseating details, without at least giving us a warning … What is radio trying to do to America?" (Martin, 31 October 1938, in Schwartz 126, emphasis mine). As these responses indicate, the broadcast revealed radio's intrusion into the intimate and comfortable space of the home.

[54] These voices also evoked a sense of uncanny disembodiment. Of course, disembodiment is part and parcel of the radio medium, since radio allows "the communicating subject the ability, real or imagined, to leave the body and transport his or her consciousness to a distant destination" (Sconce, 2000, 8), and, as Miller puts it, "radio voices are

With the news of the alien assault, many listeners felt the familiar and comfortable world suddenly become charged with strangeness. This was enhanced by the effects of listening to radio. By cancelling geographic distance, radio broadcasts made it not only possible, but quite common to find out immediately about disasters going on all around the world.[55] In a sense, radio brought the wider world — and the accompanying news of death and danger — into the home: "wireless collapsed the previously unambiguous and safe boundaries that divided individuals from a larger world of trouble," evoking a sense of insecurity in the process (Sconce, 2000, 63).

As the entire world stood on the brink of another world war, Americans did not feel as secure and remote as they had during World War I, and the comfortable idea of American isolationism was shattered by radio, which offered a sense of immediacy and connectedness on a global scale; this produced a sense of anxiety about where the United States would stand in the event of another war. Once protected and isolated, the United States now seemed open to threats of invasion, so when "The War of the Worlds" aired on that late October evening, the idea of the invading Martians resonated with these underlying concerns about an external invasion, allowing it to spark a strong emotional response.

Here I draw from Carl Jung, who argues that the imminence of war created an unusual emotional climate in the United States, which helped distort people's perceptions: the "delusions of the senses," or those visionary rumours that took the form of UFOs, he finds, "spring from a strong excitation and therefore from a deeper source" ([1958] 2002, 2). For Jung, "The War of the

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discernible entities without a corresponding fixed visual aspect" (Miller, 2003, 5). But because the many fragmented and fleeting voices in the broadcast were delivering such haunting news, their disembodied communication was made all the more uncanny. Returning to Freud, the uncanny is evoked by "severed limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm … feet that dance by themselves" — things that all create an uncanny impression — and when listeners heard the series of disconnected voices alerting them of the impending war, the broadcast reminded listeners that these strange voices were divorced from their human bodies, which further intensified its uncanniness (Freud, [1919] 2003, 150).

[55] This certainly helped initiate understandings of a modern, connected, and global world by removing previously secure boundaries between what was happening in faraway places and what was taking place in smaller communities.

Worlds" "evidently hit the latent emotions connected with the imminence of war," and the reports of flying saucers that emerged in the years following the broadcast became tangled up "with the psychology of the great panic" that erupted from the radio play (3). The broadcast therefore triggered a "strong excitation" that brought these latent emotions into view. With Jung's interpretation of "The War of the Worlds" in mind, I am interested in what it was about the broadcast that reawakened these latent emotions. Jung's argument is rather curt here — he merely suggests that the broadcast connected to underlying fears of war — but I am interested in fleshing out his point by looking at how the radio play, by reawakening these latent fears, provoked an uncanny return of the repressed.

Significantly, I find that the eerie alien doubles in the broadcast reawakened repressed anxieties and produced an uncanny effect. According to Freud, the double is one of the strongest and most common figures to generate feelings of uncanniness, and there was something about the Martians in the broadcast that was a bit too familiar and too close to home.[56] While their tentacled bodies hardly resembled human ones, the familiarity of the aliens' actions allowed them to be read as strange and disturbing doubles. As the entire world seemed to be standing on the threshold of another war, the invading and colonizing Martians echoed the familiar and called to mind that which was supposed to remain repressed.[57] I am certainly not the first to suggest that depictions of invading aliens can be taken as eerie parallels for dangerous or threatening human others — H.G. Wells, for instance, made this link rather explicit in his original novel by using the Martian invasion

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[56] This idea of doubleness is also conjured by radio itself, whereby the "spontaneous transmission of mental processes" from one person to another — or what we would call telepathy — is evoked by the medium: as John Durham Peters writes, for instance, "telepathy was radio's doppelganger" (Peters, 1999, 104); radio's "history is inseparable from daring imaginations about the flight of souls, voices without bodies, and instantaneous presence at a distance" (Ibid.). Radio was able to rouse these notions about transmitting thoughts and ideas from one person to another, which had the potential to render the medium uncanny.

[57] Importantly, many of those who believed in the broadcast and who were interviewed after the fact reported that they were not actually sure if the invasion was describing Martian invaders or human ones, and in this way, it seems that listeners merged their ideas about the Martians with ideas about human beings.

as a commentary on European expansionism and colonization. While these ideas stem back to Wells's prototype, it was not until Orson Welles's play that they made such an uncanny impression. Again, Wells's novel was didactic, whereas Welles's broadcast fantastically blurred the boundaries between reality and unreality, which made it seem as though these uncanny doubles really were invading the United States.

But it was not just their parallels to humans that made these alien invaders so unsettling; the extraterrestrials in the broadcast also served as a reminder of ideas about the gods and other magical and supernatural beings that were long thought to have been overcome. Of course, extraterrestrials — if they are found to exist — would be part of the natural world; in other words, they would not be paranormal or supernatural entities, but actual beings. However, *real* aliens, like the Martians in Welles's broadcast, are imaginatively formed by stories and ideas, and are therefore quite different from the hypothetical extraterrestrial life that might exist elsewhere in the universe. *Real* aliens are not part of an objective reality, but a symbolic one, and because they are depicted as advanced creatures with omniscient powers, they are akin to other kinds of mythical beings, like gods, angels, and devils, only in a modern guise.[58] When listeners heard of these seemingly all-powerful and god-like beings coming down from the sky and terrorizing humanity, the broadcast evoked a fear that reminded listeners of things they had thought they had long surmounted.[59]

"The War of the Worlds" worked so effectively to encourage ideas about extraterrestrials because it ignited the fear that supposedly surmounted magical thoughts could return to us in the disenchanted modern age. The broadcast was also able to produce such an uncanny sensation on a

[58] This relates back to a point made by Carl Jung: aliens are like the gods of modernity; however, it is not just Jung who draws this connection between aliens and the gods. See also Robert E. Bartholomew (1991), Thomas Bullard (1989), Diana Purkiss (2000, 317-322), Keith Thompson (1991), Jacques Vallée ([1969] 2014) and Christopher Partridge (2002; 2003). .

[59] As I will show in my later sections, the uncanniness of the Martian invaders is repeated in later stories of *real* aliens, and there is something fundamentally uncanny about *real* aliens.

national level, in large part because it blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality. As Freud mentions, the uncanny effect can multiply in fiction "beyond what is feasible in normal experience" (157), and he goes on to explain that the writer can make things happen that one would never, or only rarely, experience in real life: "he [*sic*] betrays us to a superstition we thought we had 'surmounted' [and] he [*sic*] tricks us by promising everyday reality and then going beyond it" (156–157). Welles certainly mastered this effect. As Freud writes, "we react to his fictions as if they had been our own experiences. By the time we become aware of the trickery, it is too late: the writer has already done what he set out to do" (157). As a fiction that was misrecognized as reality, "The War of the Worlds" instilled a profoundly uncanny impression for many listeners; even when revealed to be a play, the listener's mind was made open to the possibility of the alien invasion, and this unsettling idea helped fuel ideas about UFO and ET phenomena well after the broadcast's conclusion.

The Great Panic Myth and the "American Lunatic Fringe"

As the story goes, after the broadcast had ended, Americans across the country were left reeling in shock. By the time it finished airing, for instance, reports have it that the CBS Building was teeming with press and police. According to Welles's account, he and co-producer John Houseman were dragged to a back office and held for questioning because of the perceived seriousness of the event (Heyer, 2005, 96), and Welles would later comment about the resulting panic in an interview with Peter Bogdanovich:

> Six minutes after we'd gone on the air, the switchboards in radio stations right across the country were lighting up like Christmas trees. Houses were emptying, churches were filling up; from Nashville to Minneapolis there was wailing in the street and the rending of garments. Twenty minutes in, and we had a control room full of very

> bewildered cops. They didn't know who to arrest or for what, but they did lend a certain tone to the remainder of the broadcast. We began to realize, as we ploughed on with the destruction of New Jersey, that the extent of our *American lunatic fringe* had been underestimated. (Orson Welles, quoted in Crook 1999, 108, emphasis added)

Stories about the broadcast and the panic it inspired lingered in the press for weeks.[60] *The New York Times* for instance, wrote a front-page article on the broadcast with the headline "Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact," and the *Daily News* reported that a "Fake Radio 'War' Stirs Terror Through US." *The Washington Post* devoted their front page to the broadcast. As the article described, "Americans knew today the chilling terror of sudden war, of meeting invasion from another world, unsuspecting and unready" (Andrews, 31 October 1938, 1). It would go on to report that "so unnerved were Americans at the prospect of invasion that at least two persons suffered heart attacks, hundreds fainted, men and women fled their homes, would-be fighters volunteered, [and] hysteria swept the nation for a long and fearful hour" (Ibid.).

[60] Archival evidence of people's reactions can be found in the Orson Welles Manuscript Collection at Indiana University's Lilly Library, as well as in letters housed at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and letters donated to the University of Michigan in 2005. These archives reveal hundreds of telegrams from listeners (mostly written to CBS, Welles or the FCC) offering their opinions of the broadcast. See Heyer (2005) for some of the Lilly Library archival materials and Schwartz (2015) for the Maryland and Michigan collections. Many reported how much they enjoyed the show, while others wrote hostile and sometimes threatening letters about the program, and several of the letters described the anxious reactions that listeners had as they originally mistook the broadcast as true.

The New York Times.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1938.

MEAD STANDS PAT AS A NEW DEALER IN BID FOR SENATE

Democratic Candidate Opposes Any Except Minor Changes in Labor and Security Laws

Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact

Many Flee Homes to Escape 'Gas Raid From Mars'—Phone Calls Swamp Police at Broadcast of Wells Fantasy

A wave of mass hysteria seized thousands of radio listeners throughout the nation between 8:15 ...

... and radio stations here and in other cities of the United States and Canada seeking advice on protective ...

OUSTED JEWS FIND REFUGE IN POLAND AFTER BORDER STAY

Exiles Go to Relatives' Homes or to Camps Maintained by Distribution Committee

Image of *The New York Times* Headline, "Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact." 31 October 1938. Digital image. "The War of the Worlds at 75: Still invading our fears." *BBC.* 30 October 2013. Web. Accessed on 10 October 2017. http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20131029-war-of-the-worlds-viral-radio

DAILY NEWS

FINAL

FAKE RADIO 'WAR' STIRS TERROR THROUGH U.S.

Image of *Daily News* Headline, "Fake Radio 'War' Stirs Terror Through U.S." 31 October 1938. Digital image. "The Daily News' Original Coverage of 'War of the Worlds'." *Daily News.* 30 October 2008. Web. Accessed on 10 October 2017. http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/daily-news-original-coverage-war-worlds-article-1.305067

According to these reports, the broadcast "disrupted households, interrupted religious services, created traffic jams and clogged communication systems" (Flynn, 2005, 6). Telephone switchboards at CBS were swamped into uselessness, while radio and police stations across the country reported having jammed up phone lines and up to a 500 percent increase in calls (Koch, 1970, 85). Men, women, and children apparently fled in cars or made frantic phone calls to friends and family; some loaded their muskets either to fight the invading Martians or to contemplate suicide, while others held religious services calling for deliverance.[61] These stories captivated the public, and the headlines in both local and national newspapers stressed how the broadcast inspired a great panic across the nation.

This idea was repeated in an academic study produced by Princeton University psychology professor Hadley Cantril in the years following the broadcast. In his 1940 *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic,* he endorsed the belief that there was a nationwide panic during the program, and as a respected social psychologist at a prestigious institution, his work helped to solidify the idea that Welles's broadcast triggered widespread hysteria across the country.[62] After reviewing public opinion surveys, police reports, and radio statistics, and after interviewing individuals who had been "upset by the broadcast," Cantril (1940, xxix; 47) concluded that:

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[61] Reports further described the frantic reaction in New Jersey, the site of the alleged invasion. State troopers reported that traffic was at a standstill around Grover's Mill, as people attempted to flee. Moreover, twenty families in Newark, New Jersey "were found by police huddled in the street, faces covered with water-soaked handkerchiefs as protection against the gas," and Trenton's police department reported that it had received 2000 phone calls in two hours, during and immediately following the broadcast (Goodman, 2011, 260).

[62] He and his team conducted interviews with 135 individuals, most chosen "because they were known to have been upset by the broadcast" (Cantril 1940, xxix). One of Cantril's main findings was that many listeners had tuned in late, which made them miss the introduction stating that the broadcast was a fiction (77–84). Further, Cantril claims that the years of economic turmoil and fear of war leading up to the broadcast may have left Americans more anxious than ever before (xi–xii; 159–163). Additionally, he notes that ideas about the habitability of Mars had infiltrated popular culture and made a Martian invasion seem far from impossible (174–183). These factors, Cantril suggests, accounted largely for the ensuing panic.

> Long before the broadcast had ended people all over the United States were praying, crying, fleeing frantically to escape death from the Martians. … Some ran to rescue loved ones; others telephoned farewells or warnings, hurried to inform neighbours, sought information from newspapers or radio stations, and summoned ambulances and police cars. At least six-million people heard the broadcast. At least a million of them were frightened or disturbed.[63]

The authoritative voices of both academics and journalists mutually reinforced the idea that "The War of the Worlds" terrified the nation, and this myth of the panic took hold in the American imagination.[64]

Thus far, I have written this section with the assumption that people across the country really were unnerved by the broadcast, yet this myth of widespread panic has recently become subject to serious speculation, and a new wave of scholarship has argued that "the panic was neither as widespread nor as serious as many have believed at the time or since" (Socolow, 24 October 2008). Many researchers have called into question these various news articles and academic studies, arguing that they were poorly sourced, mutually influenced by other exaggerated stories, and largely inaccurate. According to this new wave of scholarship, there was a lot at stake in the

[63] His interviews describe the terror that captured the imagination of over one hundred listeners, and he extrapolates from these reports to argue that a significant number of Americans became horribly frightened by the broadcast. He also relies on a Gallup poll taken on 16 December 1938, which surveyed the voting public to ask if they had heard the broadcast, and which also asked if those who had heard it were "very much" frightened by the broadcast, "somewhat" frightened, or "not at all" frightened (Schwartz, 2015, 183). The poll determined that twelve percent of those surveyed had heard the broadcast, from which Cantril projected an estimate that twelve million people had heard it (Ibid.). The poll also indicated that twenty-seven percent reported being "very much frightened," and forty-two percent reported being "somewhat frightened"; from these numbers, Cantril estimated that 1.2 million people "were excited by it" (Ibid.). Of course, as Schwartz (183–184) points out, these categories are entirely subjective, and they offer no information on whether or not the listeners took any panicked action because of the show.

[64] Cantril's theory of widespread hysteria, which was highly promoted in the press, remains immensely popular even today. His proposal that at least a million listeners became frightened or disturbed is a bold one and his study was to become a foundational text in the discipline of social psychology and a landmark text for mass communication research, heavily cited to this day. This text also greatly influenced the way in which "The War of the Worlds" broadcast has become popularly represented, as the ideas surrounding the mass panic are often directly drawn from the interviews presented by Cantril in his study.

believability of the panic, and collectively, these works challenge the popular myth that saw "The War of the Worlds" as a program that stimulated intense feelings of fear across the nation.[65]

As A. Brad Schwartz argues, for instance, while the panicked scenes of fleeing homes and taking arms against the Martians did happen, "they were very, very rare," and most of those who believed in the broadcast stayed rooted to their radios (Schwartz, 2015, 83).[66] As he concludes, "one million Americans may indeed have briefly believed Earth was under attack from the Martians that night — or, at least, that something horrible was happening in New Jersey — but almost none of them actually panicked" (90). I agree with Schwartz's assessment; certainly, most Americans did not "lose their heads" (89) from panic and hysteria, though many did react with an anxious and hesitant pause, which I attribute to the fantastic and uncanny quality of the broadcast. Much of the evidence proposed to support the case for a great national panic can certainly be questioned, but this does not mean that no one was frightened — and indeed, many were briefly shaken up by the unfolding events; however, it does force into reconsideration the grand claims that were originally made about the overwhelming and panic-stricken responses of the listening public.

Yet this idea of the panic was an attractive one and stories about the fake alien assault circulated in the popular press for weeks after its airing. Even to this day, the broadcast has maintained an enduring fascination in the United States: "There are few people who are unaware of the panic created by the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* on Hallowe'en night in 1938" (Crook, 1999, 106). The

[65] See Jackie Orr (2006), Pooley and Socolow, (2013a; 2013b), Schwartz (2015), David H. Culbert (1976) and Campbell (2010) for a detailed look at the over-inflated reaction to the broadcast and some of the possible motives for promoting this idea of the panic.

[66] Schwartz importantly draws a distinction between panic itself, and the viral spread of news about the incident: "the flood of phone calls indicates how quickly news of the 'invasion' spread, not the existence of widespread panic" (88). That is, while the vast increase in phone calls was frequently cited as evidence of alarm, it does not explicitly indicate that people were actually in a frenzied panic, and this "cross-continental flood of phone calls suggests that, far from losing their heads, many people stopped to think before heading for the hills" (89).

circulation of stories about the panic in popular media and in academic works spread the idea that individuals across the country could believe that extraterrestrials were able to invade our planet — and whether people really believed in the fake alien invasion at the time of the broadcast, many found it believable that other Americans did.

There was a certain appeal to this thought; this idea of panic drew attention to the overwhelming powers of the mass media in the lives of everyday Americans, and it exposed the so-called "American lunatic fringe," to borrow Orson Welles's phrase. That is, many of the responses following the broadcast raised concerns about the use of mass media as a tool of persuasion and control in American society, and many commentators used the incident to promote the idea that the American masses were highly inept, ignorant, and gullible.

For weeks after the event, patronizing editorials and other public statements peppered the nation's newspapers discussing the credulity of the listening audience, and by extension the wider American public, for believing in the media so wholeheartedly and without any discerning judgement. These commentaries painted radio listeners as lacking values and common sense, and many were quick to conclude that the masses listening in were uneducated and ignorant dupes ready "to believe anything, however preposterous" (Morson, 2006, 15).[67] They further argued that the broadcast suggested a deep pessimism about national intelligence and offered a disturbing vision for the future of the country.

The broadcast roused a very judgemental response against average American citizens and placed the American population under scrutiny like never before. Rather than seeking to understand why people reacted to the broadcast in the way they did, and rather than seeing their reactions as potentially reasonable, most public commentators were highly critical and disparaging

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[67] For instance, one noted critic, Dorothy Thompson, cited the failure of American schools, and argued that the broadcast laid bare "the primeval fears" behind the modern mask of civilization (Thompson, 2 November 1938).

of the listening public, and they constructed the idea of the "American lunatic fringe" in opposition to the rational, intelligent, and reasoning public.

This idea of a gullible listening audience awakened a sense of anxiety over the powers of media technologies and the force they exerted over the masses.[68] With Hitler using media to spread Nazi propaganda and to control German citizens overseas, many commentators in the US feared that the American masses could similarly be misled by authoritative media corporations. With this idea of the persuasive and pervasive influences of media in mind, Jeffrey Sconce (2000) argues that the resulting panic from "The War of the Worlds" was not simply the result of an invasion by Martians, but an invasion of the media into our lives: it "was as much a panic over the new and rather suffocating presence of mass communications as it was a panic over extraterrestrial invasion" (16).[69]

According to Sconce, the broadcast was unsettling because it signalled the repressed potential for panic "that lies just behind the normalizing functions of media technology, a terror that is at once terrifying and yet suggestively enticing" (117). It was not just the invading Martians that caused a panicked reaction; it was that CBS, or NBC, or ABC, were able to invade homes across the country and colonize the thoughts of many Americans. The otherworldly tale of the Martian invasion seemed to articulate this earthly concern, and the broadcast became such a famed parable

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[68] Anxieties heightened after the broadcast, and commentators questioned what would happen in a real crisis. For instance, an editorial in the *Broadcasting Journal* suggested that if a fictitious broadcast could "throw some Americans into a frenzy, what would happen if radio were ruled by a Government dictatorship?" (Unknown author, 15 November 1938, cited in Goodman 2011, 263). Another commented that the panic revealed "the uncertain foundation upon which our American democracy rests" (Torbett, JC., no date, cited in Schwartz, 2015, 143). An article in the Associated Press reported: "thousands of persons … exhibited all the symptoms of fear, panic, determination to resist, desperation, bravery, excitement or fatalism that real war would have produced" (Associated Press, 31 October 1938).

[69] According to Sconce, "The War of the Worlds" caused panic "to the extent that listeners had successfully internalized this new model of media presence as a seemingly omniscient consciousness in the air, one capable of bringing together an invisible mass audience while at the same time 'watching over' them electronically as a higher authority," and the broadcast served as a "cogent reminder of the American public's inability to intervene through the mass media" (113).

because it offers a cautionary tale about the manipulative powers of the mass media in our daily lives.

The idea of panic, therefore, roused a strong sense of anxiety over the powerful effects of the mass media on American citizens and the credulity of the wider American public. These concerns did not stop after "The War of the Worlds" and, as the ufological movement illustrates, these debates have only intensified. I find many close parallels between the treatment of the 1938 listening public and the modern-day ufological public, which — as I outline in my introduction — is itself extensive and is composed of a large portion of the wider American populace.[70] The concerns lobbied against the 1938 listening public seem to foreshadow the treatment of ufology and its public, where those who believe in aliens and UFOs are often described as ignorant individuals unable to settle upon concrete and rational evaluations of the truth.

Rather than looking at the reasons for belief in aliens, the reaction of the official culture is simply to ostracize believers and point out their willingness to believe in anything, however strange. Authoritative commentators used the "War of the Worlds" incident to scoff at the lack of discerning and intelligent critical inquiry by the masses, just as commentators today sneer at ufologists and their public for believing that UFO sightings may be the result of extraterrestrial intelligences. I therefore see the "War of the Worlds" broadcast as a sort of precursor to modern ufology; it worked to set apart the American lunatic fringe from the rational and discerning public,

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[70] It is difficult to gauge just how large the ufological public really is, and certainly the number of members has fluctuated over its roughly seventy years of existence; however, several public opinion polls and surveys taken over the last several decades suggest that this number remains quite large. In looking at Gallup polls taken in 1985, 1988, and 1990, for instance, Charles Ziegler finds that they consistently showed that just over fifty percent of adult Americans believed that some UFOs are spacecraft from an extraterrestrial civilization (Ziegler, 1999, 2). These numbers are repeated in more recent polls, such as the Public Policy Polling firm's 2013 poll and the market research company Ipsos's 2015 poll, which both indicated that over fifty percent of Americans believe in UFOs. Further, a 2002 Roper poll found that nearly half of all Americans believe that alien craft have visited Earth ("A Majority Already Believe in the Extraterrestrial," 2002). Further, many ufological texts (books, films, television programs, radio programs, websites, etcetera) have made best-seller lists, have achieved high ratings, and have gone viral, which serves as a further indication of ufology's reach in the United States.

just as the ufological public is today cast aside by official culture as dangerously blind and insufficiently critical.

In both cases, the authoritative experts who produce these critiques fail to consider why many people have found these stories to be plausible. Instead, they cast these individuals aside as part of a credulous mass that is unable to settle upon a reasonable evaluation of what is going on in the world, and they ignore the power of storytelling for creating a space to believe in *real* aliens. In the next chapters, I will consider more closely what it is about ufology that makes it so enticing to many Americans and will contemplate why stories about UFOs and aliens are so believable. For now, however, I have attempted to emphasize how and why "The War of the Worlds" offered such an enticing moment, when beliefs in extraterrestrials could take hold in the minds of many Americans. Rather than dismissing those who briefly believed in the broadcast as part of a "lunatic fringe," I have sought to understand why so many people were able to entertain the possibility that aliens were invading the United States. Radio, it seems, was a powerful medium for stirring uncanny sensibilities, and Orson Welles's careful storytelling worked to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction in such a way as to make the Martian invasion seem plausible.

I have also sought to understand why the idea of the great panic became so famous, and it is necessary to acknowledge that the broadcast's extensive popularity (immediately following its airing and up until the present) has also contributed to the widespread interest in extraterrestrials in the United States. The more the stories of the fantastical Martian invasion circulated across the country, the more life was breathed into this idea that aliens could make their way to Earth. As Michael Warner (2002, 62) notes, it is not individual texts that create a public, but the "concatenation of texts through time," and the repeated circulation of texts about the Martian invasion helped establish a public with a sustained interest in ideas about extraterrestrial beings.

The success of "The War of the Worlds" propelled the figure of the alien to a place of prominence in the broader popular culture: alien invaders could be found on the pages of books and magazines, on radio, in film, and later, on television, and many of these stories about aliens borrowed heavily from the plot of the great Martian invasion.[71] Like the Great Airship Flap, which needed the idea of human flight to inspire visions of incredible flying technologies, later UFO sightings required the notion that alien beings could occupy American skies, and "The War of the Worlds" certainly helped spark these imaginings. "The War of the Worlds" was itself a performative utterance; it created the Martian invasion simply through its telling, and it inspired ideas about *real* aliens — which, as we shall see, have been invading the United States ever since.

[71] For instance, Hollywood made a few movie renditions of *The War of the Worlds*, in 1953 and again in 2005, and in 1978, Jeff Wayne even staged a musical version, starring Richard Burton. Extremely popular films, from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The Thing* (1951), and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), to *Independence Day* (1996) and *Mars Attacks!* (1996), also owe debt to this original epic of alien invasion.

Part Two

Ufology and the United States

Chapter Three:

UFO Sightings and the Rise of Ufology

A Real War

The invasion of *real* aliens in the United States did not happen all at once; it was an intermittent process in which the ebbs and flows, or "waves" and "flaps," of sightings and stories about UFOs and extraterrestrials were punctuated by social and political events taking place across the country. As this chapter will show, these events very much shaped the way in which stories about aliens were imagined and told.

In the years immediately after "The War of the Worlds," ideas about *real* aliens coming to Earth were temporarily put on the back burner as the fictional war conjured by Welles was replaced by a fundamentally real and tangible one that encompassed much of the world, including the United States. World War II led to mass destruction on an unprecedented scale: it was the bloodiest conflict and the largest war in human history, and the war (and especially the atomic bomb) helped form the idea of planet-wide destruction at the hands of human beings.

With most of the war fought on European and Asian soil, Americans were initially involved in the conflict indirectly. The US government and media actively endorsed propaganda campaigns against the Axis powers, which drew sharp (and often highly racialized) distinctions between American allies and their adversaries. Of course, many of these xenophobic sentiments were already in circulation long before the commencement of WWII; for instance, the idea of a "yellow peril" (the imagined invasion of the US by Asians of East and Southeast Asian descent) captivated the American public between the two World Wars.[72] Fantastical stories about this perceived enemy

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[72] This term "yellow peril" emerged as a colour metaphor for race in the late nineteenth century when Chinese immigrants as *coolie* slaves or labourers came to the United States. It later came to be associated with the Japanese

invasion filled pulp magazines throughout this period and the strict "us" versus "them" dichotomies were meant to dehumanize their foreign rivals as complete outsiders with absolutely no similarities to American citizens. These ideas only intensified in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor. "The War of the Worlds" broadcast eerily foreshadowed the end of American isolation that came when the Japanese launched a surprise military strike against the US navy, and this attack on Pearl Harbor left a permanent mark on the American psyche; no longer could the nation be viewed as secure, isolated, and protected from the threat of invasion — following the attack, the United States was thrust into the war.

At this time propaganda campaigns, such as the famous "Slap the Jap right off the map" jingle, permeated American popular culture and portrayed the Japanese (and their allies) as dehumanized presences that needed to be entirely eradicated from the planet. In many popular depictions, the Japanese were likened to animals, insects, reptiles, simians, and other vermin, and portrayals of Japanese people as powerful but foul "hordes" of monsters also appeared in American popular culture at this time. In some ways, these depictions bore a striking resemblance to the strange Martian invaders from Welles's broadcast: the Japanese were portrayed as entirely alien beings lacking any human attributes, who were intent on destroying the American way of life. Welles's alien invasion, it seemed, uncannily paralleled the Japanese assault on American soil; in fact, the Martian invasion in Welles's broadcast now sounded like a haunting prediction of the invasion of alien strangers — this time human ones — into the United States.

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during the mid-twentieth century due to Japanese military expansion, and eventually came to be applied to all Asians of East and Southeast Asian descent. The term often referred to the fear of a mass immigration of Asians to the US, which threatened white wages and standards of living, and it promoted the idea that Asians would eventually destroy and ultimately take over western civilization. During WWII, ideas about the "yellow peril" were especially heightened by fears of a Japanese invasion of the United States. See Henry Yu's (2001) *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* for a history of "the yellow peril" and the xenophobic discourse surrounding Asians in the US.

The attack on the American homeland propelled the US government to develop and expand their military technologies, and as the war progressed, these technologies became more advanced and specialized. Developments were made to military equipment, such as small arms and armoured vehicles, as well as to rather complex and sophisticated technologies, such as airplanes, missiles, rocketry, and the atomic bomb. The latter, produced in secret under the confidential Manhattan Project, proved to be an extraordinarily powerful weapon that completely transformed the scale of human warfare, culminating with the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 — an event that led the Japanese to surrender but also led to the deaths of an estimated quarter of a million people.

In the United States, the government and media promoted an "official narrative" about the bomb; despite obliterating much of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was proposed that the bomb ultimately saved hundreds of thousands of lives by putting a stop to the war, and a consensus existed among much of the population that the American position of postwar power and prominence could be attributed to its atomic weaponry. As Paul Boyer ([1985] 1994, 334) argues,

> For a fleeting moment after Hiroshima, American culture had been profoundly affected by atomic fear, by a dizzying plethora of atomic panaceas and proposals, and by endless speculation on the social and ethical implications of the new reality. By the end of the 1940s, the cultural discourse had largely stopped. Americans now seemed not only ready to accept the bomb, but to support any measures necessary to maintain atomic supremacy.

Emerging from the war as its clear victor, the United States had exhibited a sense of technological and military supremacy like never before, and many Americans embraced its nuclear technologies

for ushering in a period of economic growth and for propelling the nation out of the Depression and the war.

Contact and the Cold War

This attitude shaped much of the Cold War–era discourse that would follow. As the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a decades-long nuclear arms race to stockpile vast nuclear arsenals, ideas flourished in the US about Americans being the rightful custodians of nuclear power to safeguard and protect the Western world and its capitalist and democratic system from the Soviet enemy. Hence the American public embraced the idea that the US should become the world's greatest superpower by expanding its military and nuclear technologies, and this early period of the Cold War saw the justification of nuclear technology as a provider of security and safety against the Soviet Union, which posed a significant challenge to the US war machine when it detonated its first nuclear weapon in 1949.

Rather than examining the ambivalent effects of nuclear technology on society and the world, many Americans saw the atom as a unifying symbol in American foreign policy, and discourse surrounding the arms race encouraged Americans to view their relationship with the Soviet enemy in stark contrasting terms of "us" versus "them." Instead of engaging in a national discussion about the devastating potentialities of the American pursuit of nuclear weapons, as Paul Brians (1987, 3) observed, "nuclear war must be the most carefully avoided topic of general significance in the contemporary world." A serious avoidance of the ethical implications of the atomic bomb signalled a profound repression of the horrors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and the United States continued to invest in atomic power to keep the Soviets in check.

Despite this public embrace and justification of American military expansionism, repressed anxieties about the nuclear bomb loomed in the background and sometimes surfaced in strange

and unexpected ways. While the bomb was seen as ushering in a period of stability and prosperity for the nation and bringing an end to the war, it also revealed the way in which these technologies could become a mortal threat, especially if they fell into the hands of strange enemies. If "The War of the Worlds" provoked fears about the damaging potentials of technology, the atomic bomb brought these fears to new heights, and the powerful Martian death rays in the broadcast did not seem that far off from the horrible destruction caused by human nuclear technologies. "The War of the Worlds" eerily foreshadowed the great devastation that would result from nuclear weaponry, and, in some ways, the high-tech aliens from the broadcast became a logical extension of a society that had become incapable of reconciling its own destructive potentials. The detonation of the bomb therefore triggered a sense of anxiety and uncertainty about the future of human technology, and as I will show throughout this section, these anxieties found their full expression in stories shared about extraterrestrials and UFOs in the United States.

The bomb also symbolized a division between those who had access to the knowledge of what was going on behind the scenes in the American government and those who did not. While most citizens showed their public trust and support in the government in the years immediately following WWII, the development of nuclear weaponry planted in the minds of many Americans the idea that significant aspects of the government's operations actually took place outside the public's view. The Manhattan Project, implemented under a shroud of secrecy, suggested to the American public that the government was able to engage in clandestine operations that could greatly affect the entire world and that could cause destruction almost beyond imagination.[73]

[73] The project was such a secret that many of the scientists who collaborated on it did not know what the outcome of their work would be. Several labs had scientists working on smaller parts of the weapon, and so few were aware of the sheer magnitude and scope of the project.

While it would take some time for these concerns to fully come to the fore, they increased during the long period of the Cold War, which spanned roughly 1947 to 1991,[74] when matters of domestic and foreign security became largely removed from public awareness and were instead undertaken covertly by governmental authorities. Timothy Melley (2012) describes this dramatic restructuring of the relationship between the US government and the general public, noting that it resulted in a precipitous decline in public confidence in the establishment. He attributes this wider Cold War period to the expansion and institutionalization of the covert sphere, which profoundly altered democracy in the US and especially the conditions of knowledge about government activities. According to Melley, during this period the government "made considerable investment in transforming the conditions of public knowledge at home and abroad" and "while there was nothing new about espionage, the degree to which foreign policy matters were sequestered from the public sphere during the Cold War fundamentally — and perhaps permanently — transformed US democracy" (31; 4).

An effective state, Melley points out, requires acceptance from the public, and therefore "has an interest in generating a public that *thinks* it has a general knowledge of such work but *does not* and *cannot* know in detail" (9). This results in a public in which citizens know that the government is engaged in secrets, but they do not know exactly what those secrets are. Melley argues that US citizens have entered into a social contract in which they have traded their democratic oversight for enhanced security, all while knowing that their elected leaders will deceive them about some acts undertaken for their supposed benefit (7).

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[74] There are disagreements among historians over the actual span of the Cold War, but the most common time frame dates it back to 1947 – to the year of the Truman Doctrine – when US foreign policy pledged to aid nations threatened by Soviet expansionism; it is also commonly dated to have ended either in 1989, when communism fell in Eastern Europe, or in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed.

During the Cold War, many citizens acquiesced to this trade-off, especially since it was a time when many felt that secrets needed to be kept from the Soviet Union and could not be revealed to the public, but one of the main consequences of this diminished transparency in government operations is that people come to feel far removed from the centres of power and feel dispossessed and alienated from the government. This shift of policy from largely transparent operations to fundamentally opaque and classified ones transformed the relationship between American citizens and their official institutions, and as I will show throughout this chapter, this created the perfect conditions for the institutionalization of ufology to serve as a challenge to the official discourse. It also created an environment for ideas about extraterrestrials to thrive.

Moreover, stories about UFOs and alien contact also gained in popularity alongside the burgeoning Space Race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the 1950s and 1960s, which presented another sort of expression of east-west competition and conflict and provided “a more benign cousin to the arms race” (Gulyas, 2013, 19). The space race began after the successful launch of *Sputnik* by the Soviet Union in 1957, which many Americans feared signalled Soviet superiority, and this initiated a panic over the threat to the technological supremacy of the United States. Many also worried that this project signalled Soviet capabilities for carrying out a disastrous attack on the US, as “launching *Sputnik* meant that the Soviets had the capacity to send long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles armed with nuclear weapons to American cities” (Dean, 1997, 70). Hence, *Sputnik* signalled a threat to both the safety and honour of American citizens and this created a political opportunity for the Democratic Party in the US to capitalize on this frenzy (70–72); it also led to the establishment of the American space program, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration more commonly referred to by the acronym NASA.

Landing the first person on the Moon and returning them safely became an important project intended to boost the image of the United States (especially after the Bay of Pigs fiasco), so the Kennedy administration turned toward the space program to help reinvigorate confidence in the United States as technologically supreme (72). The American space program was designed to reflect American ideals and it became a symbol for the nation; as Jodi Dean observes, it was set directly against the initiatives undertaken by the Soviet Union: "if Soviet efforts in space were military secrets, then America's would be open and public, a civilian operation in the interests of peace" (71).

Importantly, the American space project was intended to be a public display that defined American national identity. Outer space became depicted as an extension of the American frontier — it became popularly dubbed "the final frontier"[75] — which instilled a romantic tinge to the exploration of outer space by reiterating the expansive fantasy of the wild, lawless West. This image tapped into notions of American exceptionalism, where frontier exploration was credited with renewing and reinventing America through its promotion of democracy, opportunity, and individuality. The myth of the frontier evokes ideas of courage and rugged adventure, as well as the exploration into uncharted territories — or, "to boldly go where no man [*sic*] has gone before" — to borrow the popular phrase from *Star Trek*.[76]

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[75] The frontier rhetoric, then, became applied to describe the exploration of outer space. For instance, John F. Kennedy (1962) notably evoked this discourse in his public declaration that "what was once the furthest outpost on the old frontier of the West will be the furthest outpost on the new frontier of science and space." The connection between space and the frontier, however, was really solidified in a saying made famous by the popular American television series *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966–69), which opened each episode with the line: "Space — the final frontier."

[76] In drawing from this myth of the frontier experience, "American exploration came to be linked to the achievements of technology and democracy" (Dean, 1998, 19), and like the American frontier, the "final frontier" of space was invested with ideas that it could rejuvenate the nation, safeguard democracy, and help ameliorate economic and social problems in the US. During the very beginnings of human space exploration, then, the American metaphor of the frontier became applied to outer space and this nationalist language intentionally strikes a distinctly American chord. By conceiving of outer space in the same metaphors and language also used to formulate the story of the American nation and its citizens, this rhetoric symbolically laid claim to the particular "Americanness" of outer space. In that sense, the exploration of space was conceived not as a universal, human-wide endeavour, but as a uniquely

The exploration of outer space was therefore presented as a distinctly American pursuit which further worked to turn attention toward the skies and encouraged ideas about space exploration in the popular American consciousness. This also spurred imaginings about the strange beings who might exist beyond our own planet and it led many to speculate about the possibilities of interplanetary space travel. If we might be able to send human beings to space, some reasoned, then perhaps alien beings had already achieved this technological mastery and were visiting us here on Earth. Those budding ideas about alien contact that had been in circulation since at least the inventions of early flight and radio technologies were finally brought into full expression during the Cold War and the Space Age.

Close Encounters: The Modern Era of UFOs

It was during the Cold War that people started to see evidence of *real* aliens, and strange and unidentified flying objects were reportedly seen flying in the skies over the country, leading some to speculate that these strange craft were being piloted by alien intelligences. While "The War of the Worlds" may have initiated these ideas by planting the suggestion that alien beings could invade Earth, over the course of the Cold War many individuals came to their own conclusions that bizarre aerial phenomena were really the workings of extraterrestrial beings.

Of course, these connections between strange flying objects and aliens did not happen right away. As I mentioned above, during the Second World War, ideas about *real* aliens fell on the back burner, and when people saw strange objects they did not recognize in the skies, they initially assumed that they were secret enemy technologies, not extraterrestrial spacecraft. As World War II ground on, many pilots reported seeing strange lights that would dart around the sky, as if playing with their aircraft. US pilots dubbed them "Foo Fighters" and believed that they were a

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"American" project and an extension of the American nation. By extending the American frontier into the skies, Americans again asserted claims to the exceptional.

German secret weapon, although they never harmed their airplanes. After the war had ended, however, the Germans stated that their pilots had also seen these strange balls of light, which they conversely thought were a US secret weapon. Only when it was revealed that neither party was responsible for the sightings did speculations pour in about what the objects could have been, and some suggested that they might have been caused by alien beings attempting to interfere in the war.

Another mysterious incident occurred late in the evening of 24 February 1942 over the skies of Los Angeles. People across the city reported seeing what they thought was a Japanese enemy aircraft hovering in the sky. The sighting came not long after the Pearl Harbor bombing, and only one day after a confirmed submarine attack off the Santa Barbara coast, so the incident provoked a very serious response. Alarms were raised, a total blackout was ordered, and thousands of air raid wardens were called to their positions and began firing over 1400 shells at the object. Several buildings and vehicles were severely damaged, and five civilians were left dead as an indirect result of the attack.

The incident, which has since been dubbed "The Battle of Los Angeles" or "The Great LA Air Raid," made front-page news across the US Pacific coast, but was later reported to be a "false alarm" when the US military identified the object as a meteorological balloon. Ufologists have since interpreted this event as a possible extraterrestrial encounter and have suggested that the government later covered up the ET visitation with a fabricated story about a weather balloon[77]; at the time, however, the official version of events was widely accepted, and the incident slipped from the public's attention. Like the Great Airship Flap, these strange occurrences were initially

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[77] As we shall see, this story of a government cover-up and the dismissal of the incident as a misidentified meteorological balloon is a familiar one to ufology and is most popularly associated with the Roswell Incident conspiracy theory.

interpreted to be caused by human activities and there was little speculation that they could possibly be the result of extraterrestrial intelligences; an additional spark was needed for this idea to stick more permanently in the wider consciousness.

More than just a spark, the devastating explosion of the atomic bomb and the subsequent Cold War proved to be the catalysts needed to permanently propel ideas about *real* aliens into the American imagination. The first part of this chapter maps how UFO sightings took off in the immediate post-war years following Hiroshima and Nagasaki, during a time when American citizens and the US government became watchful of the skies, and the frequency of these sightings grew as the Cold War persisted and the Soviet Union was found to be in possession of nuclear technologies.

One of the first UFO sightings during this period (and arguably one of the most popular), occurred on 24 June 1947, when Idaho aviator and businessman Kenneth Arnold encountered a group of peculiar objects in the sky while flying his private plane from Chehalis to Yakima, Washington. As he headed toward Mount Rainier, he saw a “chain of nine peculiar looking aircraft” that were “flat like a pie pan,” or “like a big flat disc,” that “flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water” (cited in Bragg, 2005, 94–96). When Arnold landed in Pendleton, he reported his sighting to the *East Oregonian* newspaper; it then found its way to the Associated Press newswire (Gulyas, 2013, 36). A reporter, inspired by his description, coined the term “flying saucer” to describe the objects. Arnold’s report was devoid of sensationalism and his position as a reputable pilot and businessman offered great credibility to his sightings, which helped popularize the story as it spread across various news channels (Kripal, 2010, 151).

In the weeks following, Arnold raised the idea that the strange objects he saw may have possible extraterrestrial origins, and these speculations were widely reported by the Associated Press.

Prepared by “The War of the Worlds,” many members of the public began to consider this possibility that these objects could have been piloted by extraterrestrial beings. Arnold’s was the first extensively reported unidentified flying object sighting in the United States and this incident has been widely acknowledged as the birth of the modern UFO age (Jacobs, 1976, 31; Denzler, 2001, 8). It was also one of the first times that an unidentified flying object was speculated to come from aliens.

Another sighting, reported by a United Airlines crew, described nine disk-like objects flying over Idaho on 4 July of that same year, which garnered even more exposure in the nation’s newspapers, opening the floodgates for media coverage about mysterious flying objects in the sky. Only days later, on 8 July, newspapers reported that an alleged spaceship crashed just outside of Roswell, New Mexico, close to the site of the 1945 atomic bomb testing base. W.W. “Mack” Brazel, a local rancher, discovered the strange debris on his property and brought it to Roswell to be investigated by the military. When the debris was initially inspected, the military released a report to the press stating that they had uncovered a flying saucer; however, shortly thereafter the statement was recanted, and the military reported that the debris was merely a weather balloon.

The Roswell story initially generated a great deal of buzz internationally, but after the recantation it faded from attention until 1980 when UFO researchers began alleging that the military’s response about the weather balloon was really an attempt to cover up the fact that extraterrestrials had landed on American soil. In Part Three, I offer a much more thorough examination of the Roswell Incident and its popularity in American culture, and I consider why this story sparked back into public consciousness during the 1980s. For now, however, I wish to draw attention to the way in which the initial media frenzy over the Arnold sighting, the Roswell

Incident, and other early saucer sightings helped spur the idea that unidentified objects were infiltrating American airspace.

With mass media being arguably one of the most powerful institutions in the United States, the popularity of UFOs can in large part be attributed to the role that the media played in making these incidents more publicly visible than ever before, and it is no coincidence that the growth of the newspaper, radio, motion picture, and television industries in the US coincided with the modern UFO era. The circulation of these early sightings across the nation's media channels helped spread the idea that strange objects were appearing in the sky across the country, and it solidified a public with a concerted interest in these unknown and mysterious entities.

Further, while there had been sporadic sightings of strange objects in the sky long before Arnold's encounter, as Brenda Denzler notes (2001, 8) it was only after Arnold's sighting that a uniform term was applied to these reports; the media seized on the idea of the "flying saucer" and the term became a handy shorthand used by journalists to characterize similar sightings that followed Arnold's. This helped establish a consistent model for future sightings and it encouraged a striking uniformity to the reports that followed. Many media reports also picked up on the idea that the strange sightings could be attributed to extraterrestrial origins — and they used sensationalized headlines to promote this idea and boost paper sales across the nation; it did not take long for the term "flying saucer" to become synonymous with purported extraterrestrial spacecraft viewed from Earth.

The term "flying saucer" was invented by the media and it played a significant role in shaping ideas about unidentified flying objects. Interestingly, after the publication of his account, Arnold was adamant that the objects he saw in the sky were not circular, but rather looked like a crescent or a flying wing, and he complained that there was a great deal of misunderstanding over his

description because the "flying saucer" label imposed a certain image onto what he saw (Kottmeyer, 1993; Clarke, 2015, 33–35). Even though Arnold never witnessed a disc-shaped object, most of the sightings reports that piled up in the years following his strange encounter involved witnesses describing saucer-shaped craft. This certainly speaks to the way in which the mass media influenced the modern era of UFO sightings and inspired later depictions of these strange objects. Future witnesses did not see what Arnold had really seen, but instead they saw what the media told them he had seen — and this heavily popularized image of the flying saucer came to shape UFO phenomena: alien spacecraft in film, on television, and in print all typically depicted (and continue to depict) the craft as circular, disc-like objects gliding through the skies.

After the Arnold sighting and the Roswell case, the idea that UFOs could possibly inhabit our skies — and even crash onto American soil — rampantly spread across the nation. A Gallup poll[78] taken on 19 August 1947, for instance, "revealed that while one out of two Americans had heard of the Marshall Plan, nine out of ten had heard about the saucers" (Partridge, 2003, 5); by the end of 1947 over 850 flying saucer sightings were reported across the US (Ibid.). As Denzler (2001, 10) observes, this marked the first major wave of UFO sightings in the United States, and between 1947 and 1970, there would be at least six other major waves where sightings peaked in number and frequency. Recalling Michael Warner's point that a public is formed by the continuous circulation of texts through time, it seems that the repeated sharing of stories about flying saucers meant that a significant number of individuals across the country were now able to engage in discussions about UFO phenomena with sustained interest and attention.

The American Government and the UFO Puzzle

[78] Gallup Polls are conducted by Gallup Inc., an American research-based, global consulting company that conducts public opinion polls in several countries.

After the heavily popularized Arnold sighting and Roswell Incident, more sightings began to accrue, including those reported by pilots and other seemingly qualified observers, which put pressure on the government to figure out what was really going on. The vast number of flying saucer sightings sparked intense interest from the US government, and the modern era of the UFO can therefore also be marked by the fact that for the first time in history some of the military resources of a world power were being expended on trying to understand these phenomena (Denzler, 2001, 12).

Importantly then, the US government has played an active role in investigating UFOs. Emerging from World War II as the world's military superpower, the US government seemed fixated on determining what was going on in its skies, and throughout the fifties and sixties it launched several official, large-scale projects and dedicated substantial time and money in an attempt to classify UFOs. The United States was at the forefront of determining the nature of unidentified flying objects, and much of this work was undertaken by US military and intelligence agencies, in particular the Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which produced thousands of pages of data about UFO phenomena. Many other countries ended up taking the lead from the United States on how to respond to the unidentified flying object sightings, frequently adopting the conclusions of these American investigations, but arguably no other government has devoted such extensive time and resources to determining the nature of these sightings (Margolis, 1967, 40).[79]

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[79] With that said, other countries have implemented their own programs to study UFOs. Brazil's Operação Prato was an investigation carried out between 1977 and 1978 by the Brazillian Air Force following sightings in the city of Colares, but the investigation was closed after finding no unusual phenomena. Canada implemented Project Magnet, which was a program established by Transport Canada on 2 December 1950, under the direction of Wilbert B. Smith, senior radio engineer for Transport Canada's Broadcast and Measurement Section, and it was formally active until mid-1954 and informally active and without government funding until Smith's death in 1962. Smith concluded that the UFO sightings were ET in origin and were operated by magnetism. France's French Space Agency CNES (Centre national d'études spatiales) has undertaken three different programs, GEPAN (1977–1988); SERPA (1988–2004) and GEIPAN (September 2005 to the present), whose brief is to investigate unidentified aerial phenomena and make these

The Cold War climate fueled concerns about the development of Soviet long-range missiles and other weaponry, and these concerns sparked these UFO projects into existence. The US government was not necessarily motivated by the idea that some of these sightings might have extraterrestrial origins (although some of its projects leaned heavily toward this explanation) but instead seemed interested in examining whether the objects observed were secret weapons or espionage devices used by their human enemies. At the same time, as I will show in this section, the US government's official response to UFOs inadvertently seemed to legitimize ideas about UFOs as extraterrestrial spacecraft, and this contributed to common perceptions about aliens and led to conspiracy theories being shared about the government.

The US Air Force was the first official body to investigate UFO phenomena in 1947 when the Air Material Command (AMC) was tasked to investigate flying saucer reports. The project was headed by AMC commander Lieutenant General Nathan Twining, who indicated that the sightings were based on "something real and not visionary or fictitious" (Twining, 1947). He also mentioned that some of the incidents could have been caused by natural phenomena, and that others may be the result of a domestic secret project unknown to the Air Force or could be attributed to innovative foreign aircraft (Ibid.). With this last possibility in mind, he recommended the creation of a permanent project tasked "to collect, collate, evaluate, and distribute within the government all information relating to such sightings, on the premise that flying saucers might be real" and a concern to national security (Haines, 1999, 27).

findings known to the public. The Soviet Union implemented Institute 22, an organization created in 1978 to study UFOs, and it was a secret institution for thirteen years until the fall of the Soviet Union. The UK's Ministry of Defence set up the Flying Saucer Working Party in 1950 and released a report in 1951, which explained that all UFO sightings could be explained by terrestrial causes. The UK also executed Project Condign, a secret UFO study undertaken by the British government's Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) between 1997 and 2000. While outside the purview of this project, a cross-cultural analysis of these government programs could offer a fruitful understanding of how UFO phenomena have been treated in different national contexts.

This suggestion was approved and a classified project, code-named Sign, began operation in the early months of 1948 (Swords, et al. 2012, 48–51). The personnel involved with the project determined that most sightings were explicable as hoaxes and misidentifications but found that some reported objects remained unidentifiable and that their unusual flight characteristics seemed to preclude the explanation that they were part of a covert domestic operation. They also rejected the possibility that the sightings involved novel foreign aircraft, also because of the nature of the technology, which seemed to be well beyond current human capabilities; hence, a small number of cases remained unexplained. Sign personnel were split on how to categorize these remaining cases (Ziegler, 1999, 5); some did not think the reports contained enough information to arrive at an explanation, while others, according to Captain Edward Ruppelt (who later headed the Air Force UFO project under Project Blue Book), "were convinced that UFOs existed and that only some unknown race with a highly developed state of technology could build such vehicles" (Ruppelt [1956] 2005, 28).

Those holding this second view seemed to prevail in Project Sign, especially since these sightings were reported by qualified military pilots (Ziegler, 1999, 5; Ruppelt, [1956] 2005, 57–58). Hence, Sign's "unofficial 'Estimate of the Situation' produced at the end of that year and submitted to Chief of Staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, indicated that the most reasonable hypothesis about the objects being sighted was that they were extraterrestrial in origin" (Denzler, 2001, 12; Ruppelt, [1956] 2005, 41). Upon receiving the report, Vandenberg immediately rejected it, criticizing it for lack of evidence and disagreeing with the assumption that military pilots were qualified as accurate observers and experts of unusual aerial phenomena (Lamb, 2001, 145).[80]

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[80] In tracing what happened to the unofficial report, David Lamb (2001, 145) finds that the report was classified as "Restricted – not Top Secret" and was ordered to be destroyed – although a few clandestine copies are said to exist.

The "Estimate" was therefore never made official, and the intent was that it would be forgotten. Sign staff then produced another report that was officially approved, and which suggested various possibilities for the unexplained reports. Its conclusion was that:

> Future activity on this project should be carried on at the minimum level necessary to record, summarize and evaluate the data received on future reports and to complete the specialized investigations now in progress. When and if a sufficient number of incidents are solved to indicate that the sightings do not represent a threat to the security of the nation, the assignment of special project O status to the activity could be terminated. (cited in Lamb, 2001, 145)

It did not discount the extraterrestrial hypothesis, but it did state that the "possible existence of space ships from another planet … have been largely conjecture," and with this, Project Sign seemed to shift its inquiry from an emphasis on the possibility of extraterrestrial activity to a security inquiry in the context of Cold War military activity (Ziegler, 1999, 6; Lamb, 2001, 145).

Following the report, Project Sign continued to investigate flying saucer sightings until 11 February 1949, but in 1950 it was reorganized and given a new title, Project Grudge, which was undertaken by mostly new staff (Lamb, 2001, 145). Under Grudge, the attitudes shifted, and proponents of the ET hypothesis became the overwhelming minority. They concluded that all flying saucer sightings could be explained simply as misidentifications, hallucinations, and hoaxes, citing "balloons, conventional aircraft, planets, meteors, optical illusions, solar reflections, or even 'large hailstones'" as some possible misidentified flying objects (Haines, 1999, 27). It also emphasized that these objects posed absolutely no threat to US airspace.

The intentions of Grudge seemed to be directed at alleviating public anxiety over the flying saucers, and the project has since been compared to a public relations campaign designed to

persuade the public that the flying saucer sightings were of nothing extraordinary (Ibid.). The report also indicated that the Air Force would no longer be studying them, and the project went on hiatus, in part because the Air Force seemed aware that their official interest encouraged people to believe in flying saucers and ETs (Ibid.). However, with increased Cold War tensions, the Korean War, and continued sightings — including the 1951 simultaneous radar and visual sightings of flying saucers tailing military jets over Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey — there were new concerns over the unidentified flying objects sighted in US air space (27–28).

These concerns prompted the revamping of the UFO project under Captain Edward J. Ruppelt, and Project Grudge gave way to Project Blue Book, which became the major Air Force effort to study UFO phenomena throughout the 1950s and 1960s (28; Lamb, 2001, 146; Denzler. 2001, 13). Ruppelt named J. Allen Hynek, an Ohio State University astronomer, as his chief consultant,[81] and Major Dewey Fournet was assigned to work with Ruppelt as the Pentagon's liaison officer. The project was headquartered at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

Under Ruppelt's leadership, the collection and investigation of sightings reports became more systematic (Denzler, 2001, 13). Ruppelt seemed to take the UFO problem seriously and some of his writings suggested that he was undecided over the extraterrestrial nature of some of these UFO cases, especially the undetermined, residual cases featuring those with professional backgrounds whom he deemed to be competent, credible observers (Ruppelt, [1956] 2005, 41; Ziegler, 1999, 7). While much of the UFO testimony is based on witness statements, and eyewitness testimony surely can be problematic and is often of poor quality (there can be incentives to lie, observers may lack knowledge about what they have sighted, and even experts are subject to human error),

[81] Hynek became an important figure for ufology, especially because of his scientific background and credentials. He began as a skeptic but later entertained the idea that there was more to UFO phenomena than the government was acknowledging, and he became quite vocal against the US military for its completely negative and unyielding closed-mindedness around UFO phenomena.

Ruppelt felt it would be inappropriate to dismiss these cases outright, especially since some UFO sightings have been witnessed by thousands of people at a time, and by many expert witnesses, such as military pilots, astronauts, astronomers, and air traffic controllers.

Ruppelt could be best described as an open-minded skeptic who did not offer strict conclusions for what UFOs might be, and instead treated each case impartially and even-handedly. Under Ruppelt's guidance Blue Book personnel were not afraid to label a case as "unsolved" or "unexplainable" if they were unable to find a conventional explanation for it (Denzler, 2001, 13–14). Certainly, Ruppelt and his team found that many sightings could be attributed to terrestrial phenomena: they may be explained by rare atmospheric phenomena, human misrecognition/ error, secret government technologies, instrument malfunction, and hoaxes; but a significant number of cases could not be explained so easily. What is more, many of these unexplained cases left ground traces and physical traces on film, others showed up on radar, and still others caused electromagnetic interference with aircraft and motor vehicles (Wendt and Duvall, 2008, 614). As the original Blue Book staff acknowledged, there was certainly something interesting about these sightings that made them worthy of investigation, and many ufologists now describe the years that Ruppelt presided over Blue Book as a kind of "golden age" for the investigation of UFO reports, as it was during his administration that unidentified aerial phenomena sightings were treated seriously and objectively.

It was also around this time that new terminology was implemented to describe the strange objects that were observed in US airspace. The term "flying saucer" was abandoned by the military because it carried with it too much baggage and had been long conflated with extraterrestrial flying machines. It was replaced by the acronym "UFO" — or "unidentified flying object" — which was meant to offer a more neutral and objective way to describe unusual and unidentifiable aerial

phenomena, including terrestrial ones, as well as, possibly, extraterrestrial ones. This less evocative term marked a shift toward a scientific and technical study of anomalous sightings; it did not imply any speculations regarding their origins and it was simply meant to describe objects for which the observer had no conventional explanation.

At the same time as Project Blue Book, the CIA also developed an interest in UFOs as a potential problem of national security, especially during the wave of sightings in Washington, D.C. in 1952. However, these concerns over national security did not stem from fears of a possible extraterrestrial assault, but instead came from worries that the sightings might provoke a hysterical outbreak by the public — much like the extreme panic supposedly inspired by Welles's radio broadcast. Alarmed by the striking number of UFO sightings, the administration of President Harry S. Truman wanted to allay public concerns, so it convened the Robertson Panel in 1953 under H.P. Robertson, a California Institute of Technology physicist with experience in CIA intelligence (Haines, 1999, 30). The panel, composed mostly of scientists, studied twenty-three UFO sighting cases over a brief twelve-hour period and concluded that UFOs offered no interesting scientific data; it found that the only threats to the US regarding these sightings were, firstly, the reports that clogged communications facilities, and secondly, the credulity of the public, which could be mobilized to create a climate of fear by an enemy nation before launching a real attack (Denzler, 2001, 13–14).

The haste of this project and its resulting conclusions suggested that UFO phenomena were not taken seriously as anything other than misinformed but popular ideas that needed to be dismissed. Adding to these speculations, the committee also suggested an active public education campaign to debunk UFO sightings and it recommended covert surveillance of civilian UFO

groups (14). Brenda Denzler traces the implementation of these recommendations through a series of special military regulations:

> Joint-Army-Navy-Air Force Publication 146 (JANAP 146) of December 1953 made reporting any UFO sighting to the public a crime under the Espionage Act, with fines of up to ten thousand dollars and imprisonment of from one to ten years. This act was considered binding on all who knew of its existence, including commercial airline pilots. A 1954 revision of Air Force Regulation 200–2 (AFR 200–2) made all sightings reports submitted to the Air Force classified material and prohibited the release of any information about UFO sightings *unless* the sighting was able to be positively identified. In February 1958 a revision of AFR 200–2 allowed the military to give the FBI the names of people who were illegally or deceptively bringing the subject [of UFOs] to public attention. (Ibid.)

The panel's full agenda was not fully declassified until the 1970s, which later fed into suspicions that a government conspiracy was in the works, and as I will show in Chapter Five, these suspicions coincided perfectly with the resuscitation of interest in the Roswell Incident.

After the Robertson Panel issued its conclusions, Ruppelt requested reassignment from the project and retired from the Air Force not long afterwards.[82] This left Blue Book without its

[82] After leaving the military, Ruppelt took on a civilian engineering job, during which time he wrote *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (1956), which described his time as the Air Force's chief UFO investigator. In the original version of his book, Ruppelt concluded that while most UFOs can be accounted for in terms of known causes, there are still a significant number that have unknown origins, which kept open the possibility that they could be extraterrestrial in nature. However, in the 1960s edition of the book Ruppelt added three more chapters where he flatly concludes that the ET hypothesis is a myth. Some ufologists have speculated that the Air Force pressured Ruppelt to add these new chapters, while others have suggested that Ruppelt's investigation of stories of extraterrestrial contact soured him on the possibility that UFOs could be the result of alien intelligences. Either way, with the publication of the later addition, Ruppelt became much more vocal about his disenchantment with ufology, which he felt imposed an answer to UFO sightings without adequate evidence. "Many inquiries come from saucer screwballs," he writes, "and these people are like a hypochondriac at the doctor's; nothing will make them believe the diagnosis unless it is what they came to hear. And there are plenty of screwballs" (Ruppelt, [1956] 2005, 246).

impartial leader, and while investigators continued to study UFO phenomena in the years following the Robertson Panel, the project was subjected to serious underfunding and understaffing. With such limited resources, the team was able to devote time only to the most significant reports, and with 12 618 sightings reported to Blue Book from 1947 to 1969, it became challenging to systematically analyze and study each individual case ("Project BLUE BOOK — Unidentified Flying Objects." *The US National Archives and Record Administration*, 15 August 2016).

For most of the cases then, the team needed to find a quick explanation to then file them away, which originally produced "an unacceptably high percentage of 'unknowns'" (Denzler, 2001, 14). As I mentioned above, during Ruppelt's control of the project it was considered appropriate to file a case away as "unknown" if no clear explanation emerged for it, but after he left, the new leadership feared that the significant number of unknown cases might give greater credence to the ET hypothesis. Hence a new method was produced to categorize these sightings, which allowed investigators to consider as "knowns" those sightings that *might* have been of conventional objects, but that had yet to be identified. This reduced the number of unknowns from twenty-seven percent to roughly ten percent (Ibid.). It was at this time that Project Blue Book changed its position and began debunking all UFO sightings. In accordance with the recommendations of the Robertson Panel, it seemed that Blue Book was to become a "public relations effort to convince the American people that UFOs were explainable in prosaic terms" (Ziegler, 1999, 11).

By the 1960s it appeared that the Air Force wanted to completely duck out of its UFO investigations, especially after the Robertson Panel had concluded that UFOs posed no threat to the nation and after Blue Book (upon shifting gears) repeated these same conclusions. In February 1966 then, a secret ad hoc committee convened to review Project Blue Book. It brought forth the

suggestion that the Air Force should contract universities to conduct investigations and make recommendations about the UFO sightings. This project was then tasked to the University of Colorado, under the leadership of Edward U. Condon, and the findings were compiled into the *Final Report of the Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects,* which became popularly known in the ufological community simply as the "Condon Report." The Condon Report concluded that there was no "direct evidence" that UFOs were extraterrestrial, and it found that while not all UFO sightings can yet be explained, even those that currently are not explained could likely be attributed to misidentifications of natural phenomena, optical illusions, psychological delusions, or hoaxes (Denzler, 2001, 16; Condon and Gillmor, [1968] 2017, 35; 9–71).

The report was largely meant to persuade the public that UFOs were not extraordinary; it concluded that there was nothing anomalous about UFOs and that closing Project Blue Book would be no loss to science or to national security; therefore, Project Blue Book was dismantled in December 1969 (Denzler, 2001, 16). The final conclusions left by Project Blue Book ultimately mirrored those of the Condon Report:

1) No UFO reported, investigated and evaluated by the Air Force has ever given any indication of threat to our national security;
2) There has been no evidence submitted to or discovered by the Air Force that sightings categorized as "unidentified" represent technological developments or principles beyond the range of present-day scientific knowledge; and
3) There has been no evidence indicating that sightings categorized as unidentified are extraterrestrial vehicles. ("Project BLUE BOOK — Unidentified Flying Objects," 15 August 2016)

Still, some 701 cases remained "unidentified" despite the more restrictive classification system implemented in the later years of Blue Book; but the official position uniformly proposed that *none* of these sightings were any indication of a possible extraterrestrial presence on Earth. The report issued by Condon was a watershed moment in the history of UFO research; the Air Force dropped its investigations into UFOs and divested themselves of any serious study of the claims of alien visitation. Scholars in the natural sciences followed suit — a point I will address more carefully below — and the taboo against UFO and ET research intensified immensely; any academic scientist who took interest in these phenomena faced being ostracized from the scientific establishment.[83]

Despite its hands-off approach following Blue Book, by taking an active interest and role in researching UFOs in the 1950s and 1960s, the government seemed to validate and institutionalize the possibility that UFOs could be of extraterrestrial origin, and as Charles Ziegler (1999, 2–3) points out, this involvement led to an unintended consequence that "created much of the evidence adduced by proponents of the extraterrestrial hypothesis to support their claim that some UFOs are spacecraft from a far world." Through its decades-long investigations into UFO phenomena, the government released several inconsistent responses about the nature of UFOs, which created openings to suggest that some of these unidentified objects are really of extraterrestrial origin, and the activities of the government regarding UFO phenomena have spurred this sense of mistrust and have led many to ask: if there was really nothing there, then why was the government so eager to study it and later suppress it? While the explanation could simply be a prosaic one,[84] the very

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[83] The notable exception to this is the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence project, also known as SETI, which has become the most popular and extensive example of the search for intelligent alien life in the universe, and which continues to search radio waves for signals from intelligent otherworldly beings.

[84] These explanations range from the idea that the government really did want to quell fears about UFOs and ETs because they were worried about public panics and believed these ideas were destructive and dangerous, to the notion that the government wanted to give the impression that strange aircraft occupied American skies, perhaps to cover their own activities or to convince the Soviet Union that the American government possessed advanced flight

idea that the government seemed invested in dismissing these phenomena has given way to creative stories about the nature of secrecy in the United States.

Some of the most damning evidence against the US government came from its own personnel, who were tasked with secretly investigating UFOs. For instance, after the termination of Blue Book, “in a guarded manner that apparently circumvented security regulations,” Ruppelt publicly revealed the existence of the Twining memo, which stated that UFOs are “real”; he disclosed the initial conclusions of Project Sign, which proposed that some UFOs were interplanetary; and he shared the recommendations of the Robertson Report, which explicitly indicated that public ideas about UFOs need to be suppressed (Ziegler, 1999, 11–12; Ruppelt, [1965] 2005, 16, 27–29; 57–59; 63–64). Ruppelt stopped short of endorsing the ET hypothesis, and would later reject it publicly, but his revelations suggested a continued policy of secrecy intended to shadow the government’s activities in its investigations into UFOs (Ziegler, 1999, 1112).

The revelations about the contradictory findings of Sign and Grudge have since been interpreted by many as an attempted cover-up undertaken by the US government to dismiss ideas about extraterrestrials visiting Earth, and, while several documents from these various projects have become declassified, many are still filled with redactions, which has only provided further room for some to speculate about the nature of UFOs and the government’s awareness of them. Further, the agenda of the Robertson Panel, which was set up solely to discredit ideas about ETs, suggested that the government was actively trying to suppress its knowledge of UFOs by implementing a debunking campaign to diminish these ideas in the wider public. Whether this initiative was executed merely to allay public anxieties (as official sources explained) or was part of a more sinister cover-up (as many ufologists have suggested) is still up for debate, but the government’s

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technologies. Further, the conflicting and contradictory messages from the government could simply be the result of human errors and bureaucratic practices leading to the perceived secrecy of the redacted documents.

attempt to suppress UFO reports has created space to speculate that it has more knowledge about UFO phenomena than it is letting on.

It also helped foster a link between the UFO phenomena and the idea that some of these sightings may be extraterrestrial in nature. While the official discourse was meant to terminate these beliefs before they gained momentum, this goal ultimately failed, and it seems as though the American government itself created the fodder from which the ET hypothesis has ignited; it certainly did not take long for the term "UFO" to become synonymous with extraterrestrial spacecraft (Oxford English Dictionary, "UFO").[85] Despite the fact that the *U* in UFO stood for *unidentified* and the term was meant to neutrally describe anomalous aerial phenomena, the connection between aliens and UFOs became intimately linked in the popular imagination, in large part because these government-conducted investigations unintentionally reinforced the association between UFOs and aliens by repeatedly discussing unidentified flying objects in relation to extraterrestrial vehicles. The association between UFOs and extraterrestrials has now become so entangled that it seems as though UFO phenomena can no longer be separated from this idea that some of them may be the products of civilizations beyond Earth, and the ET hypothesis has become a prevalent belief in American society: based on polls taken from the 1980s up until the present, "slightly over 50 percent of adult Americans avowedly believe[d] that some UFOs are spacecraft from an extraterrestrial civilization" (Ziegler, 1999, 2). Certainly, these phenomena are not simply marginalized but are deeply entrenched in the ideological fabric of the United States.

Grassroots Initiatives and the Foundations of Ufology

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[85] Today, many ufologists have abandoned the term "UFO" in favour of the term "Unidentified Aerial Phenomena" (UAP), as it carries less cultural baggage than the now stigmatized term "UFO." Since "UFO" has been used to describe a whole gamut of strange phenomena since the term was introduced and has become part of the popular vernacular, these ufologists find that "UAP" offers a more neutral and scientific-sounding expression to connote unidentified objects sighted in airspace. (At the same time, these ufologists frequently make the connection between UAP and extraterrestrials, and so UAP have similarly become associated with extraterrestrial vehicles). Still, I continue to use the better-known term "UFO" throughout this project.

With such growing public interest in UFOs and ETs, grassroots organizations were founded by civilian researchers to investigate UFO sightings as a serious hobby. These groups first operated alongside the government's inquiries into UFO phenomena, but once the Air Force and CIA ceased their study of UFOs, these independent organizations took over the investigation.[86] Since the government's official stance after the Condon Report was to simply dismiss speculations that UFOs could be operated by ET intelligences, these civilian groups gained considerable sway in shaping public discourses around UFO and ET phenomena. Many American citizens found the government's official explanations to be unsatisfactory, which meant that these organizations had a space to build their own credibility, especially since they were willing to tackle what the government was seemingly unwilling to look at.

These grassroots organizations were initially formed by a loose network of independent researchers with an interest in UFO sightings, and over time they developed into formalized organizations dedicated to the study of UFOs. Some of these earlier organizations embraced the colourful term "flying saucer" to describe their area of study, such as the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB) which, as we shall see in my next chapter, promoted rather fanciful ideas about extraterrestrial visitations, as well as the Saucer and Unexplained Celestial Events Research Society (SAUCERS), which was founded in the early 1950s and endorsed the idea that flying saucers were likely interplanetary. As time went on, however, a more extensive and sophisticated

[86] While the government ceased its study of UFOs for quite some time following Blue Book, it eventually resumed its investigations with the Advanced Aviation Threat Identification Program, which was implemented under the US Defence Intelligence Agency, an external intelligence service of the US federal government. The program began in 2007 with funding of over $22 million over five years, and it ended in 2012. It was not made public until 16 December 2017, at which time the program manager, Luis Elizondo, stated to the press that he believed there was "very compelling evidence we may not be alone." It seems that UFO phenomena continues to attract official interest in secret, and the revelations made by some official personnel working on these projects fuels ideas that UFOs may be the result of ET intelligences.

set of organizations took over the UFO research scene and presented themselves as scientific centres and research institutes that sought to mirror the rigour of the scientific establishment.

Some of the more notable of these organizations include the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), which was founded in January 1952 by Jim and Coral Lorenzen, and which served as a clearinghouse for the reports that did not make it into the Blue Book files; as well as the Ground Saucer Watch (GSW), which was founded in 1957, and which had a membership of scientists, engineers, professionals, and educated laypersons interested in providing an accessible outlet for persons wishing to relay their UFO experiences without fear of ridicule. Notably, in the 1970s the GSW filed under the Freedom of Information Act for CIA documents related to UFOs, and it succeeded in having almost nine hundred pages of CIA UFO-related documents released; these documents showed that the government was not entirely forthcoming about its involvement in studying UFOs when it revealed some of the secret projects outlined above. But before the GSW took centre stage in petitioning the government to release its findings on UFOs to the public, the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), founded by retired marine Major Donald Keyhoe, was the leading voice against the government's handling of UFO phenomena.

Keyhoe was an American Marine Corps naval aviator who became well known in the 1950s as a UFO researcher, and he was the first to suggest that the government was keeping its UFO files a secret. After the US released contradictory information about the saucers, Keyhoe became convinced that the US government was trying to suppress the truth about the reality of UFOs from the public. Since he had many friends and contacts in the military and Pentagon, Keyhoe had access to insider information that many other UFO investigators lacked, and from his investigations into these phenomena, he became convinced that the flying saucers were real.

This became the title of his January 1950 article, “The Flying Saucers Are Real,” which first appeared in *True* magazine. As Edward Ruppelt ([1956] 2005, 65) acknowledges, “It is rumored among magazine publishers that Don Keyhoe’s article in *True* was one of the most widely read and widely discussed magazine articles in history,” and it consequently brought the idea of UFOs to a wide audience. Soon after, he expanded his article into a book of the same name, which sold over half a million copies in paperback during its first run. In this text, Keyhoe ([1950] 2004) argues that the Air Force knew that flying saucers were extraterrestrial but downplayed these findings to avoid public panic. He also suggests that aliens are not hostile and have been watching over Earth for some time but had increased their presence in recent years to monitor human beings after the invention of the atomic bomb, which explained the significant increase of sightings following WWII. He wrote several more books about the subject during his life and founded NICAP to bring these issues to a broader public. In ufological circles he is often described as the very first ufologist and he has been praised for his application of serious scientific thinking to UFO phenomena.

Part of the aim of NICAP was to publicly petition the government to release its files, and Keyhoe’s position as a military veteran leant credibility to the organization. Keyhoe also recruited scientific, military, and political leaders for its board of directors, which gave NICAP the legitimacy that other flying saucer clubs lacked. In the 1950s, NICAP was one of the most active voices for pressing the government to be accountable to the public about its awareness of UFOs, and it petitioned Congress and the Air Force to give a public accounting of its UFO data.

Of course, not everyone agreed with Keyhoe’s stance and tactics. Captain Edward Ruppelt, for instance, seemed to hold a dim view of Keyhoe and his organization. In his book documenting his time with Project Blue Book, Ruppelt ([1956] 2005) explains that while Keyhoe may have had

many of his facts straight, his interpretations of these facts were entirely off base. Ruppelt accused Keyhoe of offering his own "mind reading" of what Ruppelt and his officers were thinking as they undertook the project, and he criticized Keyhoe for offering a sensationalized reading of the data to fit within his own theory of what was going on. Despite these accusations against Keyhoe, NICAP remained quite successful for nearly two decades, and was one of the biggest thorns in the Air Force's side throughout this period. By the end of the 1960s, however, NICAP's membership plummeted and Keyhoe was blamed for the organization's decline. By 1969, amidst growing financial struggles, Keyhoe was forced to retire, and while the organization lasted for another ten years, its membership never fully recuperated and it was formally disbanded by 1980.

Other organizations picked up the slack after NICAP's decline. For instance, the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS), a privately funded UFO research group founded in the early 1970s that is still active to this day, was initiated by astronomer and former Blue Book consultant J. Allen Hynek. The Center was formed to continue the work of Blue Book, and like NICAP, it sought out scientists, academics, investigators, and civilian volunteers to dedicate their time and expertise to the study of UFO phenomena. As their mission statement indicates, "our purpose is to promote serious scientific interest in UFOs and their study, and to serve as an archive for reports, documents, and publications about the UFO phenomenon" ("Welcome to the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies." *CUFOS.* 6, June 2018). Similarly, the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON)[87] was established in 1969 and has become the largest self-described scientific UFO research institution in the world. It is designated as an American-based non-profit organization that uses civilian researchers to investigate UFO sightings both nationally and internationally, and it now has chapters in nearly every state in the US and in countries all over the world.

[87] It was originally called the Midwest UFO Network, but changed its name as it expanded its membership across the country.

These grassroots and highly public initiatives led to the establishment of ufology, which, as I defined in my introduction, is a citizen-led movement whose premise asserts that UFOs are real, likely of extraterrestrial origin, and are routinely visiting Earth (Cross, 2004, 4).[88] I discuss the movement of ufology more thoroughly in my sixth chapter, including a review of its present status in the United States and an examination of the rhetorical strategies used by ufologists. For now, I wish to consider how the refusal of the government (and by association, the scientific establishment) to publicly address UFO sightings led to the institutionalization of ufology, which is as much a critique of official governmental and scientific institutions as it is about aliens and UFOs.

The Politicization of Ufology

At present, ufological research groups across the United States seem to be the only prevailing organizations dedicated to the public study of UFOs and ETs. By the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, these "local and national UFO organizations were directly receiving UFO reports from witnesses … and teams of investigators were being sent out to conduct fieldwork research at UFO and alien encounter sites" (Eghigian, 2017, 617); it was often left solely up to these organizations to investigate potential UFO sightings. Even today, the US National Archives website directs witnesses of UFOs to these independent organizations, as opposed to documenting the reports themselves: "A person calling the base to report a UFO is advised to contact a private or professional organization" ("Project BLUE BOOK — Unidentified Flying Objects," 15 August 2016).

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[88] This premise is not always officially endorsed by these organizations, and some of them maintain a more modest position that UFOs are real and are worthy of serious study, but they make no conclusive claims that these objects are extraterrestrial in nature. While not all of these organizations explicitly endorse the ET hypothesis, this position is often made implicitly, and ufology as a whole has come to be linked to the assertion that some UFOs are extraterrestrial.

By directing inquiries about unidentified flying object sightings (and other reports of extraterrestrial contact) to independent UFO groups, the government has afforded these ufological organizations significant control over the messages being disseminated about the possibility of alien activities on Earth, and ufology has consequently become a public mechanism for advocates of the ET hypothesis to push this idea on the American public. One of their predominant strategies to promote this claim has been to carefully cultivate their own support networks and audiences to make their pursuit seem credible and convincing. The various UFO organizations that I describe above encourage vigorous debate regarding the existence of UFOs and their possible extraterrestrial origins, and these organizations tend to mimic traditional knowledge-producing institutions to enhance their legitimacy.

For instance, many of these organizations have created their own internal peer-reviewed journals, publishing houses, films, magazines, online television networks, and Internet forums to disseminate their theories; they have also established their own awards, certifications, and credentials for UFO investigators to provide legitimacy to their endeavours; and they have hosted annual symposia, academically-styled conferences, interest group meetings, public lectures, festivals, exhibitions, and even mock congressional hearings to expand their reach and to gain political clout. Further, some of these organizations have created their own hotlines and have assembled rapid-response teams to immediately follow up after a sighting has been reported.

By mirroring conventional epistemic institutions, such as academia and the scientific establishment, proponents of ufology seek to present it as just another academic field of study that employs an interdisciplinary set of techniques to the study of UFOs and other anomalous phenomena. Ufology is frequently described by its proponents as a field of inquiry that draws heavily from the natural sciences, especially biology, physics, and astronomy, as well as from the

social sciences and humanities, chiefly psychology, theology, anthropology, and politics. However, ufology faces significant barriers in being considered legitimate, and the conventional institutions that it seeks to mirror contend that ufology does not adequately meet their standards for suitable scholarly inquiry.

It is important to underscore that the organizations dedicated to the study of ufology are civilian-based; they receive no support from the state or from other official institutions and they are comprised of an eclectic amalgamation of individuals from various backgrounds. For instance, there are some specialists with scholarly credentials who have afforded an air of legitimacy to the field,[89] but most practitioners are amateur researchers who engage with ufology as an avocation, and only a select few ufologists are able to practice ufology as a full-time profession. Hence the official position endorsed by traditional knowledge-producing authorities is that ufologists are mostly untrained amateurs who impersonate scientists and other academics to push their agenda on the wider public.

Ufology is therefore frequently labelled a pseudoscience and it is quite often dismissed as an amateurish pursuit mostly undertaken by unqualified individuals who are said to engage in quasi-scientific research to present their alternative truth claims. I address why and how ufology is frequently characterized as a pseudoscience in a moment, and I will also consider the potential limitations of this labelling, but for now I wish to emphasize that ufology, despite its popularity, remains heavily stigmatized and is excluded by official bodies as a possible source of knowledge

[89] In fact, MUFON's journals list the names and specialities of professional member-subscribers who have advanced degrees "from such fields as medical anthropology, physical chemistry, library science, counselling psychology, education, political science, law, medicine, psychology, and various subfields of engineering" (Denzler, 2001, 18). As Denzler notes, "it is safe to say that many of these volunteers were never actually called upon by MUFON. Nevertheless, their very presence in the organization and their willingness to offer their expertise in UFO-related matters was an indication of the level of interest in UFOs among American professionals" (Ibid.).

production. At the same time, it is from this stigmatization that ufology has become empowered as a source of critique against these official sources.

While "ufology" is frequently used by ufologists as an objective term denoting a field of study, it is important to point out that it is not a neutral body of knowledge; its exclusion from official culture has led to its marginalization — and hence politicization — a point made by Jodi Dean (1998, 6) when she writes that "ufology is political because it is stigmatized." She goes on to note how the claims of witnessing a UFO or being abducted by aliens are political acts because they contest the "status quo" and they install "the claimant at the margins of the social" (Ibid.). By falling outside of government, university, and corporate support structures and being dismissed by these conventional institutions as a valid field of inquiry, ufology takes on a highly political character.

Rather than being an objective field of study then, ufology is politicized; as such, it is perhaps more akin to a community or a movement with its own preconceived notions and internal motivations. By a community, I am referring to a group of individuals bound together primarily by their common interest in UFOs, extraterrestrials, and related topics, which goes beyond mere attention; these individuals spend a significant amount of their time, money, and energy on attending or participating in UFO conferences (both local and international), and they often subscribe and contribute to UFO journals and newsletters. Some have also taken courses and received training from UFO organizations to become certified as civilian researchers who are able to assist in the investigation of UFO and ET phenomena. Communities are about belonging and are based on a sense of learning from and supporting other members, and as a community, ufology allows individuals to organize themselves around their beliefs and assemble to be among those who share their specific interests and needs.

Ufology, therefore, brings those with a common interest in UFO and ET phenomena into a safe space where they can discuss their ideas with other like-minded individuals, but it is not simply about the mutual exchange of information within the community itself. Ufologists also press for change and attempt to mobilize others to believe and support their claims, and when this occurs, ufology becomes more like a movement. A movement is directed at mobilizing others into taking action and creating social change around a particular cause, and in the case of ufology, ufologists engage in highly public debates in an effort to remove the stigma around the study of UFOs and extraterrestrials and to press the wider public to recognize it as a valid field of inquiry.

Here I find Michael Warner's (2002) theorization of the public sphere a useful one for considering the sway of ufology in contemporary American society. [90] Warner envisions the public sphere as being formed not by an all-encompassing, single public, or "*the* public" as "a kind of social totality" (49); instead he notes that there are multiple publics. "*A* public," he argues, is partial, text-based and "organized by nothing other than discourse itself" (50). It exists solely "by virtue of being addressed" and it is "self-creating and self-organizing … through discourse rather than through an external framework" (50–52). Publics, he argues, are used to navigate the

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[90] Michael Warner's (2002) work on publics fits into a broader scholarly discussion of the public sphere, which is largely credited to have begun with Jurgen Habermas's *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* ([1989] 1991), first published in German in 1962 and later translated into English. In this text, Habermas describes the public sphere as an imaginary community that does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space (176). Habermas theorizes that the bourgeois public sphere came into being in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was created by the exchange of rational discourse taking place inside coffee houses and clubs, and in the newly emerging print media, such as newspapers and journals (32–36). It is a discursive space that serves to mediate between the state and the private sphere, and its purpose is to build consensus and to seek a common rationality through deliberation and mutual understanding. Further, it is a space for discussing matters of common concern, and it is a site in which public opinion is not only formed but often mobilized into political action. According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere is formed by a sovereign, reasonable public which is nourished by the critical reporting of the press, and he argues that it is essential to a participatory democracy. However, Habermas notes that the bourgeois public sphere began to disintegrate with the commercialization of the nineteenth-century press, the mounting control of the party apparatus by private interests, as well as the decrease in homogeneity that came as a result of an expanding education system and the inclusion of working classes and other groups in its fold; he notes, therefore, a shift from a "culture-debating" to a "culture-consuming" society (159–162; 171; 189).

contemporary world and they are achieved by rhetorically hailing a group of strangers and uniting them in a certain way. With this definition, Warner hints at a sense of emotionality involved in the formation of a public, which he argues is constituted solely by the acts of being addressed and paying attention, and nothing else. A public therefore has a performative and rhetorical dimension to it as it is formed solely by this sustained attention to texts, and he emphasizes that a public requires an active uptake and must "continually predicate renewed attention" or else it will cease to exist (61).

This definition draws attention to the ways in which ufologists have succeeded in uniting a public together through their strategic use of media and the transmission of their ideas through a plethora of different channels. The public that surrounds ufology is not as actively involved as those who compose the core of the ufological community, but it is formed by an extensive and rather significant — though more peripheral — group of individuals who are united together by their sustained attention to ufological texts. The fact that many ufological books have made their way onto bestseller's lists, or that UFO-themed television programs have achieved high ratings, or that ufologists' blogs have become popular links for individuals to peruse online, suggests that a wider public has formed around ufology and is composed of members with a sustained interest in the debates presented by ufologists.

Ufologists are therefore deeply engaged in a political struggle to obtain a position of influence in the public sphere, and through the creation of these various organizations, websites, presses, publications, and other sources with which to disseminate ufological ideas, ufologists have fashioned their own public — one that they have strict control over. In vying for public legitimacy and seeking access to a wider public, ufologists do not need to appear directly in the dominant public sphere from which they are excluded, but instead they have established their own public

through the continued circulation of their texts. The vast content of ufological literature about aliens available in print and online, in contrast to the scarcity of publications released by official bodies, has created an imbalance in the type of information and ideas shared about UFOs and ETs. Since official sources pay little attention to ufology and frequently dismiss its claims outright, ufologists have gained the advantage of being considered authorities for speaking out about UFOs and extraterrestrials, largely because they are one of the few communities that give the subject any sustained attention.

The Professionalization of Science and the Popularization of Ufology

The public fashioned around ufology is today quite vast. Ufology has gained significant popularity during the last half of the twentieth century and it now claims millions of devotees worldwide, and at least 350 organizations dedicated to UFO research operate across the United States (Cross, 2004, 4). Importantly, ufology is both marginalized *and* popular, and its widespread attraction in the United States signals that there is something to these stigmatized claims that many Americans find appealing, even though they are heavily criticized by official institutions. Its appeal, I suggest, is in part owing to the way in which ufology conveys a sense of open and participatory involvement as opposed to the closed and exclusionary operations of the government, the scientific establishment, and academia more broadly, and this has allowed ufology to serve as a rebuttal to these official sources.

From its beginnings, ufology has been the domain of civilian researchers who have taken up the pursuit of studying UFOs and other anomalous phenomena. During the early years of ufology, the boundaries separating these nonprofessional UFO investigators from professional scientists were rather lax, and laypersons, if they were serious enough in their study, could be likened to scientists; scientific training was not deemed necessary for one to be able to make contributions to

knowledge so long as the layperson in question exemplified a thoughtful and objective attitude toward these phenomena being studied. Further, in the early stages of ufology, both the professional scientific community and the amateur UFO community shared an interest and enthusiasm regarding the study of unidentified aerial phenomena. As Edward Ruppelt ([1956] 2005, 114) contends, when he first began as the director of Blue Book "UFOs were being freely and seriously discussed in scientific circles." While Denzler (2001, 72) notes that this does not mean that they were being funded and developed into formalized research, it does indicate that an open attitude prevailed in the early stages of ufology, where scientists were willing to consider the topic of UFOs as a matter of serious study.

However, as science gained in prestige after World War II by delivering "victory-bringing atomic bombs, radar, penicillin, and many other less prominent advances," the boundaries between professional science and amateur endeavours began to harden, and by the 1950s, "influential social institutions had become stakeholders in what counts as proper science" (Bauer, 2014, 97–98). Government support for scientific research and education expanded enormously over this period, and science became an integral part of the Establishment; it was at this point that science acquired constraints on what topics could be studied seriously and what constituted appropriate standards to carry out this study.

Ufology emerged amidst this growing politicization, professionalization, and specialization of science. At this time "graduate training, specialized journals, and membership in exclusive organizations all helped to establish a substratum of agreed-on practices, facts, and concepts that most scientists learned to share," and science became viewed as an abstract set of principles that increasingly required specialized training and tools to understand (Thurs and Numbers, 2013, 131). Expertise could only be acquired through education undertaken at appropriate institutions, and

degrees or certifications offered by the modern research university were needed to establish oneself as a legitimate scientific authority. Moreover, special equipment, such as microscopes and telescopes, became necessary to make appropriate observations about the natural world, since our notoriously unreliable human senses alone were seen as insufficient in making objective declarations about reality. Science therefore became a privileged domain of epistemic authority invested with the right and ability to establish what is true and what is false, what is real and what is fake: “if ‘science’ says so, we are more often than not inclined to believe it or act on it — and prefer it over claims lacking this epistemic seal of approval” (Gieryn, 1999, 1).

Brenda Denzler (2001, 71) notes that

> the increasing abstractness of scientific discourse … tended to remove it from the intellectual grasp of the average person. … Although science became increasingly successful on its own terms, it became less successful at appealing to the interests (and thus the goodwill) of the general population who were expected — nay, needed — to help foot the bill.

Denzler continues by describing how the public efforts to promote scientific ideas to the wider public tended to fall back on journalists and “scientific educators with minimal (or no) scientific credentials,” especially since there were few or no professional rewards for scientists to popularize this knowledge themselves. Denzler argues that the consequence was a “fracturing [of] the ‘cultural symbolism’ of science into mere bits of trivia disconnected from any substantive relationship to the practice and findings of science” (Ibid.).[91]

These hierarchies of expertise and knowledge resulted in a gap between the scientific community and the broader public, and this professionalization of science created “stringent

[91] At this time, science found allies in the media, politics, and skeptic organizations, which champion and promote science as the epistemic authority of the modern world above other claims to knowledge.

boundaries around the scientific, including distinctions between scientists and laypeople and between legitimate scientific knowledge and scientific error and misunderstanding" (Thurs and Numbers, 2013, 131). It was during this time that ufology gained in popularity because it promised an open and participatory engagement with science, and it became one of the few "scientific" pursuits that the lay public could access directly. It was also at this time that the scientific establishment began to impose a rather rigid boundary between itself and this largely citizen-led movement of ufology, and scientists echoed the government's stance that UFO phenomena were simply popular but misinformed ideas that needed to be rejected.

In doing so, the scientific establishment sought to frame ufology as a pseudoscience — a debased form of thinking that presumes to have scientific grounds but differs in some way from established or mainstream science. More specifically, scientists propose that a distinct set of characteristics to distinguish pseudoscience:

> Among these characteristics are (a) unfalsifiability … (b) absence of self-correction … (c) overuse of ad hoc immunizing tactics designed to protect theories from refutation … (d) absence of 'connectivity' … with other domains of knowledge (i.e., failure to build on extant scientific constructs) … (e) the placing of the burden of proof on critics rather than on the proponents of claims … (f) the use of obscurantist language (i.e., language that seems to have as its primary function to confuse rather than clarify) …, and (g) overreliance on anecdotes and testimonials at the expense of systematic evidence …. (Lilienfeld, Lohr, and Morier, 2001, 182)

As Massimo Pigliucci and Maarten Boudry point out, "a ballpark demarcation of pseudoscience — with a lot of blanks to be filled in — is not difficult to come up with," and "if a theory strays

from the epistemic desiderata of science by a sufficiently wide margin while being touted as scientific by its advocates, it is justifiably branded as pseudoscience" (2013, 2).

However, establishing the line that demarcates science from pseudoscience is not as straightforward as it might initially appear.[92] According to Henry H. Bauer, "there is no universally applicable, objective, impartial formula for distinguishing good science from bad science or real science from pseudo — the devil is always in the details" (2014, 95). As this historical account of ufology demonstrates, for instance, the field was not always considered pseudoscientific and only became defined that way over time; it seems that the definitions of science and pseudoscience are based as much on the internal consensus of the scientific community as they are on the scientific method, and the scientific establishment is invested with the authority to impose its own line of demarcation between itself and other "deviant" or "pseudo" sciences.

Thomas Gieryn (1983) calls this strategy of demarcation "boundary work," which is the effort to publicly delineate the scientific from the non- (or pseudo-) scientific. Essentially, boundary work is a methodological construction of a boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activities as non-scientific, and Gieryn uses the term to signify "a rhetorical style common in 'public science' … in which scientists describe science for the public and its political authorities, sometimes hoping to enlarge the material and symbolic resources of scientists or to defend professional autonomy" (782). For Gieryn, this idea of "boundary work" implies that these boundaries are not simply natural and given, but are instead flexible and socially constructed, and he notes that there are no completely stable criteria that absolutely distinguish science from non-science. As the historical examination of ufology demonstrates, the dividing line between ufology and science has changed

[92] Relatedly, offering a clear and straightforward definition of science is rather challenging. While most people intuitively understand that science is different from common knowledge, politics, or religion, it is tricky to explain what is meant by "science" in purely unambiguous terms. Even scientists have struggled over defining the essence of "science" and what distinguishes it from "non-science," which is why such a demarcation problem persists.

over time, and while it began as thin and permeable, it has become increasingly more pronounced and rigid.

Despite otherwise professing a strong interest in studying strange phenomena, the scientific community has shown itself to be completely unwilling to even consider the possibility that UFOs might bear some significance. Nachman Ben-Yehuda (1985, 112) makes the point that certain areas of study are often rejected by scientists because "science finds it extremely difficult to cope with those aspects of reality that can neither be controlled nor created at will under specific laboratory conditions," and ufology's exclusion can be attributed, at least in part, to its challenges to established knowledge. Since UFOs are fleeting, erratic, unpredictable, and seemingly immaterial, they pose a considerable threat to the military, the government, and the scientific establishment, which are all unable to provide answers for those unknown cases that defy conventional explanation. While there are estimates that upward of twenty-five to thirty percent of UFO sightings cases resist classic explanation, and as I outline above, some of these cases are quite compelling (they have been reported by multiple expert witnesses and have left physical traces on radar and film), the American government and the scientific establishment have presented a very public dismissal of UFOs and have constituted them as "objects only of ridicule and scorn" (Wendt and Duvall, 2008, 610; 613).[93]

Noted ufologist Ron Westrum (1977, 271) makes this point when he argues that the "debunking posture on the part of scientists" has become a natural reaction to UFO phenomena. Westrum argues that scientists are held in contemporary western society as "the representatives of truth,"

[93] Wendt and Duvall (2008) find that UFO ignorance is political: it is not a conscious effort undertaken to suppress the truth about UFOs but is instead "the work of countless undirected practices that in the modern world make the UFO 'known' as not-ET" (625). Ultimately, they propose that the anthropocentricism of modern sovereignty, constituted and organized by reference to human beings alone, simply does not allow space for these questions to be asked: "that modern decision presupposes anthropocentricism, which is threatened metaphysically by the possibility that UFOs might be ETs" (612).

but he is quick to point out that scientists certainly can make errors (Ibid.). Science is largely unable to cope with aspects of reality that cannot be controlled or created under specific laboratory conditions, but these anomalies are absolutely vital for us to gain a better understanding of our world and its relationship to the wider universe. The instant rejection of anomalies (such as UFO reports) by mainstream science, Westrum finds, is quite dangerous and he argues that this frame of thinking imposes a doctrine of scientific belief whereby a filtering system has prevented scientists from exploring these anomalies (280).

This frame of thinking became quite prevalent in the scientific establishment especially after the publication of the "Condon Report," which indicated that UFOs offered no basis for scientific inquiry. Following this authoritative report, professional scientists have risked losing their professional status if they take the subject of UFOs seriously. For instance, Charles Berlitz and William L. Moore ([1980] 1988, 12) quote an anonymous scientist who states that "it would be professionally suicidal to devote significant time to UFOs" (the interview was later published in a [1975] 1994 report by Peter A. Sturrock, 43), and other anonymous surveys have indicated that the fear of ridicule has meant that most professional scientists are completely unwilling to publicly entertain the idea that the study of UFOs might give rise to some interesting findings; at the same time, some of these surveys have also indicated that many scientists privately think the topic should be explored more thoroughly, even if they are unwilling to engage in it publicly (Denzler, 2001, 72–75).

Relatedly, many ufologists have taken issue with the evidential demands made by their critics, especially since ufologists trained in science are often denied grant requests and their contributions are rejected by peer-reviewed journals (90). For instance, despite being a professional astronomer, many of J. Allen Hynek's writings about UFOs were rejected by scientific journals, leaving him

to publish his findings in popular magazines such as *Playboy* and *Fate*. Ufologists argue that it becomes very difficult to meet the demands of scientists when they are not given adequate resources to investigate these phenomena and are simply excluded from engaging in scientific debate.

Others contend that the staunch conservativism and rigidity of science leaves little space for ufology; as one ufologist commented, “I cannot help but be skeptical of the attitude that normal science will graciously invite ufologists into the club just as soon as they clean up their scientific act” (quoted in Emmons, 1997, 191–192). Considering this, respected ufologist Jacques Vallée (1968, 19) has proclaimed that “the scientific method has *never* been applied to this problem [the study of UFOs]” and as Brenda Denzler notes, the criteria that establishes science from pseudoscience, “while useful, fail to take into account the obstacles to their fulfillment” (2001, 91). She goes on to summarize the circular and hermeneutic nature of the logic confronting ufology, arguing that “a field is condemned as pseudoscientific and forever outside the fold because it does not follow the same procedures accepted by recognized fields of study, while at the same time it is denied access to the resources that would make procedural conformity possible because it is outside the fold” (92). In this way, the work being done by ufology is trapped in a cycle of being declared illegitimate, even though there are certainly some pertinent criticisms being made by ufologists against mainstream science, and UFOs present some interesting anomalies deserving of further attention and research.

Of course, many ufologists do often engage in serious faults in logic and argumentation, a point I will examine more carefully in my next chapters. Ufology often attaches itself to conspiratorial logic, and it adheres to the belief that UFOs are extraterrestrial in nature without evidence to support this point. But ufologists also present some important contentions by condemning the

scientific establishment for failing to take the UFO question seriously. While the skeptical orthodoxy of science begins from the premise that none of these UFO reports are extraterrestrial, this is, in fact, not actually known, and while we might never know what UFOs are (even when studied), as ufologists contend, the fact that a systematic inquiry is not even attempted is certainly questionable (Wendt and Duvall, 2008, 614). Ufology, its defenders argue, is excluded from conventional science by these rigidly imposed boundaries that have created unfair barriers to the study of UFOs, alien contact experiences, and other anomalous phenomena, and ufologists see themselves as forced into an awkward position where they are unable to offer advancements to knowledge because of their outright exclusion from the scientific community and the mocking and dismissive attitudes taken against their research in official discourse.

The Debunkers and the Performativity of Scientific Critique

These boundaries have been most vocally imposed by what is known in the UFO community as the debunkers. Debunkers are (usually) professional scientists who carry scientific credibility and credentials, and who use their positions of influence and expertise to become active detractors of UFO phenomena. Different from mere skeptics who are uncertain or unconvinced by the claims of ufology, debunkers, according to ufologists, use their professional voices to actively and aggressively detract, disparage, and lampoon ufological research.

The debunkers, however, see themselves as devoted advocates of science who do not take kindly to endeavours of ufologists; they claim that ufologists are trying to appropriate science to further their own agenda and they have accused many ufologists of being self-serving frauds hoping to get famous by promoting their outlandish ideas. Dr. Donald H. Menzel, a Harvard astronomer, was one of the first and most active debunkers of ufology, and after his death this role was taken up by Philip J. Klass, an electrical engineer and former editor of the publication *Aviation*

Week.[94] More than mere skeptics, Menzel and Klass arguably did more to promote the public dismissal of UFOs than any other persons or groups, and they engaged in a very active campaign in print (and later with Klass, online) to undermine ufology and to reject all UFO sightings as simply unrecognized or insufficiently recognized natural phenomena.[95]

Facing the accusations made by these debunkers, ufologists draw attention to their flawed approaches. As Brenda Denzler (2001) summarizes, many ufologists have insisted that several debunkers who have addressed UFO phenomena were not, in fact, scientific or objective in their attitudes or methods: "Most debunkers, ufologists claimed, were only 'armchair experts' on the subject who had done little or no actual fieldwork investigating UFO sightings" and they offered overly simplified and stockpiled responses to explain away the data without offering any serious and objective scrutiny of the UFO evidence (86).

When it comes to appointing panels of scientists to consider UFO data (such as the Robertson Panel or the Condon project), moreover, ufologists point out that "almost inevitably the scientists selected were those who had little or no background in the subject" (87), and they note that vocal UFO debunkers have frequently fallen back on the positions made in these authoritative reports, even though their conclusions were highly flawed and politically motivated. The debunkers, ufologists argue, refuse to acknowledge that there are several enticing UFO sightings that have not been explained; instead they focus their attention on those cases that have been revealed to be known misidentifications or hoaxes, and they use these cases to refute *all* UFO evidence in

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[94] Over the decades, the two published a series of books against ufology, including Menzel's *Flying Saucers* (1953), *The World of Flying Saucers* (1964), and *The UFO Enigma: A Definitive Explanation of the UFO Phenomenon* (1977), and Klass's *UFOs – Identified* (1968), *UFOs Explained* (1974), *UFO Abductions: A Dangerous Game* (1989), and *The Real Roswell Crashed-Saucer Coverup* (1997), to name a few of their major book publications.

[95] Like the government's projects dedicated to the study of UFOs, these scientists seemed to inadvertently confirm the importance of ufology since they dedicated substantial time and energy to write several books in an effort to discredit it.

advance. According to ufologists, the debunkers are certainly not the objective scientists they claim to be.

In his recent article "Strategic Ignorance and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence: Critiquing the Discursive Segregation of UFOs from Scientific Inquiry," Adam Dodd (2018) draws attention to the way in which many prominent scientists have used their authoritative positions to dissuade public interest in UFOs, even though their arguments fail to uphold the standards of objective scientific inquiry that they claim to protect. By looking at statements made in recent years by high-profile scientists such as Carl Sagan and the late Stephen Hawking, Dodd argues that these scientists engage in highly performative strategies to dismiss ufology altogether, as opposed to offering "rigorous, informed, and effective assessments" of the UFO evidence presented by ufologists (75).

He contends that these scientists are engaged in what Erving Goffman refers to as "facework" (Goffman, 1967, 5), which is a strategy to make a good showing of oneself for the public, and they carefully tailor their responses to UFO phenomena to maintain their reputation and to reaffirm "the boundary of science against outsiders" (Dodd, 2018, 78). In dissecting the various statements made publicly by these scientists, Dodd finds that many of their declarations about UFOs derive from logical fallacies and historical inaccuracies, and they are unable and unwilling to address anomalies in UFO sightings; they uphold this flippant attitude to maintain "face," since UFOs threaten the foundations of the scientific establishment. The legitimacy of the scientific establishment and the government rests on the disavowal of the unknown — otherwise they appear weak and ignorant — so the dismissal of ufology is necessary for scientists to maintain their influence, which is why they are so forceful in publicly maintaining these boundaries.[96] As Dodd

[96] Since 1947, over 100 000 UFOs have been reported worldwide, many by militaries, but for the most part these cases have not been systematically analyzed by scientific establishments or by the state (Wendt and Duvall, 2008, 610). As

finds, by employing these dismissive tactics, mainstream scientists have hindered "public and professional knowledge of UFOs," which leads him to conclude that "ignorance of the topic of UFOs is actively produced, rather than natural or inevitable" (Ibid.).

The claims lobbied by ufologists against the debunkers and the wider scientific establishment draw attention to the limitations of modern science, especially regarding the mechanisms in place that make it difficult to take UFOs seriously. The scientific community is engaged in careful boundary work that stigmatizes anything that falls outside what is deemed acceptable scientific inquiry, and while science is frequently upheld as being completely objective, these critiques draw attention to the fact that science remains a fundamentally human practice, and scientists are not immune from having their own agenda.[97]

This, of course, does not mean that ufology necessarily offers a better, or more objective, interpretation of UFO phenomena, and, as I will address throughout this dissertation (and especially in Chapter Six), much ufological argumentation is itself strategically performative and frequently succumbs to its own errors of logic. Further, this is not to say that the epistemological standards of the scientific and scholarly communities are unsuitable and that the contributions of the scientific establishment are minor; modern science has clearly offered a deeply useful and reliable way to establish the foundations for knowing and understanding our world and universe. However, the ufological critiques against the scientific establishment draw attention to the fact that science is not always the objective intellectual beacon of authority that many claim it to be, and

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Wendt and Duvall argue, these cases pose a fundamental "threat of unknowability to science, upon which modern sovereignty stands," and that is why they are systematically ignored by these institutions. They note that there are certainly many things that science does not know, "like the cure for cancer," but scientific "authority rests on the assumption that nothing in Nature is in principle unknowable" (623). UFOs, on the other hand, might be potentially knowable, but they also might not be, and in this respect "they haunt modern sovereignty with the possibility of epistemic failure" (Ibid..).

[97] See Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's work *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* ([1979] 1986) for a comprehensive examination of how scientific work is conducted, and how the "daily activities of working scientists lead to the construction of scientific facts" (40).

ufology therefore poses a challenge to the supposed infallibility of science that our rational, materialist society attempts to uphold. As a civilian-led pursuit that claims to be a serious scientific inquiry, ufology's appeal stems from its remarkable ability to bridge both the popular and the scientific. Ufology has therefore emerged as a kind of popular alternative to science, and it serves as a foil to the inflexible and exclusionary official institutions that attempt to undermine it.

Ufology therefore mounts a growing criticism against official institutions; in doing so, it both signals and reflects a strong disillusionment with traditional experts and authorities. This cynicism can perhaps be traced all the way back to "The War of the Worlds," which importantly marked a decline in trust when authoritative radio voices alerted the American public of the fake alien invasion. The radio broadcast gestured to the potential deceptiveness of radio, and it made the listening public wary of the commanding influences of mass media technologies. Of course, "The War of the Worlds" was initially all about the implicit trust in authority figures, and commentators afterwards blamed listeners for their willingness to believe in whatever they were told. While many of those who listened to "The War of the Worlds" implicitly trusted the message being relayed, with ufology there is a reversal; that is, ufology is typically characterized by a categorical dismissal of official experts and authority figures, who are often imagined to be pursuing their own hidden agenda.

This stance is exemplified by the slogan from the quasi-conspiracy program *The X-Files*: "trust no one." While *The X-Files* offers a fictional representation of ufology, this slogan extends beyond the television program and characterizes the attitude of much of the ufological movement. Ufologists typically dismiss "The War of the Worlds" as a credulous moment in the history of UFO lore that detracts from the systematic study of extraterrestrials. It was a fake news broadcast that contrasts with the real and serious work of ufology, and it is denounced as a story that draws

attention to the gullibility of a public willing to believe in anything so long as an expert has professed its truth. Ufology, by contrast, is about not blindly trusting the authoritative voice and believing wholeheartedly in what specialists in their ivory towers want us to think; it is about thinking for oneself and investigating these phenomena directly, rather than relying on the predisposed views of experts. This stance is quite significant, and it signals the precipitous decline in trust that has become characteristic of ufology and that makes ufology so appealing for many Americans.

Chapter Four:

Closer Encounters

The story offered by ufology is itself not completely uniform and it has been informed by significant internal tensions and debates. During the 1950s, for instance, there was a fracturing of ufology, which was caused when some individuals came forward with claims that they had psychic and physical interactions with the occupants of the flying saucers. While ufology began as a study of strange, but distant, objects viewed in the skies, over time stories of close (and sometimes very intimate) encounters with purportedly real extraterrestrial beings came to shape the UFO community and led to intense disagreements over what constituted solid ufological research.

Shaver and the Saucers

As I have already reiterated, ideas about purportedly real alien beings were launched into the American public's awareness with Orson Welles's "The War of the Worlds," which inspired several spin-offs in popular culture. Following the broadcast, stories of alien invasions took off in pulp magazines across the country and, as Aaron Gulyas notes, "the sensationalist science fiction and fantasy pulp magazines of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s … provided a significant portion of the cultural context for reports of flying saucers in general and extraterrestrial contact narratives in particular" (2013, 30). One such magazine, *Amazing Stories,* published and popularized one of the earliest accounts of a human being claiming to have knowledge about extraterrestrials on Earth, and this story helped spread the idea that aliens could be real.

The story began with Richard Shaver, an American writer and artist, who wrote a letter to *Amazing Stories* in 1943 professing that he had discovered the phonetic key to all languages. He claimed that he could use a formula applied to any language to decode a secret meaning behind

any word, name, or phrase. Ray Palmer, the editor of the magazine, found Shaver's story intriguing and he published it along with a statement asking the readership to contribute if they had any information regarding the strange language Shaver was talking about. While *Amazing Stories* was a science fiction magazine, many readers responded saying that they had followed Shaver's instructions on how to use the secret language, and it worked. Seeing a good story in the making, Palmer wrote back to Shaver and asked him to explain how he learned the secret language formula.

Shaver responded, and Palmer published the response as a short novella in the March 1945 issue of *Amazing Stories.* His story was titled "I Remember Lemuria!", and Shaver hinted that his story was merely presented under the guise of fiction and was really a true account of his recollections of strange earthly and extraterrestrial beings from a past life.[98] His story sparked a tremendous response from readers, and some even wrote in to state that they had encountered the strange beings described in Shaver's tale. Palmer published these responses, along with Shaver's replies to them, which resulted in a long chain of stories which became referred to as the "Shaver Mystery." At this point, Shaver and Palmer began to present these stories as if they were true. This intrigued several readers, but also annoyed many of the magazine's devoted followers, who merely wanted to read science fiction stories, and not what they considered to be fantastical and dubious claims presented by Shaver.

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[98] In his tale, Shaver claimed that he was the modern incarnation of a being named Mutan Mion, who used to live in the ancient land of Lemuria. He explained that there was a race of people in Lemuria known as the Titans, who had developed a highly sophisticated civilization, even more advanced than our own, but they had a terrible enemy, the Deros (Detrimental Energy Robots), who were warring beings who wanted to destroy the Titans. Shaver explained that the Titans were forced to leave the Earth and inhabit another planet, but they still visited from time to time. Meanwhile, he claimed that the Deros were forced to lived in caves and were usually kept in check by another underground race known as the Teros, but sometimes the Deros escaped to terrorize unsuspecting humans. Shaver's story initiated all sorts of "hollow Earth" theories, which imagined that the core of our Earth was filled with strange creatures. Even today, these hollow Earth theories still circulate in some ufological circles, and the idea that strange beings inhabit the interior of our planet is still discussed on popular online conspiracy forums.

In December of 1948, Palmer was pressured by management to end the Shaver tales, and Palmer resigned from *Amazing Stories* in solidarity. After leaving the magazine, Palmer began his own publication, *Fate,* which he co-founded with Curtis Fuller. *Fate* is the longest-running magazine devoted to the paranormal and it is still published today; its first issue tackled the Arnold flying saucer story, which propelled the magazine to national recognition and solidified it as a publication devoted to purportedly true accounts of the strange and unusual.

In *Fate*, Palmer continued to publish Shaver's stories and, after the 1947 Arnold saucer sighting, Shaver began to tie in elements of the flying saucer sightings to his stories. He explained that the vast increase of UFO sightings served as a validation of his accounts, and some ufologists, such as John Keel (who is best known as the author of *The Mothman Prophesies* [1975]), came to champion Shaver for popularizing ideas about flying saucers and alien contact to a broad audience. Embedded in Shaver's stories were many of the themes that would become part of the alien contact canon,[99] and Shaver and Palmer had a huge influence on shaping successive UFO belief systems by exposing these ideas to a vast readership.

The Contactees

Following Shaver's proclamations that UFOs were piloted by extraterrestrial beings, and with UFO reports increasing in popularity across the nation, stories of human-extraterrestrial contact came to captivate the attention of many Americans. By the early 1950s these stories exploded in popular culture, and tales of American citizens who claimed to have experienced physical and psychic contact with extraterrestrial visitors were shared across media outlets and developed into

[99] For instance, Christopher Roth (2005, 50) explains, "Shaver's stories of extraterrestrials, Atlantis, and Lemuria betray a familiarity with Theosophical ideas," which we shall see came to define later UFO contact tales. Further, as Aaron Gulyas notes, Shaver's and Palmer's assertion that the tales were true also came to inspire later tales of alien contact. While Shaver's story was originally presented as a fiction, over time it became portrayed as if it were factual, and this shift from fiction to fact became "a defining characteristic of contact tales through this history of the phenomenon" (Gulyas, 2013, 30).

stable narratives of human-alien contact. The (mostly) men (and a few women) who came forward with these tales described anthropomorphic alien visitors who came to Earth to deliver warnings about the looming possibility of the planet's destruction at the hands of human beings. These "contactees" as they became known, claimed that they were selected by the aliens to convey messages of peace and universal "brotherhood,"[100] and their stories carved a niche in American popular culture and left a lasting impression on ideas about aliens in the United States.

The key figure in this movement was Polish-born American George Adamski, who carried almost all the responsibility for initiating and popularizing the image of the benign and helpful aliens.[101] Adamski spent much of his adulthood dedicated to the study of philosophical, religious, and spiritual systems and, while operating a small hamburger stand on Mt. Palomar in San Diego County, he founded the Royal Academy of Tibet, a monastery devoted to his teachings of "Cosmic Law" — his term for a system of beliefs that focused on the principles of universal peace and love, and that critiqued rampant materialism. By 1930, "Adamski was a minor figure on the California occult scene," and he had gained a small but dedicated following (Gulyas, 2013, 43; Clark, 1998, 26).

After the Kenneth Arnold sighting, Adamski took an intense interest in UFOs. Unlike most other ufologists during this period, Adamski was not as concerned with explaining what the flying saucers were, but was "more interested in finding out what the visitors were trying to communicate to humanity," and he used the phenomenon of the flying saucers to promote his spiritualist practices and teachings (Gulyas, 2013, 42). In 1949, Adamski wrote a fictional novel titled *Pioneers of Space: A Trip to the Moon, Mars and Venus* ([1949] 2008), in which he describes the

[100] I use 'brotherhood' rather than a more gender-neutral term to evoke the language used by the majority of contactees in their own writings.
[101] See Bennett ([2001] 2008) for Adamski's biography.

adventures of a human astronaut who travels to other planets and interacts with the space people there. Most of the text is devoted to the aliens' philosophies, which shared a striking resemblance to Adamski's own principles of Cosmic Law.

While Adamski initially created a fictional account of alien contact to experiment with his ideas about the possible motivations and philosophies of extraterrestrial beings, over time he began to present these ideas as fact and, in November of 1952, he became one of the first people to popularly suggest that humans were in physical contact with aliens by claiming to have made face-to-face contact with a humanoid alien being. His supposedly true account was published in his and Desmond Leslie's *Flying Saucers Have Landed* ([1953] 1977), which was widely circulated in ufological channels and was popularly received even in the wider American public.

In an encounter that could have been taken straight out of the popular film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) — which was released only a year before Adamski's contact experience — Adamski described how he and his friends drove to Desert Centre, California and witnessed a strange aircraft in the sky. While the others waited behind, Adamski went to explore the craft and when he returned to the group he asserted that he had met the saucer's sole occupant, a human-looking man with flowing blonde hair. This man, named Orthon, through a combination of telepathy and sign language, communicated to Adamski that he was from Venus and was dispatched from his mother ship to find Adamski to discuss with him the Venusians' concerns with human warfare and atomic testing on Earth. Adamski's narrative was fundamentally shaped by existing popular culture and his description of the human-looking alien beings and their compassionate motivations certainly paralleled the humanoid aliens from the popular 1951 science-fiction film.

Further, his depictions of the aliens as superior beings bear many similarities to the ascended masters of theosophical discourse, which fundamentally shaped Adamski's belief system prior to his alleged encounter. The Theosophical Society was founded in the United States in the 1870s and reached its height of popularity in the 1890s, and the movement was (and in some esoteric circles, still is) concerned with esoteric philosophy and the investigation into the mysteries of being and nature.[102] It was based on the messages channelled and delivered by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and the core of theosophical doctrine can be found in Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* ([1877] 1997) and *The Secret Doctrine* ([1888] 2009).

Important for this discussion, some elements of theosophical doctrine suggested that life existed on other planets, such as Venus, and that humanity itself could be linked to otherworldly beings. That is, theosophists argued that there were other inhabited planets in the universe and that life-forms from these planets not only had the capacity to visit Earth, but already had, and were responsible for human development. For instance, theosophists claimed that these "ascended masters" established the ancient Egyptian civilization (Fuller, 1988, 212), as well as the entire tradition of occult lodges (such as the Rosicrucians and Freemasons) that allegedly pass on secret knowledge to this day (Roth, 2005, 46).[103] Usually the extraterrestrials in theosophical doctrine were anthropomorphized, angel-like beings, and the doctrine suggested that this extraterrestrial life had reached a level of consciousness that was a step higher than humans'. While theosophy

[102] See Roth (2005, 44–47) for a description of the Theosophical Society.

[103] Much of the "Ancient Alien" philosophy that is popular in contemporary ufological circles, and which is based upon the speculation that extraterrestrials have visited Earth in the past and shared with humans their technology (and that has been further popularized by the American television series of the same name that is currently in its twelfth season), has roots in this theosophical discourse. These ideas that ancient aliens provided humanity with the tools and knowledge to create complex civilizations is rather telling of the believers' views of the human species; that is, it seems to show little confidence in past human innovation and intelligence, and instead suggests that it was aliens who created such things as the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. As Julien Benoit (18 September 2017) notes, these ideas also take on a racist tone, since so much of ancient alien theories are selectively made against non-European civilizations, and therefore they work to perpetuate the idea that "only Europeans – white people – ever were and ever will be capable of such architectural feats."

suggested that humans were presently inferior, it did propose that some individuals had the potential to rise to the same level of awareness as these ascended masters.

In his depictions of the benevolent and superior aliens, Adamski clearly drew from underlying theosophical themes and, as Christopher Partridge (2015, 399) argues, "Theosophical understandings of these masters as benevolent intelligences with a deep salvific concern for a spiritually immature race is simply given a space age, science-fictionesque packaging" in Adamski's tale. Adamski's stories fundamentally linked the UFO to mystical, spiritualist, and occultist traditions, as well as esoteric and metaphysical systems. Inspired by Adamski's stories, later tales of extraterrestrial encounters are similarly informed by mystical elements and, as I will show in a moment, this created tensions in the ufological community by raising the question of whether UFO phenomena could be understood through scientific or spiritual means.

For now, however, I would like to address why Adamski's tales of contact achieved such popularity in the United States and around the world. As the first, and arguably the most influential of the alien contactees, Adamski became a minor celebrity figure. He wrote about his alien contacts extensively and authored two more books about his encounters, which allegedly continued after his initial meeting with the Venusian in the desert. These texts, *Inside the Space Ships* (1955) and *Flying Saucers Farewell* (1960), further promoted Adamski's messages about the kind and benevolent space people coming to Earth to help humanity. In addition to publishing his books, Adamski embarked on a world tour to spread his ideas at UFO conventions and conferences, which helped him popularize the contactee movement on an international scale.

Of course, speaking and writing about his experiences did not guarantee that people would listen to and believe in his encounters, yet there was something to Adamski's stories that seemed to resonate with many individuals and his tales attracted interest from a devoted band of followers.

Certainly not everyone found his claims genuine, and several individuals sought to debunk his work and expose him as a fraud, but many others found his ideas enticing and hundreds of contactees followed in his footsteps by making similar claims about strange visitations from benevolent saucer people who came to Earth to help lead humanity toward salvation.[104]

Adamski's popularity is owing to the way in which his stories latched on to the general mood of the time. In his writings and teachings, Adamski relayed how earthly events such as nuclear war impacted and threatened the entire solar system, and the aliens in his stories offered him warnings about the future devastation of Earth if humans continued along the same destructive path. It seems this message made a lot of sense for those struggling to reconcile with the anxieties brought about by the invasive and invisible threat of the atomic bomb, and these tales about aliens and their interactions with human beings became significantly popular during the early Cold War years; this environment certainly helped shape the specific ways in which *real* aliens were imagined.

In other words, the ideas shared by alien contactees cannot be understood apart from anxieties created during the Cold War climate and the potential threat of nuclear holocaust bringing about the end of the world. These tales can therefore be interpreted as a projection of Cold War fears, situated alongside fundamentalist and millenarian fantasies about the end of the world. It made sense that during the Cold War people needed to look beyond the planet for salvation, and it also made sense that these stories began in the United States, one of the two main superpowers involved in the Cold War conflict.

Carl Jung ([1958] 2002) makes the point that the UFO became a modern symbol for the ancient gods and offered itself as a visionary rumour during times of need, and as people searched the heavens for answers after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it seems that the aliens stepped in as uncanny

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[104] Other notable contactees that followed include George Hunt Williamson, Alfred C. Bailey, Truman Bethurum, Howard Meneger, and George Van Tassel.

reminders of the gods we thought had been deposed. In Jung's words, "At a time when the world is divided by an iron curtain … we might expect all sorts of funny things, since when such a thing happens in an individual it means a complete dissociation, which is instantly compensated by symbols of wholeness and unity" (Jung, "To Beatrice M. Hinkle," 6 February 1951, in Adler and Jaffé, eds., [1953] 1990). Amidst the increasing fragmentation of the modern world, the benevolent alien beings in the contactee tales acted as modern angels and gods that could save us from our destructive ways.

The contactee stories also projected an ideal world that could be made better through the wonders of alien technology, which could help bring about peace on our planet. Hence the contactee messages were not only about technology's negative capabilities for bringing about apocalyptic doom, but they also hinted at its potential for leading us toward progress. These utopian and dystopian imaginaries about technology's potentials manifested during the Cold War period and found their home in these stories of alien contact.[105]

These contactee stories, which focused on the cosmic destruction of Earth at the hands of human beings and the need for superior space brothers (and sisters) to rescue us from this peril, also allowed many individuals to voice their concerns about the political climate of the Cold War without overtly expressing criticism against the US government. In this sense, the contactees' writings often came across as political manifestos, rather than merely fanciful stories of alien contact. As Aaron Gulyas (2013, 23) aptly observes, these stories are not simply escapist tales or fear-reactions of the time, but many of the contactees, beginning with Adamski, used their

[105] Of course, the contactees would disagree with these assessments and would instead argue that the alien encounters were not a response to nuclear anxieties but were rather caused by humanity's engagement with nuclear technologies. That is, they claim that aliens came to Earth at this time to watch over the skies and to monitor humans in the hopes that they could prevent us from engaging in any further catastrophic destruction, not just of our own planet but of the wider universe as well.

narratives to express desired social changes and to make claims about the Cold War period and their stories allowed them to convey messages that were otherwise silenced during this time. Adamski's writings, for instance, offered rather blunt commentaries against the Cold War conflict and the possibilities of nuclear war, and the aliens offered him a safe avenue to make these critiques.

Of course, Adamski's subversive critiques were limited by the fact that they were channelled through extraterrestrial voices — which ultimately relegated them to the fringes of American society — but they did offer an outlet to express unpopular opinions without directly challenging the current political and social systems, and these political and philosophical sentiments likely would otherwise have been blacklisted and labelled as subversive during the Cold War period: "Because these cultists were considered beyond the pale, they may have been the only oppositional group in America in those years that no one bothered to accuse of communism" (Engelhardt, [1995] 2007, 104).

The importance of these social and political messages from the contactees were not lost on readers at the time. In *Flying Saucers Have Landed* ([1953] 1977), for instance, Desmond Leslie's introduction emphasized the importance of Adamski's messages over the validity of his report, stating: "The main thing is to read it and study the teachings given, for they can be of great help and benefit to many" (29). In this sense, the stories told by Adamski and other contactees were not simply about alien contact, but also conveyed important political messages that deeply resonated during the Cold War period; the extraterrestrials, it seemed, offered an excuse to make these sorts of critiques.

The contactee tradition therefore bridged science fiction with nonfiction, and created elements of fantasy, but also rooted these elements in earthly concerns. It both originated and reached its

peak of popularity in the 1950s, and at the height of the contactee movement there were more than 150 flying saucer contact clubs organized in the United States alone, suggesting the significance of these claims of ET contact within wider American culture (Denzler, 2001, 44).[106] Even today, elements of the contactee tradition continue in some ufological circles, such as the notion that aliens are friendly and wise beings working to save humanity from doom, which indicates that the contactees have left a long-lasting imprint on ufological discourse. Whether or not people found these stories believable, they certainly found them enticing — especially considering the Cold War context — and the contactee tradition offered a pivotal moment in the history of ufology when elements of mysticism were introduced to saucer research.

The Men in Black (MIBs)

Alongside these stories of aliens as fundamentally benevolent, technological angels, came other, much more sinister stories of ET contact, which described malevolent aliens who had concealed themselves as human beings and infiltrated various levels of American society to purportedly carry out a secret and nefarious agenda against humanity. These stories differed from the contactee tales in that they described overtly demonic figures, but like the contactee stories, these darker tales similarly drew from elements of mysticism and, as Gulyas points out, they also "explicate[d] the concerns and aspirations of society" (5).

What would become called the "Men in Black" (MIB) narrative traces back to the stories told by Albert K. Bender, an American citizen who served in the United States Air Force during WWII. When Bender was thirty-one, he founded and became head of the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB), a group that investigated flying saucers across the country (Lewis, 2000, 51–52). The organization was one of the several ufological groups that sought to explore the meaning

[106] See Aaron Gulyas's *Extraterrestrials and the American Zeitgeist: Alien Contact Tales Since the 1950s* (2013) for a more detailed account of the contactee phenomenon and for biographical information about many notable contactees.

behind the saucers, and because of Bender's efforts, the IFSB seemed about to become one of the biggest flying saucer clubs in the country.

The IFSB headquarters was in Bridgeport, Connecticut, but the group had members in 48 states across the US. As Bender reported, the headquarters was often swamped with correspondence about sightings from all over the United States and investigators from the IFSB were sent out to interview witnesses and write reports in the hopes of uncovering the reasons behind the sudden swell of saucer sightings in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During the time that the IFSB was in operation, Bender and the other members decided that they would need to produce a regular publication to keep their members informed. Subsequently, the *Space Review* was created to offer members a means for sharing their findings and an avenue for greater participation in the saucer investigation community; however, only nine months later the IFSB disbanded.

In the October 1953 issue of *Space Review*, Bender wrote out his foreboding reasons for disbanding the Bureau:

> A source, which the IFSB considers very reliable, has informed us that the investigation of the flying saucer mystery and solution is approaching its final stages. The same source to whom we had referred data, which had come into our possession, suggested that it was not the proper method and time to publish this data in *Space Review.* (Cited from the "Late Bulletin" section of *Space Review*, October 1953)

Bender continued by informing members that "the mystery of the flying saucers is no longer a mystery. The source is already known, but any information about this is being withheld by orders from a higher source." His ominous final statement advised "those engaged in saucer work to

please be very cautious" (Cited from the "Statement of Importance" section of *Space Review*, October 1953).

It seemed likely that because of its swift termination, the IFSB would quickly be forgotten as other ufological groups rose to prominence and continued to entice saucer researchers; however, the efforts of Gray Barker ensured the enduring legacy of the Bureau.[107] Barker was appointed the Chief Investigator at the IFSB during its operations and he maintained a strong influence in the saucer community even after the Bureau disbanded. He also claimed to know why Bender had dismantled the IFSB, and in 1956 he published a book about its decline. In *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers* ([1956] 2014), Barker describes how the suspension of the IFSB was an intentional, sinister plot executed by extraterrestrials in the attempt to squash the efforts of saucer investigators across the United States. In his account, Barker claims that Bender revealed to him that he was visited by three men in dark suits who had threatened him to promise "on his honour as an American" that he would not reveal what he knew about the saucers and their occupants (104).

After the publication of Barker's account, Bender released his own record of the events that led to the disbanding of the IFSB. His *Flying Saucers and the Three Men* ([1962] 2014) focuses on the dreadful and mysterious incidents of stalking by the extraterrestrials and the painful headaches and terrifying sightings that accompanied their visits. He also describes how the extraterrestrials' humanlike appearance was an illusion: the creatures used human bodies to disguise their own figures to develop a strong and secret presence on Earth. These aliens, he claims, walk among

[107] Barker, a motion picture booker in the 1950s, joined the IFSB after he published an investigation for *FATE Magazine* on the 'Flatwoods Monster' of rural West Virginia. While a member of the IFSB, Barker also independently released his own magazine, *The Saucerian*, which would grow into a larger publishing venture, *Saucer Books*, a business that oversaw the printing of hundreds of books and tracts about saucers and other strange phenomena. Barker's publications were often criticized by other saucer researchers for promoting a mythic and sensational account of alien stories, which they believed jeopardized the perceived seriousness of scientific ufological study.

ordinary people to keep track of human activities and they possess harmful powers that could destroy humanity. These extraterrestrials became known as the "Men in Black," since they always dressed in black suits (and often dark sunglasses) to further disguise their alien features.[108]

After Bender published his account, stories describing reports of MIB cases circulated across the country. While there were actually few recorded reports of the MIB, the hype around these incidences was substantial, and the idea that extraterrestrials were disguising themselves as human beings as a way to carry out their sinister plans became a common trope in stories of extraterrestrial contact.[109] This MIB myth centred around the omniscient, intimidating, humanlike figures dressed in dark clothing who would threaten bodily harm or hardship on those humans perceived as intervening in their secret agenda.

Folklorist Peter Rojcewicz (1987; 1989) looks at how the tales of the MIB aliens developed into an enduring folklore, and he connects this folklore with stories of the devil. He finds that there is a strong connection between MIB beliefs and traditional stories of demonic visitation, and he argues that the shapeshifting abilities of the MIB, their black dress, and their omniscient knowledge reflect this demonic tradition. He also closely examines the MIB narrative for specific motifs, such as Bender's description of the sulfur-like odour that appeared during his encounters, which he maintains correlate strongly with dominant images and themes found in demonic folklore. Similarly, Christopher Partridge (2004) traces in these narratives the myths and symbols

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[108] From a contemporary standpoint, the name "Men in Black" likely conjures up the 1997 blockbuster film of the same name, where Agent K (played by Tommy Lee Jones) and James Edwards (played by Will Smith) are part of a secret agency of humans recruited to keep track of concealed aliens living on planet Earth, some of whom have nefarious agendas to blow up Earth and destroy humanity. In the film version, the humans are the men in the dark suits engaging in undercover work; however, in the original narrative, the roles are reversed – the MIB were the aliens disguised as humans sent to Earth to spy on and control human beings. The depiction of aliens as menacing and dangerous creatures with superior abilities features strongly in both accounts, although there are also friendly aliens in the film version who help the human agents. In the original narrative, however, the aliens remain uniformly sinister.

[109] See Peter M. Rojcewicz (1987, 150–152; 1989) for a thorough description of MIB reports across the United States.

of Christian demonology, arguing that the Christian tradition in the United States had a profound influence on shaping these stories.

Like the contactee tales, these stories of the MIB seemed to fit nicely into the Cold War context, especially in the way in which these stories expressed fears of contamination, mutation, and subversives infiltrating the US government. Bender's and Barker's stories coincided with the Second Red Scare, also known as McCarthyism, in the United States, during which anti-leftist proponents promoted the fear of communist infiltration in powerful levels of society, such as the federal government and the mass media. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) played an important role at this time in investigating the allegedly subversive activities of American citizens and organizations suspected of having ties to communism. At the HUAC, former Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) and People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) spies Elizabeth Bently and Whittaker Chambers testified that Soviet spies and communist sympathizers had penetrated the US government before, during, and after WWII (Wortman, 2004, 184). This revelation intensified anxieties about Soviet intrusion into the seemingly sacrosanct realm of American affairs.

These intense fears of communist espionage and surveillance of the American government and the media led to heightened censorship and political repression. The insecurity and mistrust of this age, and the repeated themes of infiltration, subversion, and invasion became central dramatic elements in the MIB narratives. One of the marked elements of the MIB accounts was the idea that the aliens were already here on Earth (and, more specifically, in the United States), lurking among ordinary men and women and watching their every move, which was made possible by their shape-shifting abilities — an idea that was also popularly conveyed in the science fiction film *Invasion*

of the Body Snatchers (1956).[110] Relatedly, McCarthyism would repeat a similar discourse about the adaptability and invisibility of Soviet spies in the American government. Likewise, the destruction of American society by un-American (or in the case of the MIB, alien) beings featured prominently in both the MIB narratives and these anti-communist sentiments. The communist ideology threatened American individualism to its core, and in a similar way, the MIB threatened these same ideals; by attacking individuals in pursuit of their own knowledge about flying saucers, the MIB jeopardized the sense of individualism and personal freedom characterized by the "American Dream."

Although engaging with darker and more sinister roots, the MIB tradition fit alongside the contactee stories by similarly reflecting societal concerns. As the contactee and MIB tales show, the threat of nuclear war and the emerging Cold War culture inspired stories about *real* aliens as either potential saviours or ravaging foes, and these ideas resonated with a public fascinated by nuclear technology's potential for bringing about both progress and doom. Further, both versions of contact connected to mystical and spiritual ideas that had long circulated in American society. These mystical stories of purportedly real alien contact shifted ufological discourse; those claiming to have made contact were not so much interested in discovering objective evidence to prove the existence of UFOs and aliens but were rather seeking to turn the conversation toward questions of personal experience and spiritual belief, and this created a fundamental divide in ufology.

Alien Abduction: Bridging the Scientific and the Spiritual

In contrast to UFO reports, which were based on eyewitness testimony of objects sighted from a distance, the contactee and MIB tales told of close and sometimes quite intimate encounters with

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[110] The film depicted an alien invasion in Santa Mira, a fictional town in California. The extraterrestrials, by dropping alien plant spores from space, were able to use these plant-like pods to create human-looking but emotionless alien duplicates of the town's residents, called "pod people."

alien beings, and some members of the UFO community believed they offered tremendous new insights for understanding ourselves and our strange and mysterious universe. For these individuals, the burden of discovering physical evidence to attest to the reality of UFOs and aliens was unnecessary, and they found that these personal stories supplied all the proof needed to believe in their existence. They also found that the messages delivered by the alien contactees offered new levels of awareness and understanding that went beyond the limits of modern science. These stories spoke of the connectedness of consciousness throughout the entire universe and they offered promises of achieving higher levels of awareness and peace by following the aliens' messages. The contactee stories therefore required that individuals make a leap of faith to trust the messages relayed in them, and, in doing so, they shifted ufology toward spiritual belief and away from science.

These stories came much to the dismay of scientifically-oriented ufologists, who formed the bulk of the ufological community and who attested that the contactee stories did not represent their ideas or concerns. Referred to as "nuts-and-bolts" ufologists because they asserted that UFOs were really just machines with "nuts and bolts" of their own, this faction of ufology emphasized the importance of uncovering physical evidence to prove UFO phenomena through scientific means. While the flying saucers were seen as significantly more advanced than our own technologies, these ufologists believed that they were essentially physical craft that interacted with the natural world and that could leave behind physical traces; as such, they considered it the task of ufology to offer a serious investigation of UFOs by supplying concrete and material evidence of their existence.

The deeply subjective and personal experiences of the contactees and MIBs contrasted sharply with the idea that ufology was an objective pursuit and with the notion that the existence of aliens

could be ascertained through the application of the scientific method and the discovery of empirical evidence, and this created a strong divide in what was considered acceptable as ufological study and what was not. Of course, even these scientifically-oriented ufologists still relied on an element of belief as they asserted that these UFO sightings were likely extraterrestrial in nature, but they presented themselves as objective, empirically-grounded, level-headed, and materialist scientists who stood in stark contrast to what they saw as the fantastical, delusional, and overly imaginative contactees.

The contactee stories, it seemed, threatened the traditional foundations of ufology by introducing a shift toward mystical and metaphysical understandings of alien contact, and away from the pursuit of physical evidence. Nuts-and-bolts ufologists saw the contactees as diluting the seriousness of ufology, especially since their fantastical stories could not be subjected to scientific testing in the same way that physical objects could, so these ufologists often resorted to using personal attacks against the contactees to undermine their legitimacy.[111] Frequently, ufologists accused the contactees of being motivated by desires for fame and wealth, and they drew attention to the ways in which the contactee and MIB stories were really just fear-reactions of the time. They also focused on how the contactee stories were merely a mash-up of Eastern philosophies and theological concepts, and they proposed that the stories came from a deeply spiritual need as opposed to arising from an actual encounter. But these criticisms did not extinguish the popularity of the contactees' stories.

These stories were even more threatening to the nuts-and-bolts faction of ufology because they were deeply entertaining — and this made them tremendously popular. UFO reports seemed quite bland and boring when compared to the fantastical tales of alien contact, and it did not take long

[111] For instance, Adamski's reputation was frequently attacked because of his career as a hamburger stand operator. Many of his critics drew attention to his profession as a way to undermine his legitimacy.

for these contact stories to be shared across popular media sources. Often these stories of the contactees were portrayed as representing the whole of ufology, and many nuts-and-bolts ufologists found that the public visibility of the contactees undermined their serious pursuits and diverted attention and resources away from their scientific endeavours; they also argued that the contactee movement made ufology as a whole appear to be the undertakings of a bunch of deranged crackpots. In fact, some ufologists began to speculate that the contactees were really part of a government conspiracy to diminish UFO beliefs, and they contended that the stories shared by Adamski and his followers were manufactured by the government as part of the debunking campaign to dismiss ufology as a bogus and delusional pursuit.

As the stories of the contactees and MIBs grew in popularity, the field of ufology became quite hostile and divided. With the scientifically-oriented ufologists on one side of the chasm, and the mystical contactees on the other, it seemed nothing could reconcile these very different perspectives. But in the early 1960s, a new story of alien contact emerged that would help bridge this divide. While the stories of the contactees and MIBs presented a diametrically opposed vision of aliens as either good or evil, friend or foe, this dualistic view of extraterrestrials gave way to a more complicated kind of alien contact narrative that emerged in the United States in the 1960s, intensified in popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, and became established as *the* most common scenario of human-alien contact during the 1980s and 1990s: alien abduction.[112]

Abduction, it seems, can be characterized by an ambiguous appraisal of the extraterrestrial creatures who purportedly take unwitting human beings from their homes and subject them to intense physical examinations and painful and violating procedures; yet, these encounters are not

[112] Abduction narratives did not simply replace earlier accounts of contact, but would feature alongside them, both influencing them and being influenced by them. At the same time, abduction became the most popular story of alien contact in the twentieth century.

always entirely traumatic, and the abductees often describe a sense of transcendence after their abduction experiences. Alien abduction, then, signals a shift in the human relationship with the extraterrestrial as no longer benevolent or benign, but as entirely ambiguous.

Unlike the contactees and MIB accounts, which offered a direct commentary on society, alien abduction did not appear to have a clear message. I will argue in a moment that the abduction experience still seems to reflect the social and political environment, but it certainly did not make statements as explicit as these earlier contact narratives; and since they did not relay a coherent message or express a particular agenda, abduction narratives were viewed by many ufologists as more sophisticated stories of alien contact that offered serious reflections by individuals trying to make sense of these strange, intimate, and often traumatic encounters. In other words, abduction accounts appeared to originate from spontaneous personal experiences, not as a direct commentary on political events, and since abductees did not relay a clear message from their extraterrestrial captors, their ambiguous stories were often taken as more believable than the earlier tales of alien contact conveyed by the contactees. It was these stories told by the alien abductees that helped bridge the divide in ufology by allowing aspects of science and mysticism to intermingle.

Establishing the Abduction Narrative: Betty and Barney Hill

The first reported alien abduction in the United States[113] was experienced by Betty and Barney Hill, an interracial couple who claimed to have been taken by extraterrestrial captors while returning home from vacation in Montreal in 1961. While driving south on Highway 3 through the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the Hills reported seeing a strange, unidentified aircraft in

[113] One of the earliest reported incident of alien abduction was related in 1957 by a Brazilian farmer, Antonio Villas Boas, who described seeing a strange spaceship in the sky. Its occupants, three or four strange, short, uniformed-and-helmet-clad creatures approached him and took him hostage aboard their craft. While on board, Boas described being subjected to a series of tests, and then recounted how he was raped by a small, blond, naked female alien who entered the room (Thompson, 1995, 90). Although this abduction happened in Brazil, the vast majority of popular abduction accounts originated in the United States, and hence I focus largely on American stories to trace this phenomenon.

the sky (Fuller, 1966). Barney recalled pulling out his binoculars and seeing humanoid creatures inside the ship. They also remembered being stopped at a road block for a brief period before making their way home. When they arrived in New Hampshire, however, the couple realized that they were unable to account for two hours of time on their return drive. Moreover, Barney noticed that his shoes were badly scuffed, and he had no memory of how this had happened. Betty also noticed strange marks on the car, and when she held a compass next to them, the needle danced around erratically. The couple began to suffer unexplained physical pain, anxiety, and nightmares, which they both felt were somehow related to the strange craft they had witnessed in the sky on their journey back to New Hampshire.

While Barney initially wanted to forget the incident, Betty decided to make a report to the Pease Air Force Base describing their encounter with the strange craft in the sky. She also began her own investigation. She went to the library and found *The Flying Saucer Conspiracy* (1955), written by retired Marine Corps Major Donald Keyhoe, which accused the government of discrediting flying saucer witnesses. As mentioned, Keyhoe was at the time the head of NICAP, and Betty wrote to him relating her story. Her letter was passed on to Walter N. Webb, a Boston astronomer and NICAP member, who composed a lengthy report stating that he believed the couple. The Hills conducted further interviews with NICAP members C.D. Jackson and Robert E. Hohmann, who suggested that the Hills undergo hypnosis to uncover what happened during the period of missing time. The Hills were referred to Benjamin Simon, a well-known psychiatrist and neurologist in the Boston area, and they began hypnosis treatments to recover their missing memories.

In individual hypnosis sessions, Simon slowly began to uncover the strange experiences that happened to the couple. Separately, Betty and Barney recounted disturbing details from the night,

which had apparently become repressed from their consciousnesses. Both described how they were taken from their car by strange alien creatures and led inside the UFO. Though their descriptions of the aliens never completely matched, after several hypnosis sessions Betty and Barney were both able to agree that the aliens were small, grey, large-eyed creatures; and once inside the UFO, the couple described how they were subjected to a series of physical examinations and medical procedures, including the taking of skin, hair, and nail samples. Betty also described what she called a "pregnancy test," in which the aliens inserted a long needle into her abdomen, while Barney recounted having sperm samples removed from his body taken by a circular device attached to his groin. During the couple's abduction, the aliens communicate telepathically with each other, as well as with Betty and Barney. In these interactions the aliens revealed to Betty their fascination with the different properties of her skin and Barney's.

When the Hills left the saucer, the aliens apparently told them to forget what had happened, and when they watched the UFO depart, both Betty and Barney were no longer able to recall what occurred for the two hours that they were abducted. As they relayed these "memories" during hypnosis, Simon would end the sessions by reinstating the Hills' amnesia to prevent the traumatic memories from resurfacing and disturbing the couple. Gradually, however, he allowed the Hills to remember what they had revealed in their sessions, finally offering Betty and Barney an explanation for the missing time and the physical and mental maladies that afflicted them after their trip.

The Hills did not initially seek publicity after uncovering their strange encounters. Privately, they told members of their church and spoke about their experiences to an amateur UFO study group, the Two State UFO Study Group in Quincy Center, Massachusetts. On 26 October 1965, however, a newspaper story appeared in the *Boston Traveler,* which asked, "UFO Chiller: Did

THEY Seize the Couple?" Reporter John H. Luttrell alleged to have been given an audiotape of the study group session at Quincy Center, and he obtained the interviews that the Hills had given to the UFO investigators. Luttrell's article was picked up by the United Press International (UPI) and was printed in newspapers and magazines around the world, garnering international attention for the abduction narrative.

In 1966, the Hills reached out to locally renowned UFO author John Fuller to publish their official version of the incident. Rather than having their account shared by a stranger, the Hills wanted to be able to tell their story in their own words. Fuller transcribed Simon's tape-recorded interviews of the Hills' hypnosis sessions, and he published the Hills' story, first in *Look* magazine, and then in his book, *The Interrupted Journey* (1966). His volume would go on to sell many copies and would greatly publicize the abduction encounter in the United States and around the world, and the Hills' case established the typical features of the alien abduction paradigm.

Betty and Barney Hill's encounter shook the ufological community, especially since their purported experience sounded nothing like the earlier contactee narratives; the aliens' motivations were much more ominous than they were in the contactee tales and they seemed to be fundamentally interested in the study of human beings, especially since they focused so intently on the Hills' reproductive organs and their racial backgrounds. For many scientifically-oriented ufologists, it made sense that the extraterrestrials might be interested in human biology, so the Hills' narrative seemed a more likely version of alien contact than the fantastical and mystical stories told by the contactees and by those reporting to have met the MIBs. The Hills case also seemed different from the contactees who were very public about their experiences; Betty and Barney, on the other hand, did not (at least initially) seek out publicity, but rather appeared preoccupied with just wanting to figure out what had happened to them.

Boston psychiatrist Dr. Benjamin Simon's involvement in the case also lent it much legitimacy. Even though Simon would explain that he did not believe that the Hills' recovered memories were exactly what they experienced, and he interpreted their idea of the alien abduction as a manifestation of subconscious anxieties and vivid imaginations, Fuller's text, which popularized the case, played down Simon's assessment and presented the recovered memories as evidence of an abduction by aliens. Fuller also emphasized the fact that the Hills could not consciously remember the experience and needed to have it extracted by a psychiatrist using hypnosis, and he drew attention to the fact that the couple underwent separate hypnosis sessions, yet their stories worked to corroborate one another.[114] Since the Hills did not originally recall the event, many ufologists felt that this ruled out the chance that it was a deliberate hoax — which made their story more enticing — and it seemed that the Hills conveyed a genuine sense of trauma in the transcripts of the hypnosis sessions, which lent authenticity to their report. Many ufologists at the time, including several of the staunch nuts-and-bolts researchers, therefore found that the Hills' case offered a sense of believability to the stories of extraterrestrial contact, and the case served to elevate and validate stories of human-alien contact in the UFO community.

The Abduction Stories Continue

After the incident with the Hills, the abduction phenomena took off slowly, but later abduction accounts testified to very similar experiences and developed into a highly stylized genre.[115] Many abduction stories that emerged in the decades following were not widely publicized, but other alleged abductees, some who had read the Hills' account and recognized the similarities with their own experiences, privately sought help from therapists. In 1975, however, only a few weeks after

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[114] Of course, he played down the fact that because the Hills were married and lived together, they may have influenced each other's stories.

[115] See Roger Luckhurst (1998) for a description of the generic characteristics of alien abduction.

NBC televised a docu-drama that brought the Hills' story to network television, American logger Travis Walton came forward with another claim of abduction after he disappeared in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona for five days, before returning to tell of his strange experiences aboard a spaceship. His story drew media attention across the United States, especially after his disappearance was corroborated by the rest of the logging crew, who admitted to seeing a strange golden disc hovering above the clearing where Walton went missing; hence, Walton's case was remarkable for it did not just involve Walton but also several of his coworkers, who also passed lie-detector tests when attesting to the validity of Walton's account. *The National Enquirer* originally published Walton's story, and in 1978 Walton wrote about his own experiences in *Fire in the Sky: The Walton Experience*.[116] The end of this decade also saw the publication of another abduction narrative, *The Andreasson Affair: The Documented Investigation of a Woman's Abduction Aboard a UFO* ([1979] 1999), written by Raymond Fowler, which details the case of Betty Andreasson, a devout conservative Christian Massachusetts housewife, who reported ongoing encounters with strange creatures invading her home beginning in 1967.

These early stories of abduction, though exceptional, were originally treated as anomalous incidents. In 1981, however, prominent, self-fashioned UFO and abduction researcher Budd Hopkins published *Missing Time*, in which he describes how these various accounts constitute a wider phenomenon of alien abductions happening across the United States, whereby hundreds, if not thousands, of human beings are being kidnapped and brought aboard extraterrestrial spaceships. In 1987, he published his second book *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods,* where he details the similarities, convergences, and patterns in abduction cases and

[116] *The National Enquirer* has had a longstanding history of popularizing accounts about aliens and UFOs in the United States, and it had launched a special call for alien abduction stories in 1974 (just before the Walton incident); it received, and later published and printed, many of these stories for circulation.

concludes that these phenomena have a "long-term, specific, experimental purpose" (35). According to Hopkins, extraterrestrials are visiting Earth and treating humans as laboratory specimens for incredible, secret, and possibly quite nefarious purposes. Hopkins traces the overlaps in the stories told to him by various abductees, and while he notices that aspects of these stories are variable, he finds that there exist notable trends in the way that abductees describe their experiences.

These unwitting human captives explain how they are kidnapped from their homes or vehicles, are brought aboard strange ships in the sky, and are subjected to a series of highly traumatic and invasive procedures, such as bodily probing, pregnancy tests, and the extraction of sperm, eggs, and fetuses. Sometimes, too, the aliens purportedly implant in the human subject tracking devices, used to record human movements and thoughts, and to transmit telepathic messages into the brain. The extraterrestrials then erase their captives' memories, leaving gaps of missing time and only a lurking impression that something has occurred. The abductees, sensing that something strange may have transpired, but having no indication of what could have happened, often turn to hypnosis to uncover their memories, only to discover the haunting and traumatic experiences of their abduction by aliens.

Hopkin's speculations about the aliens' motivations in alien abduction lent themselves to a conspiratorial reading of the abduction phenomenon, and, as we shall see in the next chapters, elements of conspiratorial thinking are an important aspect of ufology's strategies of storytelling. His claim that extraterrestrials are secretly abducting unwitting humans for the purposes of an intergalactic interbreeding project gave rise to a popular alien conspiracy theory in which the aliens are cast as malicious plotters infiltrating our planet and conducting perverse experiments on human subjects, while most individuals are totally unaware of what is really going on. Hopkins's book

Intruders, especially, promoted the idea that possible malign workings underly the alien abduction phenomenon.

Hopkins's books were widely circulated, and *Intruders* even made an appearance on the *New York Times* best-sellers list, which brought the idea of alien abduction to a broad audience. His powerfully suggestive texts carry a performative function, and his writings strategically engage the reader to recognize their own abductions in feelings of "missing time" and things being out of place. By encouraging patients and readers to look for their own symptoms, Hopkins begins to plant in the mind of the reader this idea that an alien abduction may have happened. That is, readers who may have sensed something strange going on in their lives, or who may not have clear memories of an event, or who simply felt uneasy for no particular reason, could now explain these feelings as possibly being caused by extraterrestrial beings, which works to interpolate these readers as potential alien abductees. Hopkins's texts, and many of the ufological writings that followed, seek to draw the reader in so that they can understand their own experiences in these stories of alien abduction, and many critics have cautioned that Hopkins might inadvertently be influencing people's stories through his writings.[117] Despite these cautions, these stories resonated for many people, and at the peak of the hype around alien abduction, hundreds of thousands of individuals claimed to have been abducted by extraterrestrial beings.

Hopkins's approach to alien abduction helped elevate its status in ufology, and many ufologists — even many of the nuts-and-bolts ufologists — began to treat alien abduction as a serious and scientific aspect of ufological inquiry. After the decades-long investigations of UFO reports had

[117] Some abduction websites have even made checklists to help an individual determine if they have been abducted. These checklists include the inability to account for periods of time, sleep disorders, waking up with unusual bodily sensations, appearance of mysterious marks on the body, feeling monitored, watched and/or communicated with, a vague recollection of a close encounter, or the unexplained healing of ailments or afflictions, any of which may suggest that the individual has been abducted by aliens.

not turned up any concrete, physical evidence, ufology struggled to maintain its influence; but alien abduction reinvigorated ufology by offering up a new and exciting area of study, one that bridged the mystical and spiritual aspects of earlier alien contact encounters with a deeply scientific approach.

Again, the emphasis on the experimentation on human bodies made alien abduction appear to be rooted in scientific understandings of human biology, which seemed more realistic and credible than earlier alien encounters. Further, the fact that some abductees claimed to have been implanted with devices offered potential avenues to "prove" UFO and ET phenomena through scientific means, which appealed to many nuts-and-bolts ufologists.[118] And, perhaps most importantly, hypnosis — which I will discuss more thoroughly in a moment — seemed (at least to abduction investigators) to ground alien abduction within a fundamentally scientific framework. Hypnosis, which has been officially endorsed as a therapeutic method by many medical, psychiatric, dental, and psychological associations throughout the world, was viewed by many ufologists as a scientific technique used to "recover" memories of alien abductions. By tapping into the subconscious and unconscious mind, ufologists found that hypnosis could enable individuals to recall things that they otherwise could not remember, and since hypnosis had been used as a medical treatment in many applications, ufologists argued that it offered a clear indicator of the validity of alien abduction experiences.

Alien Abduction in the Academy

The elevation of the topic of alien abduction in ufology was reinforced when these phenomena attracted the attention of some notable scholars across the United States, whose credentials brought

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[118] Of course, the supposed "alien implants" that have been extracted from the bodies of alleged abductees have been difficult to authenticate, and there is much debate in ufology, and in the broader scientific community, over whether any of these "implants" constitute evidence of an alien encounter.

serious legitimacy to abduction research. Dr. David Jacobs, an American historian, was one of the first academics to publish a book about the alien abduction phenomenon. In his *Secret Life: Firsthand Documented Accounts of UFO Abductions* (1993), Jacobs conducted interviews with sixty individuals and investigated 300 "independently corroborated accounts" to figure out what was really going on with all these claims of alien abduction.

As a historian, Jacobs argues that his research offers a "chronological narrative" to help make sense of the phenomenon: "In the discipline of history, one spends years learning how to analyze documents and other forms of evidence, put them together into a coherent, logical whole, write serious historical works, and make knowledgeable contributions to the field" (27). Jacobs was convinced that "the abduction accounts were forming themselves into distinct patterns of activity," and he argues that his historical approach allowed him to "perceive what was happening in various abduction accounts and to make connections" (27). He admits that "I knew I was on shaky ground in terms of both my own analysis and science. I was using primary anecdotal evidence as the basis of my research. Stories that people tell are a weak form of evidence for most scientists" (27). However, he notes that "all the major accounts of abduction in the book share common characteristics and thus provide a confirmation of one another," and he uses their similarities to construct his view of the abduction phenomenon (15).

To supplement his historical research, Jacobs also apparently taught himself hypnosis so that he could conduct the abduction research himself. He writes, "I read books about hypnosis. I attended a hypnosis conference. I learned about the dangers and pitfalls of hypnosis" (23), and he hypnotized many of his research subjects to gain a better understanding of what alleged abductees had supposedly experienced. By using hypnosis, and by looking at the overlaps in the stories told by the abductees, Jacobs offers the conclusion that aliens are real and are conducting complex

reproductive experiments on human beings to produce a posthuman, or human-alien hybrid, species (3; 10; 146–150). Like Hopkins's, Jacobs's speculations were tinged with a sense of conspiracy, and he suggested that the aliens' motivations were quite possibly nefarious.

Jacobs's bold claims were met with significant criticism, especially from members of the academic and scientific communities, who challenged Jacobs's research and ostracized him from these scholarly channels. Critics were apt to point out that Jacobs's academic credentials came from his training in history, not in science, and they accused Jacobs of using his academic position to legitimate his research, even though it did little to meet the standards required of serious academic study. His detractors called attention to his dubious use of hypnosis to support his grand claims, especially since he provided no indication of the sources he turned to in order to learn the practice, and they mocked his assertion that he learned "to distinguish the unreliable material from what appeared to be legitimate memories," arguing instead that he interpreted his data in such a way as to construct his own narrative of what was going on (27). Jacobs, they find, did little to question how these stories may have become contaminated by other influences, such as popular culture and suggestion through hypnosis, and instead he uses the similarities in the stories as evidence of their truth.

Despite these criticisms, Jacobs's scholarly credentials imbued his works with a certain authority, and many individuals concluded that he was a trusted and legitimate source on the matter. Ufology benefited from Jacobs's qualifications, and his work became highly respected in the field; it was seen as establishing *the* model for alien abduction research and it solidified hypnosis as the appropriate methodology to carry out its study. Even though ufology as a whole is skeptical of academics and experts, it has strategically relied on the voices of a few key academic

dissenters to prop up its own authority, and Jacobs served as a trailblazer for ufology by offering a sense of seriousness to the alien abduction phenomenon.

Another trailblazer was Dr. John Mack, a tenured professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, and Pulitzer Prize winner for his biography of T.E. Lawrence. In the 1980s, Mack began to study alien abduction as a serious phenomenon, and while he initially suspected that abductees were suffering from mental illnesses, he was unable to locate obvious pathologies in the persons he interviewed. He found that his sample groups of abductees were random and came from all walks of life and all parts of society: "These people suffered from no obvious psychiatric disorder, except the effects of traumatic experience, and were reporting with powerful emotion what to them were utterly real experiences" (Mack, [1994] 2007, 7). For Mack, the abduction phenomenon was not something that could just be explained away as some sort of pathology: there was something *real* behind these stories of abduction, even if this "reality" was intangible and it was impossible for modern science to grasp what was really going on.

Mack published his own volume *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* two years after Jacobs's *Secret Life;* he also wrote a glowing forward to Jacobs's book prior to completing and publishing his own research, and he dedicated his book "to Budd Hopkins, who led the way," suggesting that Mack was highly influenced by the works of his ufological predecessors. In *Abduction*, Mack explains that he devoted four years of his studies to alien abduction research, and he felt that his background in psychology qualified him as a legitimate voice on the matter. This point was echoed in ufological channels, and Mack's position as a psychologist afforded his study significant scientific prestige, making it one of the most authoritative texts in the field of ufology.

In *Abduction,* Mack contends that psychology and psychiatry are appropriate fields to approach the study of alien abduction, but Mack also argues that the researcher needs to adopt a new method

that balances the scientific with the spiritual, where “the feelings and spirit of the facilitator in alternative therapeutic situations, as well as his or her rational mind and observational skills, are a vital aspect of the therapeutic or investigative method” (387). Here, Mack makes the argument that “feelings and spirit” are an important part of the analytical process, which makes his position markedly different from the largely objective standpoint presented by orthodox science. Mack also focuses heavily on the importance of the abduction experiences themselves and he treats abduction as a clue to the mysteries of life; of course, this approach went against the dominant rational and materialist worldview upheld by other practitioners in his discipline.

Like Jacobs and Hopkins, Mack also turns to hypnosis to study the phenomenon, and he argues that “Hypnosis appears to complete or greatly add to the process of remembering and has proved in this field to be a valuable therapeutic and investigative tool” (Mack, 1993, 10). (As we shall see in a moment, this is a serious point of contention in orthodox scientific channels). He further explains that “in my work with abductees I am fully involved, experiencing and reliving with them the world that they are calling forth from their unconscious,” again emphasizing that the completely objective stance of science needs to be abandoned to gain a better understanding of the abduction phenomenon (Mack, [1994] 2007, 391).

In his appeals to psychological and psychiatric discourse, and in his reliance on therapy and hypnosis, Mack seeks to elevate personal experience itself as the criterion for knowledge. As Jodi Dean (1997, 51) points out, ufology has always been shaped around “questions of trust and credibility as much as around empirical evidence,” and ufologists have “resisted the view that the judgements of significant numbers of Americans are unreliable.” Mack’s research falls in line with this approach; he emphasizes that ordinary people from all walks of life report these very similar stories of abduction, and he contends that these people can be trusted, especially since they have

reported such strikingly similar experiences. Mack also argues that their experiences themselves are valuable, even if they cannot be subjected to the scientific testing required by a purely materialist science; as Dean elaborates, "located at the primary site of ufological inquiry, the witness, these [therapeutic] techniques provide more than insight into an individual's feelings and experiences. They access the production of these feelings and experiences, pointing to a truth beyond the witness" (57).

While relying on many of the same methods as Hopkins and Jacobs, Mack came to different conclusions about the meanings behind the abduction encounter. Mack became interested in the spiritual dimensions of the abduction experience and his work offers an attempt to come to terms with the "potential implications of the abduction phenomenon for the expansion of human consciousness"; throughout his writings, Mack shows interest in the way that abduction opens to a "mysterious reality that may be beyond the manifest physical world" (Mack, [1994] 2007, 436). He also finds that alien abductees often return from their encounters with a sense of new understanding. While acknowledging that his patients underwent significant trauma, Mack emphasizes the transcendence of alien abduction and the heightened sense of spiritual awakening his patients experienced after being taken by the aliens.

Trauma and Transcendence, and The New Age Ethos

This sense of transcendence and spiritual growth following the trauma of abduction was first popularized by the ground-breaking publication *Communion: A True Story* (1987) by Whitley Strieber, a science fiction and horror novelist. While Strieber had established a reputation for himself as a writer of fiction, he claimed that *Communion* was a true story describing his own experiences with strange, otherworldly beings. In his account, Strieber offers a very personal and intimate narrative of his experiences of abduction, which he first remembered occurring on the

evening of 26 December 1985 in his log cabin home in a secluded corner of upstate New York. Strieber's experience began when he first noticed unsettling pain in his anal region, an unexplained infection on his finger, and an overwhelming sense of anxiety, which made him seek professional help from Dr. Donald F. Klein.

Klein conducted several hypnosis treatments on Strieber, which helped him recover his memories from that December night. In *Communion,* Strieber describes his dark, traumatic encounters with strange-looking creatures who invaded his home, abducted him, and subjected him to a series of humiliating and painful procedures (including the insertion of a large needle into his brain and another instrument into his anus, as well as the collection of his ejaculate and fecal matter). As he underwent hypnosis, he also uncovered deeper memories from throughout his childhood when these "visitors" had taken him against his will. Despite the traumas he endured while aboard his captors' ship, Strieber recounts the transformative aspect of his abduction and the "communion" he ultimately experiences with his captors.

Strieber's background as a fiction writer meant that his abduction narrative was well written and entertaining, and it allowed him to capture the horrifying nature of the experience unlike any abduction text before, especially since most prior abduction accounts were written as reports or transcripts of the alleged encounter.[119] This colourful and lively text commanded a wide readership and launched itself onto the *New York Times* best-sellers list soon after it was published, relaying the story of alien abduction to a broad audience. In doing so, it re-popularized many of the key features of alien abduction (such as missing time; being taken aboard a strange and sterile spacecraft; bodily experimentation by the captors and a focus on the human reproductive organs;

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[119] Of course, his detractors have also used his background to point out that Strieber is an imaginative, creative person capable of conjuring up fantastical stories.

and the recovery of these memories through hypnosis). While these elements appeared in the original Hills case in the mid-1960s, and again in the Walton and Andreasson cases in the 1970s, Strieber's complicated and deeply emotional story of abduction kept the public interest in the topic going into the 1990s. His story of abduction also brought a new interpretation to the abduction phenomenon by emphasizing both the traumatic and transcendent aspects of alien abduction, a point that Mack came to elaborate on in *Abduction.*

In emphasizing this sense of transcendence, both Mack and Strieber's texts draw connections among UFOs, alien abduction, and New Age spiritual awareness. The "New Age" is a diverse religious phenomenon referred to loosely as a "movement," which incorporates a plethora of different Eastern and mystical traditions into a smorgasbord of religious ideas to pick and choose from (Lyon, 1993, 119). Its rhetoric, Roger Luckhurst elaborates, involves discarding "Western ego-centric and socio-economic goals for Orientalized philosophies," thereby de-traditionalizing religiosity and elevating the Self to the level of the sacred (Luckhurst, 1998a, 41).

Luckhurst also describes New Ageism as a "populist and mystical response" to living in a "technologized lifeworld" (40): "In its de-politicized stance and its turn inward toward self-responsibility and the wealth of spiritual power, the New Ager conforms ideally to the late capitalist subject. In its attack on science and technology, it is nevertheless desperate for scientific legitimation" and the New Age ethos seeks to unite both science and spirituality (41). Here, Luckhurst agrees with Heelas's (1993) findings that New Ageism is both counter-modern and decidedly modern, and he identifies the New Age movement as having a profound influence on "how abduction accounts are articulated": many alien abductees express sentiments that are very much in line with the New Age ethos (Luckhurst, 1998, 40).

Strieber's account, for instance, seems heavily influenced by this New Age philosophy. Interestingly, he never uses the term "alien" or "extraterrestrial" to describe his captors, and he offers many speculations of what they could be, including aliens from other planets, beings from parallel universes or other dimensions, mythological figures or ancient gods conjured from the communal unconscious, or beings summoned into physical existence by the mind itself. Speculating over these possibilities, Strieber's account is saturated with expressions of New Age thought: he amalgamates "comparative mystical literature, including … the Asian contemplative traditions of Zen Buddhism, Chinese Taoism, and Indo-Tibetan Tantra. …" and invokes categories such as "the Koan of Zen Practice or the Kundalini and 'third eye' of Indian Tantric Yoga," to speculate on the meanings behind his experiences (Kripal, 2011, 294). In addition to these Eastern spiritualities, he further draws from Western religious traditions, with the very title of his book *Communion* gesturing to Catholicism, but his borrowings from Western religion become largely de-traditionalized. Strieber comes to understand his abduction experience as both spiritual and scientific, traumatic and transcendent, and his text offers a solution to the tensions between theology and secularism by meshing spiritual enlightenment with scientific discovery and reconfiguring these oppositional epistemologies into a holistic formulation, one that is very much in line with this New Age logic.

Mack's text also seems inspired by this New Age spirituality. "Beginning with a necessary apocalypse and ending in personal growth and expanded consciousness," Mack's approach draws attention to the paradigm-shifting nature of alien abduction (Luckhurst, 1998a, 41). According to Mack (1994, 11; 31; 140; 376), the abduction experience is an "ontological shock" and requires "another ontological paradigm" to understand it, and as Roger Luckhurst notes, "Mack's appeal is that abduction shatters the 'consensus reality' constructed by science" and is "about surrendering

to an ‘ego-death’ similar to the experience of near-death, meditation, and shamanism,” which makes his discourse decidedly New Age (Luckhurst, 1998a, 41).

According to Mack, scientific objectivity is important but it can only get us so far. He emphasizes that we need a new way to embrace alien abduction, one that requires a break from the epistemological foundations of traditional scientific discourse. Mack suggests that alien abductions “represent a real and revolutionary encounter with intelligences beyond the scope of our present understanding,” and he sees the abduction experience as creating new ways of knowing and understanding the world, where “the rationalistic polarities of mental and physical, subjective and objective may have proved too rigid and narrow to encompass the reality of human experience” (Bullard, offering an account of Mack’s talk from the 1994 Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, 9–16).

As such, Mack’s approach differs from that of Hopkins and Jacobs, who are hard proponents of the ET hypothesis and who see the abduction phenomenon as entirely real and physical; rather, Mack’s philosophy is grounded in psycho-spiritual theories, making them perhaps more aligned with Jung’s ideas, and he sees alien abduction as both a subjective and objective experience. That is, he argues that alien abduction has a literal physical aspect to it, but it is also “some kind of psychological, spiritual experience occurring and originating perhaps in another dimension,” which makes it tangible and intangible, physical and spiritual all at once (“Interview with John Mack,” *PBS/Nova Online*, 1996). He also endorses the notion that alien abduction signals that humanity is collectively undergoing developmental shifts in understanding by gradually alerting us to additional dimensions of reality.

Mack’s research was fundamentally important for ufology, which was struggling to reconcile the scientific and spiritual approaches to UFO and ET phenomena. His suggestion that modern

materialist science is limited in its ability to understand the abduction experience appealed to the spiritually-oriented ufologists, and they appreciated the way in which Mack advocated instead for an exploration of spiritually-based consciousness and a closer examination of “the profound experience that stands in its own light” (“Interview with Dr. John E. Mack,” SciFi.com, 2002).

At the same time, the nuts-and-bolts scientists valued Mack’s conclusion that the abduction phenomenon needed to be subjected to the critical and analytical methodologies and theoretical perspectives offered by the fields of psychology and psychiatry. Mack’s work brought stories of alien contact in line with a scientific approach, at least more so than the earlier alien contactee narratives. Whereas the alien contactees drew heavily from the esoteric and the mystical, Mack’s research sought to understand the numinous experiences of extraterrestrial contact in scientific terms, and he speculated that the abduction experience might be the result of multi-dimensional interactions of objects intersecting with our dimensional reality and leading to paraphysical traces of UFOs being viewed in our skies and alien beings appearing to abductees. By describing alien abduction as an encounter with evolved beings from other dimensions, his theories became framed by scientific discourse; as Brenda Denzler describes it, this became “a sign of the cultural times, of a day and age when the divine had been secularized, subjected to historical-critical analysis, and rationalized to bring it more into conformity with the dominant scientific worldview” (2001, 123).

By challenging conventional science but also conforming to its discourse, his work helped narrow the divide between the spiritually-oriented ufologists and the science-minded ones. According to The John E. Mack Institute website, a non-profit ufological organization that seeks to encourage the continuation of Mack’s research, Mack’s work “brings us to the edge of material reality and beyond, shattering the boundary that has separated matter and spirit and scientific or spiritual ways of knowing” (“Books by John E. Mack,” *John E. Mack Institute*, 2017). Many

ufologists appreciated Mack's medical-scientific approach to abduction and found that his credentials offered legitimacy to his arguments, but they also welcomed the way in which Mack refused to play by the rules of the conventional scientists, who were seen as too narrow-minded to offer any significant insights into UFO and ET phenomena. Mack's research therefore tests the boundaries of science and scientific authority — a challenge that fits in well with the overall project of ufology.

Still, not all ufologists were on board with Mack's approach; some ufologists continued to see abduction research as a waste of time that distracts from the real issue of uncovering empirical evidence of UFO phenomena, and there was a concern that abduction research continued to endanger the scientific pursuits of ufology, "threatening to replace it with fuzzy, mystical, quasi-religious New Age thinking" (Denzler, 2001, 67). At the same time, many ufologists saw that the abduction scenario offered significant value to ufological research, especially in the way that it posed fundamental questions about the human experience. Further, ufologists recognized that despite their internal disagreements it made sense that ufology as a whole unite in a coalition against official bodies of knowledge, so nuts-and-bolts ufologists strategically aligned with abduction researchers to promote the aims of the ufological movement.[120] While the stigma surrounding ET contact has never been fully removed from ufology, over time many ufologists came to recognize the importance of abduction experiences for coming to understand UFO and ET phenomena, and as Brenda Denzler puts it, "legitimate one-on-one contact between human beings and aliens" became "viewed as one of the best chances ufology had to obtain answers about — if not, indeed, to secure proof of the reality of — UFOs" (65).

The Abduction Controversy and the Rise of Alien Abduction in Popular Culture

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[120] I will address this strategic alignment again in my sixth chapter when I examine how these different strands of ufological research are presented at the International UFO Festival in Roswell, New Mexico.

While Mack's claims largely gained acceptance from the field of ufology, naturally they drew fire from his academic colleagues. Even though his credentials lent themselves to the prestige of science, many critics argued that "far from embracing the ethos of the objective scientists, Mack wants to establish the 'expanded use of the self' as an investigative method," which is itself "a mystical rather than scientific procedure" (Cowlishaw, 2004, 599). Mack was seen as privileging "knowledge derived from personal experience rather than from objective reasoning," which is "a way of knowing that requires no credentials but the ability to render oneself a speaking subject" (593). This was exactly Mack's point, but it did not sit well with the academic establishment.

Consequently, he was investigated by the Harvard Medical School for allegedly "affirming the delusions" of patients who believed themselves to be abductees (Beam, 4 August 1995). Considering his highly controversial research, a special faculty committee was convened to evaluate Mack's work, which ultimately "decided that Mack could retain his tenure and would not be censured for his conduct"; however, most of his peers rejected his approach and he was largely scoffed at by other academics in his field (Lavery, Hague, and Cartwright, 1996, 10). The treatment of Mack's research again served to reaffirm the boundaries surrounding conventional scientific discourse; his ideas threatened the epistemological foundations on which modern science stands, so the wider academic and scientific community either ridiculed his work or dismissed it altogether.

These flippant sentiments were also frequently echoed by mainstream journalistic sources. In her doctoral dissertation, Linda Billings (2005) looks at the role played by journalists in reproducing the boundaries of scientific authority by focusing on their treatment of Mack's research, and she finds that most mainstream journalists followed professional conventions and maintained the cultural authority of science by probing for "personal and professional flaws,

critiquing his research methods and questioning his conceptions of reality" (2). Similarly, most mainstream texts dismissed Strieber's narrative as nothing more than the fantastical imaginings of a deranged crackpot, and few mainstream sources gave the idea of alien abduction any sustained and serious attention. At the same time, as I have mentioned earlier in this dissertation, ufology has long been at work in creating its own outlets to disseminate its ideas and it has successfully sustained a wide and diverse public with an interest in ufological debates. And with the highly public controversy surrounding Mack's research and Strieber's claims, these ufological ideas reached a broader public than ever before — some individuals even began considering that their own bizarre experiences might actually be explained by alien abduction.

Despite the exclusion of this topic from most official channels, Mack's work spread throughout ufological circles, as well as in popular culture; he was interviewed on popular talk shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Today Show,* and *Dateline,* he appeared in numerous popular documentaries about alien abduction, such as *Intruders* (1992), and his work was featured in *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Vanity Fair,* and *Time*. Since he was largely excluded from professional outlets, Mack used popular media to bypass official channels and get his ideas out to public, and even if many journalists mocked his claims, his professional status elicited attention from a large segment of the American public.

Strieber could also be found giving interviews on various talk show programs and *Communion* could be found on bookshelves across the US and the world. The popularity of *Communion* in American culture cannot be emphasized enough, and Whitley Strieber's account encouraged the topic of alien abduction to become a household conversation across the United States. The cover of *Communion*, painted by Ted Jacobs, depicts a feminine, almond-eyed humanoid creature with haunting black eyes, which cemented the iconic image of the alien in popular culture; after its

publication, thousands of self-identified abductees came forward reporting how the image of the alien on the front cover of the novel awakened strange and disturbing memories of their own abductions (Roth, 2005, 69).

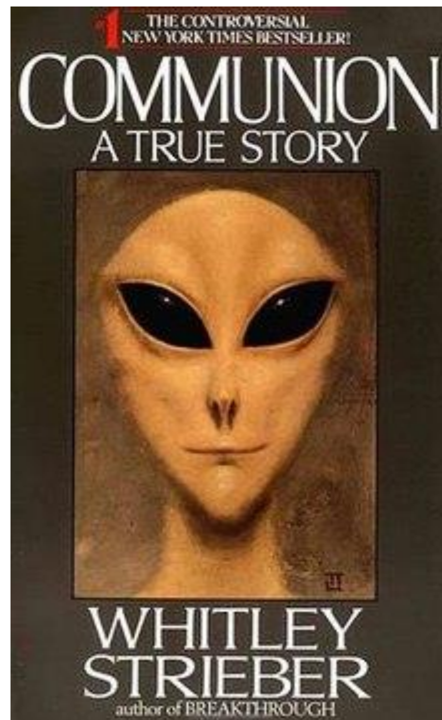

Image of the cover of *Communion: A True Story*. Image by Ted Jacobs. 1987. Digital image. Accessed on 3 July 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communion_(book)

Following the release of *Communion*, letters started arriving to Strieber describing similar experiences of anomalous visitors interacting with unwitting humans. In *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained* (2017a), Strieber recounts his shock over the reception of *Communion*:

> Had you asked me prior to the release of the book how many people might claim similar experiences, I would have estimated the number in the hundreds. I'd met twelve or fifteen, and knew of perhaps thirty others. Then the letters started coming in, at first by the hundreds, then the thousands, then a great cataract of letters, easily ten thousand a month, from all over the world. The publisher told me that the book

> was selling far beyond even their most optimistic expectations. … Between 1987 and 2000, we must have received well in excess of half a million letters, at least a hundred thousand of them detailed accounts. We stopped counting at two hundred thousand, and that was in 1992, and they were still arriving in surprising numbers as late as 1998. We have kept around thirty thousand on file. (Strieber, 2017a, 31–32)

With the publication of *Communion*, alien abduction became the most significant story of alleged human-alien contact in the last decades of the millennium; while these reports began on the fringes, they quickly became popular topics of conversation in households across the United States.

As stories of alien abduction became more commonplace, the aforementioned Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs, along with another ufologist with academic credentials, sociologist Dr. Ron Westrum (1992), suggested that as many as 3.7 million citizens of the United States had been abducted by extraterrestrials. They came to this number by interpreting a 1992 Roper poll conducted between July and September 1991, which asked respondents if they had experienced any of the strange feelings or symptoms characteristic of the typical alien abduction encounter.[121] This astounding figure has certainly not gone unchallenged, but the striking number presented by Hopkins, Jacobs, and Westrum was widely publicized. It was even discussed in depth at a five-day academic conference held at MIT (C.D.B. Bryan, 1995), and it brought before the American public the suggestion that alien abduction had become endemic in the United States.[122]

This conference at MIT also popularized (and legitimized) ideas about alien abduction. Organized by Mack and physicist David Edward Pritchard, the conference attracted a wide range

[121] Roper polls are conducted by the Roper Center for Opinion Research, located at Cornell University, one of the leading archives in the United States which specializes in data from public opinion surveys.
[122] See Philip Klass (1993), Lloyd Stires (1993), and Susan Blackmore (1998) for a criticism of this interpretation as a misleading and gross overestimate of the results.

of professionals representing a variety of views on the topic of abduction (including the highly skeptical and the serious), and it offered a rare moment when the strict boundaries of academia were eased to accommodate the perspectives of alien abduction researchers. Not surprisingly, things largely returned to the status quo after the five-day conference, and most ufologists — even those with academic credentials — continued to face difficulty publishing their theories and research about the subject in academic journals; however, the conference exposed the flexibility of these institutional boundaries, and it confirmed that some ufological research could meet the standards of academic inquiry and could be discussed seriously in an academic context. The proceedings of the conference were later published by C.D.B. Bryan (1995), which allowed those unable to attend the conference to read about the abduction research. This provided greater access to these ufological debates; it also suggested to the public that something serious may underlie these claims of abduction.

Of course, ideas about alien abduction were not simply discussed and promoted by ufologists, and alien abduction also became a tremendously popular subject in books, on television programs, and in films, many of which reflected strong conspiratorial leanings. For instance, alien abduction was featured in many of the storylines in the highly popular television program, *The X-Files* (1993-2002) [123] created and produced by Chris Carter, as well as the mini-series *Intruders* (1992) directed by Dan Curtis and written by Budd Hopkins, Barry Oringer, and Tracy Torme. The subject also featured centrally in such popular films as *Fire in the Sky* (1993), based on the aforementioned

[123] While it originally premiered to little fanfare, over its nine original seasons it gained a sizable viewing audience, with 29.1 million viewers at its peak and with an average of 19.8 million viewers between 1997–1998, making it the highest-rated program on *Fox* during that season (Meisler, 1998, 298). This attention prompted two blockbuster feature films based on the television series, *The X-Files* (1998) and *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* (2008), and despite a fourteen-year hiatus, the program was brought back on air in 2016 with six new episodes and more are slated for the future. The program helped bring alien conspiracy theories into mainstream culture, and consequently familiarized the wider American public with the conspiratorial notions about alien abduction.

Travis Walton case, and directed by Robert Lieberman; and *Communion* (1989), based on Strieber's experiences and directed by Philippe Moral, to name a few.

The cultural influence of these pop-culture ephemera cannot be overstated, and these popular texts, in addition to the serious works presented by Hopkins, Jacobs, Strieber, and Mack, among others, helped create a public with a sustained interest in these stories of alien contact. Throughout the 1990s, ufology experienced a kind of revival as the topic of alien abduction opened new avenues for ufological research and, arguably, there has been no other period in ufology's history, except perhaps in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when stories about aliens gained the attention of such a vast public. The scope of the idea of alien abduction in the United States during this time was astounding. With the over *half a million* letters received by Strieber, and with Gallup polls consistently indicating that approximately half of those polled believed that UFOs are real and of extraterrestrial origin, it is not possible to simply brush alien contact phenomena aside as part of some lunatic fringe — alien abduction has gained the attention of the wider American public.

Implicit Anxieties and Grey Aliens

These stories of alien captors abducting unsuspecting human beings proved to be captivating, and the idea that alien abduction could, in fact, be real resonated for many individuals. As mentioned, ufologists have pointed out that these stories conveyed a sense of genuineness and sincerity because they did not use the idea of alien contact to make an explicit commentary on the social and political climate, and many believed that the idea of alien abduction arose spontaneously and was unmotivated by external factors. Yet, I argue that there was something underlying these stories of alien abduction that connected to the historical moment from which they originated, and it is these resonances that made the alien abduction phenomenon so appealing to such a broad public. These stories, like the contactee tales before them, continued to express underlying

anxieties — albeit in a much more implicit way — and the staggering popularity of alien abduction in American society is owing to the way that they latched on to broader cultural concerns and offered an outlet to make sense of turbulent social and political changes taking place in the United States.

From its very beginnings, alien abduction was embedded within the social and political landscapes of the United States, even if this point was largely overlooked by ufology and by the alien abductees. Tracing back to the Betty and Barney Hill case, for instance, this foundational story of alien contact seems implicitly shaped by the cultural climate of the 1960s, in particular the burgeoning civil rights movement, and it is not a coincidence that Betty and Barney Hill, an interracial couple, first envisioned the ambiguous grey alien beings who were fascinated with their human bodies. As Martin Kottmeyer (1994, 9) argues, "the fact that the Hills were a bi-racial couple may be relevant to why they stand at the creation of this tradition."

David Drysdale (2008) elaborates on this point by offering a close reading of the Hill's story, and he locates a deep fixation over racial identity that permeates the Hill's account, even though Fuller attempted to cover it up in his analysis.[124] While Fuller insisted that the Hills were no longer troubled by the experiences of race, through Barney's own words, it became evident that racial

[124] For instance, during Barney's hypnosis sessions, he described his fears of what might happen when he arrived at the hotel, concerns that were fundamentally linked to his anxieties about being a black man: "The thoughts that were going through my mind were: Would they accept me? Because they might say they were filled up, and I wondered if they were going to do this, because I was prejudiced …" (Fuller, 1966b, 73). He also described his and Betty's visit to a restaurant, where he obsessed over the racial identity of his waitress: "There is a dark-skinned woman in there, I think, dark by Caucasian standards, and I wonder – is she a light-skinned Negro, or is she Indian, or is she white? – and she waits on us, and she is not very friendly, and I notice this, and others are there and they are looking at me and Betty, and they seem to be friendly or pleased, but this dark-skinned woman doesn't. I wonder then more so – is she Negro and wonder if I – if she is wondering if I know she is Negro and is passing for white (75)." In Barney's attempts to portray the aliens, his concerns over race surfaced again. When he first described the humanlike beings at the roadblock, he commented that he thought the alien was "a red-headed Irishman… because Irish are usually hostile to Negroes" (90). Soon afterwards, he described the leader as "a German Nazi," but with "slanted eyes" (91). Drysdale emphasizes the significance in Barney's accounts, observing that the Hills struggled to identify the race of the abductors, just as Barney tried to identify the race of the waitress at dinner, and Drysdale makes the point that Barney's descriptions of the aliens were shot with racial commentary.

anxieties haunted the Hill's reports. Similarly, Felisa Patricia Barbeito (2005, 202) contends that their descriptions of the grey aliens were "shaped by extremely potent and enduring conventions regulating the conception and articulation of racial difference in America," and Christopher F. Roth (2005, 61) writes that "the Hills were passive victims of interstellar racial dynamics that they little understood."

These authors make the argument that the image of the grey alien allowed the Hills to negotiate unconscious or repressed anxieties about racial power dynamics, and the grey-skinned aliens hinted at the very distressing challenges faced by an interracial couple amidst the civil rights politics of the 1960s in the United States. By settling on the description of aliens as having grey skin, Kottmeyer (1994) argues that the Hills were able to transcend the symbolic associations of white and black with good and evil, and the Hills invented grey-skinned aliens, instead of black or white ones, as a way of preventing racial connotations from being imposed on their experiences.

It is likely the Hills would disagree with this reading and would instead emphasize that their experiences were real and they were simply describing what they saw. Ufologists, too, tend to reject this kind of analysis, as it sees the abduction experience as merely a response to the social environment, and it denies the assertion that these experiences are real. As I have already stated, it is not my intent to argue for or against the objective reality of these experiences, but this tension points to the tricky thing with *real* aliens — ideas about them may arise from spontaneous subjective experiences, but they can only become framed in our human understandings, so these stories always come to reflect the world around us. Even if their experiences arose without any conscious motivation, the Hills came to describe these experiences in ways that were fundamentally shaped by their social worlds, which is why their story is so heavily saturated with

racial anxieties that seem to manifest in images of strange grey beings; this is also why these stories were so attractive in wider American discourse.[125]

These grey aliens became known simply as the Greys in ufological literature, and they did not disappear after the Hills' account. In fact, this image of grey-skinned aliens with oversized bald heads, wide slanting eyes, small, vestigial noses, lipless mouths, and frail bodies became cemented as *the* standard image of the alien in popular culture, suggesting an enduring fascination with the strange, grey-skinned creatures. That the image of the Greys became *the* popular representation of the alien figure is not a coincidence. Here, I draw from Michael Taussig (2009), who notes that colours are not simply neutral, but are charged with symbolic meaning. Grey symbolizes undecidability and, as Nils Bubant (2015, 187) remarks, "greyness … highlights ambiguity, ambivalence, absence, complexity, doubt, excess and paradox." He adds further that the colour seems to express the conditions of contemporary social life: "paradox is the order of the day, one might say, and its colour is grey" (188). It seems fitting that aliens became described in this way at a time when paradox and ambiguity were becoming viewed as ordinary life experiences, especially as the Cold War dragged on and fostered intense anxieties about who and what could be trusted.

Postmodern Skepticism and Ambiguous Authorities

According to Timothy Melley, the Cold War and the covert sphere brought about feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and powerlessness, leading to what he terms "agency panic," which he describes as "a pervasive set of anxieties about the way government, technologies, social

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[125] Ufology as a whole has exhibited an engaged fascination with race. By applying the human sciences to the contact experiences, ufology has sought to "understand alien physical forms in light of understandings and paradigms in physical anthropology," so many ufologists obsessed over the physical appearances of the aliens, which they attempted to slot into existing terrestrial classification systems (Roth, 2005, 41). In Christopher Roth's words, "put simply, ufology is in one sense all about race and has more to do with terrestrial racial schemes as social and cultural constructs than most UFO believers are aware" (Ibid.).

organizations and communication systems may have reduced human autonomy and uniqueness" (Melley, 2000, 7). The term is meant to describe the sense of diminished human agency felt by the average American at a time when control was perceived to be transferred away from human agents to larger agencies, institutions, and corporate structures, and where populations were "*openly* manipulated without their knowledge" (3).[126]

For Melley, agency panic gives voice to a far more general anxiety about the loss of individuality in the face of the increasingly vast, autonomous, and shadowy bureaucratic forces that seem to control our lives, and even our most intimate thoughts and bodily processes. In other words, it describes the intense anxiety that accompanies a loss of autonomy or self-control, as many American citizens have become convinced that their actions are being controlled by someone or something else much larger and more mysterious than they can pinpoint. Agency panic and its parallels with alien abduction are unmistakable, especially in the way in which aliens are frequently described as manipulating the human body without the subject's awareness, and abduction offers a tangible expression of these generalized anxieties that emerged from the covert sphere.

As Melley points out, this sense of agency panic intensified as the Cold War progressed, and the "forms of suspicion, skepticism, and uncertainty" that arose from the Cold War environment "would eventually find their fullest expression in postmodernism" (Melley, 2012, viii).[127] Postmodernism is a highly contested term, but the prefix "post-" suggests a departure from the

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[126]See Bridget Brown (2007); Wise (1976); Johnson (1989), and Englehardt ([1995] 2007) for further examples and analysis regarding events of government secrecy in the US.

[127] Postmodernism is a disputed and complicated term that refers to an aesthetic, literary, political, or social philosophy that is typically defined by attitudes of skepticism and irony, that rejects the ideologies of modernism, and that calls into question the assumptions of Enlightenment rationality. The related term, postmodernity, generally refers to the cultural state or condition of society which is said to occur after modernity, although there are many disagreements over this timeline, as well as disagreements over whether this can even be described as a linear periodization.

modern, so an understanding of it requires a brief contextualization of modernity. To reiterate, the Enlightenment project fits neatly into the modernist schema: the belief that reason and natural sciences would dispel the darkness of tradition — especially its irrational beliefs, its religious convictions and institutions, and its political despotism — is synonymous with the modernist project, which is why many have argued that modernity was inaugurated by René Descartes' ([1637] 2007) vision of philosophy and science that would make humans the masters over nature.

Eighteenth-century philosophers such as Immanuel Kant ([1784] 1996) would further support the modernist project and add to its discourse by seeing the Enlightenment as a linear process that would free humans from their naiveté and immaturity and would lead to a rational humanity capable of perfectibility. The modern subject that results can be characterized by a privileged sense of intellect and reason, and which emphasizes the free, rational, thinking individual at the centre of experience. Briefly, the tenets of modernity include a faith in science, empirical thinking, observation, and technological advancements and, by extension, a faith in experts who can steer us toward this progress, as well as the suppression of superstition and belief in spirits, ghosts, and gods, and a replacement of these ideas with scientific rationality.

However, with the erosion of the protective structures of smaller communities and traditions and their replacement with larger, impersonal organizations, in addition to the aloof forces of capitalism, some have argued that the individual has become more and more alone in the world. Modernity, it is suggested, has led to isolation, alienation, and an overwhelming sense of homelessness. This universal, rational subject, it has been claimed, is now facing a crisis, which some have argued has ushered in the postmodern age (Woods, 2004, 1; Lyon, 1993, 117). This postmodern age is often depicted as a period marked by perceived surmounting social anxieties,

as well as a skepticism of the project of modernity, particularly its commitment to scientific rationality, individualism, and universalism.

In his depiction of postmodernism, Melley (2012, 36–37) emphasizes this sense of skepticism and paranoia that characterizes the tenets and themes of postmodern thought:

> [Postmodernism's] central quality is skepticism about how to know and represent the world, particularly as history. Postmodernism emphasizes the constructed nature of narratives, philosophical and social structures, and even persons. It reflects the institutions of mass culture, and it thematizes the artifice of nearly everything, especially nature (or 'nature') itself. Its distinctive effect on readers and observers is disorientation or confusion about the nature of the real.

Accordingly, he traces postmodern thought as arising in some way from the covert state, which he sees as causing a shift concerning *all* public knowledge (and not just knowledge about CIA coups or clandestine government operations).

This is not to say that the Cold War caused postmodernity, "or that each enterprise did not have its own agents and agendas" (Douglas, 1998, 75), and Melley's claim

> is not that postmodernism is a simple product of the Cold War, but rather the national security institutions were among several crucial factors — including the postwar triumph of new mass media, strategic communications, and multinational capitalism — that altered the conditions of public knowledge in postwar Western societies, generating a pervasive skepticism about the public's ability to know what is real and true. A good deal of US postmodernism expresses this epistemological skepticism. (2012, 36)

In this sense, Melley's position is in line with Ann Douglas's, who writes that "postmodernity can not be fully explained outside of its cold war context," and "the postmodern critique of power makes the most sense when taken as a straightforward description of the extremes of dishonesty characteristic of the cold war era" (Douglas, 1998, 75). As Melley and Douglas both point out, skepticism and mistrust of experts and authorities represent essential tenets of postmodern thought.

The destabilization of traditional authority figures is elaborated on by Zygmunt Bauman, who traces transformations in contemporary thought. Bauman does not employ the term postmodernity, but similarly attempts to describe the cultural conditions at the end of the twentieth century, and he theorizes that the contemporary era is a period of "liquid modernity" which he contrasts with "solid modernity" (Bauman, 2000). Liquid modernity describes the instability, change, and constant flux that Bauman sees as marking the contemporary period, and his characterization bears many parallels with postmodernity. For Bauman, liquid modernity is solid modernity "coming to terms with its own impossibility; a self-monitoring modernity, one that consciously discards what it once was unconsciously doing" (Bauman, 1991, 272).

Liquid modernity is the result of the failure to rationalize the world and is an attempt to seek a new kind of permanence, paradoxically through its contingencies and constant change: "what I've chosen to call, more to the point, 'liquid modernity,' is the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty" (2014, 90). In its faith in uncertainty, Bauman points out that liquid modernity challenges the ideal that science can solve natural and social problems and it begins to question authorities — the scientists, experts, academics, and government officials — who were custodians of truth and guides of progress under solid modernity. Under liquid modernity, these authorities are seen as both the possible cause of, and the possible solution for, our problems (Bauman, 1987; Bauman, 1991, 210; Bauman, 2000, 22–

30). Hence, Bauman identifies how our recent frames of thinking have transformed traditional understandings of authority by making them appear much more ambiguous.

In its questioning of authority and its faith in uncertainty, the postmodern (or liquid modern) project also seems to align with some of the key messages and goals of ufology, so I am interested in how ufology came to be embedded within this postmodern discourse. I also find it significant that stories about alien abduction coincided with this "postmodern turn," and I do not think it is a coincidence that alien abduction became organized as *the* central topic of ufology at the same time that postmodernity was being theorized and discussed both in academic and popular discourse; as I shall show, alien abduction narratives and postmodernity share many significant affinities.

Postmodern Storytelling: An "Incredulity Towards Metanarratives"

The acceptance of ufology by a large and diverse public is certainly owing to the way in which it has attached itself to postmodern discourse, which has elevated ufology to stand as its own story and has enabled it to promote its incontrovertible claims. One of the most influential sources of postmodern theory is Jean-François Lyotard ([1979] 1984, 47–53), whose argument that postmodernism has allowed for the fracturing of overarching truths into smaller, incommensurable narratives can offer insight into the way in which ufology has been able to assert its own claims to the truth.

Of relevance to this discussion, Lyotard is interested in the way in which experts and scientists make claims of having access to higher forms of knowledge than the average person, and he argues that these claims are heavily flawed. For Lyotard, scientists have no more direct access to the truth than philosophers or historians do, or anybody else for that matter, and he sees scientists as storytellers who tell the results of their experiments through stories — or narratives — that are governed by the protocols of their field. He also finds that each discipline is its own game with its

own terminologies and it must play within the rules governed by its disciplinary boundaries, which allows for only a limited set of permissible moves. That is, a scientist does not face an infinite set of possibilities but must work within the scope of her or his discipline, which is itself determined by existing power structures. Consequently, he finds that science is just as political as any other human activity, and it is made up of "language games" — incommensurable and separate systems in which meanings are produced and rules for their circulation are created (xxv; 9–11; 53–67).

And yet he notes that science as a whole tries to deny its involvement in storytelling. Science pretends to exist beyond narrative, and from this stance it has produced a "grand-" or "meta-" narrative — an overarching story that is supposedly invested with the authority to comment on the validity of all other stories (xxiv). Metanarratives are presented implicitly as universal or absolute truths, and Lyotard argues that science has put forward the claim that it alone is the source of truth by appealing to knowledge and progress.[128] For Lyotard, this metanarrative, among others, was used to frame the project of modernity, and it was supported by the traditional elite, who benefitted from this overarching story.

With postmodernity, however, Lyotard notes a shift toward a different kind of storytelling as a reaction against the modern worldview's embrace of metanarratives, especially as the promises made by the grand narratives of modernity, such as scientific progress, were falling short.[129] Lyotard discusses the "incredulity towards metanarratives"— an incredulity that he sees characterizing the "postmodern condition" — arguing that postmodernity signals the dissolution of these grand narratives into smaller, local narratives: multiple different, discontinuous,

[128] Prior to the Enlightenment faith in reason and science, Lyotard argues that religious narratives were presented as universal truths.

[129] This promise was challenged by the introduction of nuclear weaponry, which demonstrated in horrific detail the negative possibilities of scientific progress. These concerns intensified as scientific "developments" were contributing to ecological problems on Earth. Further, while science was meant to better our lives, many people have reported feeling more anxious and restless, and science's claims to benefit everyone seemed misleading, as a privileged few were able to capitalize on the project of science.

incommensurable, and fragmentary histories that recognize no overarching authorities or truths (Ibid.).

His assertion is that the postmodern condition means that no ultimate discourse could be grounded in truth and these “small” or “little” narratives could de-privilege overarching official discourses (xi). As such, Lyotard presents the doctrine of postmodern relativism, whereby there are no universal, objective truths, and truth is always relative to some particular frame of reference. For Lyotard, this was something to be celebrated, as it meant that the narrative of history told by the dominant classes to naturalize their power would dissolve, and he sees these little narratives as posing a challenge to scientific authority and its grand claims of expressing a universal truth. Postmodernity, then, is characterized by a new form of storytelling in which separate, incommensurable stories can stand on their own as valid interpretations of the world.

While Lyotard celebrated this incredulity toward overarching grand narratives, many other commentators have questioned how this frame of thinking has given rise to a loss of bearings over who or what can be trusted, and an inability to establish any common foundations for what is true and what is false. By questioning traditional experts and promoting its own story as a valid interpretation of the world, ufological discourse falls in line with these postmodern frames of thinking, and ufology ultimately bares its full expression after the “postmodern turn” during a time when questions of trust and credibility have intensified to such a degree that it is often challenging to determine how to establish the foundations of what is true and what is false.

Jodi Dean makes this argument in *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (1998). In this text, Dean explores the invasion of extraterrestrials in American popular culture and she traces how aliens have moved from the expected realms of science fiction and the tabloids into broader popular culture, filling the pages of the *New York Times*, the

Washington Post, and the *Wall Street Journal,* intruding in academic debates and appearing in Ivy League university psychiatry departments and at MIT, entering storefronts as popular commodities, and infiltrating the homes of American citizens by popping up on links all over the Internet (1–2). Dean proclaims that we are living in an "age of aliens" — an invasion made possible by this disequilibrium over truth — and, by appropriating the language of the modern and the rational, she finds that ufology signals a crisis over knowledge itself.

According to Dean, this appearance of the alien is symbolic of our cultural moment: "The alien seduces us into a critical reassessment of our criteria for the truth: How do we determine what is real? What do we believe?" (4). As such, she argues that the alien "serves as a repository for postmodern anxieties," and the appearances of aliens in popular culture signal "a fugitivity of postmodern truth" where the "criteria for legitimacy are themselves abducted — the mainstream, the serious, the conventional, and the real become suspect" (22; 31; 54; 58). The appearance of ufology therefore thrives in this postmodern discourse.[130] In particular, the stories told about alien abduction resonate strongly with postmodernism, especially in the way in which they re-centre the goals of ufology away from attempting to establish empirical evidence and toward valuing the testimony of one's personal experience — a point that I will address more thoroughly in a moment.

Technology and the Truth

[130] Ufologists have certainly taken advantage of this postmodern discourse to promote their own claims. The IMHS Metaphysics Institute website offers a strong example of this ("IMHS Institute Home," 2017). This institute offers its own Master and PhD degrees in ufology, and on its accreditation page it boasts that "yes, IMHS degrees are 'real' degrees; they are simply different than traditional degrees. This does not make them less valid or less legal; it makes them different" ("IMHS Institute: About Metaphysical/ Metaphysics Degree Accreditation," 2017). It continues by explaining that the degree programs of the college are designed for solely "religious vocations as outlined in Chapter 246.084 of the Florida Statutes," and the degrees are granted by the authority of the International Church of Metaphysical Humanism, Inc. (ICMH), "a religious organization authorized by the First Amendment of the US Constitution to conduct religiously-based training" (Ibid.). The website explains that secular and non-secular degrees "are different and designed for different purposes" and that "a PhD in chemistry cannot be compared with a PhD in metaphysics. They exist for two different purposes. … One is designed for research in a certain field (such as chemistry), the other is designed more for educational and remedial purposes in helping people spiritually. *One is not necessarily better or worse than the other. They are just different*" (Ibid., emphasis added). Clearly, the relativistic attitude of postmodern thought offers the language to make these claims.

Dean attributes the pervasiveness of UFO beliefs and alien imagery to transformations in the US nearing the millennium, and she concludes that the appearance of the alien is related to the development of modern technologies and the digital age. That is, extraterrestrials have become mainstream as a result of the rise of the Internet, where the attention of the public has shifted from "outerspace to cyberspace" (5). With the Internet, "any and every idea could be broached, contested, or defended," and ufology has taken advantage of this (Denzler, 2001, 31); as I have already explained, ufology thrives on creating its own channels of knowledge and information and has established a very active digital presence to disseminate its own truth criteria.

As I have also shown, these concerns over technology's potential to undermine truth and to unsettle trust in authority did not begin with the postmodern turn. As "The War of the Worlds" case demonstrates, these concerns were in effect since the very beginnings of contemporary mass media; Dean notes, however, that these apprehensions have only amplified with the inception of more open and participatory forms of media, which have created channels for individuals to present their own truth claims. Consequently, democratic forms of media, such as the Internet, are often seen as culprits for encouraging the destabilization of trust and truth, and as "we have moved from a consensus reality to a virtual reality," Dean argues that it has become increasingly difficult to determine what is the truth (1998, 8). Hence, she contends that ideas about aliens signal a "skepticism toward experts, authorities, and a technology that has made virtuality a part of everyday life" (Ibid.).

For Dean, stories about alien abduction and conspiracy theories come from a disequilibrium in our access to information in the postmodern age, which is enabled by this cyberspace culture. As she argues, the digital age has led to the creation of multiple and often contradictory sources of information, which has made it impossible to know what sources to trust. She describes our world

as one in which there is a vast amount of information, but none of it is ever complete: there is always another theory we need to consider, and another expert opinion to consult (2002, 85–106). With so many different, and often incommensurable, sources of information, it makes it challenging or even impossible to appeal to a higher authority to infiltrate the truth. She concludes that we have no way of determining which accounts are correct and which are mistaken, and with so many truth claims being presented, it is exceedingly difficult to reach a consensus.

Dean's argument is reminiscent of Baudrillard's (1988, 5–6; 120–128) simulacra. According to Baudrillard, our society has become so reliant on models and maps that we have lost all reference to the real world that preceded the copy. Our reality, he finds, is simply a model of the model, and we have no way of accessing the real: "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory — *precession of simulacra* — it is the map that engenders the territory" (166). According to Baudrillard, there is "no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real itself" (167). Baudrillard does not suggest that postmodern culture is merely artificial, because the concept of artificiality still requires a sense of reality to be able to discern this artifice; instead, he finds that we have lost all ability to make the distinction between nature and artifice, and he uses the term "hyperreality" to describe this inability to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, or the authentic from the artificial.

The postmodern simulation that Baudrillard describes is therefore different from mere imitation. For instance, if one feigns an illness, it may be difficult but not impossible to discover the deception, since the imitation maintains the distinction between real and false, even as it conceals it (167–168), "but when an illness is simulated, as for example in certain hysterical or psychosomatic conditions, some of the symptoms of the 'actual' illness may indeed be produced

in the person of the simulator" (Connor, 2010, 58). In this instance, the either/or logic of truth and deceit, real and false is threatened: the simulated illness is a simulation rather than a deceptive imitation "precisely because it *does* produce real effects" (Ibid.).

This distinction seems especially relevant when considering something like alien abduction. The abductee does not flatly imitate an illness and is not simply "faking it" or making the story up; alien abduction is not a pure fiction but is something that produces "real effects" for experiencers. Abductees frequently describe physical symptoms manifesting from their abduction, including strange marks on the body and scars of mysterious origin. Some report intense nose-bleeds, while others, as I have noted, may have murky feelings of "missing time," or memories from the past that are not fully clear. They also often report intensely vivid emotions arising from their alleged encounters and, at least according to ufologists, it is these emotional impulses that attest to the validity of their experiences. In this way, alien abduction becomes perfectly suited to the age of "simulation," as the underlying cause of these symptoms is filled in by the story of abduction — a story that has become more real, more meaningful, and truer than the "real" world itself.

Dean's argument that in the digital age we see the dissipation of the distinctions between original and copy, the real and the fake, therefore fit alongside Baudrillard's claims about contemporary society and virtualization, where any sense of an original trace is impossible to locate, and where any appeal to the truth is futile. As Dean notes, ufology has become framed around these concerns, which makes it emblematic of the cultural condition of the time: "The concerns of ufology, its worries about evidence and credibility, about whom to trust and whom to believe are the concerns of the rest of us. They are concentrated versions of the facts and pseudo-facts of life at the millennium" (22). While not every individual who believes, or is interested in,

these stories of alien abduction claims to have been abducted by aliens themselves, Dean's point suggests why these stories are so popular and appealing in broader American society, especially in the way in which they latch on to our contemporary apprehensions over what is real and what is fake.

"Missing Time": Alien Abduction and Postmodern Subjectivity

The skepticism of authority, the decline of the expert, and the struggle over the real has led many postmodern theorists to question how these postmodern attitudes and ways of thinking have transformed our notions of subjectivity, and there are many significant parallels between the alien abductee and the postmodern subject as described by Fredric Jameson (1991).[131] Jameson laments the loss of some grand narratives (in particular, the project of Marxism), and he argues that in this postmodern age we have lost our connection to history and have forgotten how to think historically. This "historical deafness," he argues, which involves "a series of spasmodic and intermittent, but desperate attempts at recuperation" (xi), has become a defining sign of our age, and has fundamentally transformed our notions of subjectivity.

Postmodern ways of thinking, he finds, signal a desperate attempt to make sense of the age, but in their rejection of conventional forms of understanding, such as narrative and history, we become forever lost in these attempts and have instead become overwhelmingly focused on surfaces and an obsession with the present. This fascination with the present, he adds, has led to a "perceptual barrage of immediacy," where the images of the past, present, and future become part of one

[131] "Subjectivity," as Nick Manfield (2000) defines, "refers to an abstract principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire, and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience" (3). He continues: "The word subject, therefore, proposes that the self is not a separate and isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles" (Ibid.).

superficial plane, which gives the effect of living in a timeless realm, or what he calls a "series of perpetual presents" (Jameson, 1988a, 351; Jameson, 1988b, 28).

Jameson (1999) therefore argues that the organization of the past in relation to the present and future is challenged in the postmodern epistemology, where linear and straightforward understandings of time have given way to experiences of time that are condensed, fragmented and non-linear. David Harvey (1990) also considers the way in which time is transformed under postmodernity; according to Harvey, globalization and neoliberalism have changed our experiences of time, and he uses the term "space-time compression" to refer to the process in which distance no longer has material constraint, and shorter intervals of time are required to traverse space, leading to space dissolving into time itself (201–326). In other words, space-time compression depicts the condensing of temporal distances and the shortening of common-sense perceptions of time as a result of the rapid acceleration and flexibility afforded by information technologies, which leads to a dramatic reshaping of our structures of experience by creating a sense of place that is evanescent and paradoxical.

For Jameson, this reorganization of time and space has meant a loss of depth, where we no longer have any sense of distance and are unable to represent space in any meaningful way; space has become ambiguous and we cannot locate ourselves in it. Jameson contends that this flattening of space has led to an erosion of what he calls "cognitive mapping" (Jameson, 1991, 51–54, 408–417; Jameson, 1988a). Cognitive mapping refers to the means by which an individual subject can locate their place in the world and make sense of their environment.[132] It concerns both an individual's ability to place themselves within a physical, geographical space, as well as their ability to structure their perceptions of their social and class relations in the world. This lack of a

[132] I will return to Jameson's conception of the "cognitive map" in my fifth chapter, where I will discuss his claim that conspiracy theorizing signifies the "poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age" (1988a, 356).

sense of place, or a cognitive map, Jameson maintains, has led to a disoriented subject who wanders alone in a world that she or he cannot make sense of or conceptualize.

According to Jameson, the postmodern subject experiences the world and the other people in it as a random assembly of flat and meaningless images. Moreover, as the subject loses coherence with the external world and this sense of "cognitive mapping," they learn to experience themselves as a similarly meaningless connection of incoherent signs: their thoughts, feelings, and desires are merely a continual flow of disconnected images that they cannot bring together into a coherent relationship. In the postmodern age, then, Jameson argues that there is no longer any sense of a permanent, stable subject. Hence, Jameson characterizes this new subject as having a "schizophrenic" structure, where the subject becomes stranded in this perpetual present; he or she has no border between the self and the stimuli of the external world, is incapable of achieving critical distance, and is unable to take responsibility for their experiences (1991, 25–31; 47). It also introduces "a whole new type of emotional ground tone" that he calls "intensities," which can be "described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, a high, an intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity" (28–29).

Jameson describes the schizophrenic subject as suffering from a "breakdown of the signifying chain" in her or his use of language, until "the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (26). These "pure and unrelated presents" have meant that the subject has lost her or his ability to create a sense of continuity between past and future, and is unable to organize her or his temporal existence in one coherent experience, and this inability of the subject to a create continuous sense of past,

present, and future, and to locate their place in the world, becomes reflected in the concerns over missing time that are frequently repeated in alien abduction narratives.

As mentioned, the term "missing time" was taken up by Budd Hopkins (1981) in his popular book of the same name. Here, Hopkins traces the pervasiveness of inexplicable gaps in time by providing case studies with individuals who came to him to make sense of their lost memories and their anxious suspicions that something was wrong. Through hypnosis, his patients were able to uncover what had happened — they recounted traumatic tales of alien abduction and described how the intense and all-powerful gaze of the aliens removed their memories, leading Hopkins to conclude that "surely hundreds, if not thousands of other such abductions must still lie buried in the silence of enforced amnesia" (1).

The language surrounding alien abduction details a profoundly traumatic experience centred around the abductees' doubts over their own memories. Specifically, abductees recount gaps in time, delays in reaction, and paralysis, and they fear that their memories have been erased and can only be unlocked by hypnosis. The recovery of traumatic memories through hypnosis signals the way that remembering and forgetting remain beyond an individual's control, and abduction narratives reveal a fundamental obsession with time being missing, misplaced, or lost.

These conceptions of postmodern time strangely echo the discourse of missing time in abduction accounts. Linear notions of time are fundamentally disrupted, as gaps in memory prevent things from fitting into a chronological, straightforward order. These hidden gaps and periods of missing time that accompany abduction evoke postmodern fragmentation and the dissolution of the subject. The trauma of abduction reveals that the subject is not fully present to herself or himself, and memories, which are supposed to be the anchor of identity and which

provide the body with a subject and subjectivity, become lost through abduction, signalling a dramatic failure not only of that memory, but of the subject.

Anthony Giddens (1991, 53) suggests that anxiety in late capitalism (another term that has been compared to postmodernity and liquid modernity) comes from “the lack of a consistent feeling of biographical continuity” where “no continuous narrative can be sustained.” “A person’s identity,” Giddens argues, “is not found in behaviour … but in their capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*” (54). In alien abduction, this loss of identity is taken to the extreme, as the abductee finds their biographical understanding fundamentally challenged by gaps of missing time.

It is when the subject comes to discover their lost memories, usually through hypnosis, that they perhaps experience the most profound trauma, as in this discovery the self is revealed to be a mere illusion subject to the control of alien forces. The extraterrestrial’s ability to control the unwitting abductee’s mind suggests the permeability of the human brain and represents uncertainties about the autonomy of the subject. Hence, the tropes of passivity, immobility, paralysis, uncertainty, alienation, ambiguity, and a loss of identity or self that feature prominently in abduction stories, as well as the “heightened intensity” of the abduction experience as both anxious and euphoric, therefore seem to correspond with these characterizations of postmodern subjectivity, especially this sense of “missing time,” which produces a sense of loss, confusion, and a desire to reconstruct one’s misplaced experiences.

The Memory Wars and “Missing Time”

In addition to these postmodern theorizations of subjectivity and its notions of time and space, the ideas about memory and “missing time” in alien abduction seem fundamentally shaped by another very public discourse taking place near the end of the millennium. Dubbed the “memory wars,” or as Roger Luckhurst (1998a, 32–38) refers to them, the “memoro-politics” of the 1980s

and 1990s,[133] these highly public debates focused on the controversy surrounding the psychoanalytic concepts of repressed and recovered memories — contested ideas ever since Freud first put them forward — which gained significant attention amidst this public fascination with alien abduction and other highly publicized stories of rediscovered memories.[134]

In his early works, Freud ([1915] 2001a, 159–216) articulates his theory of the subject, which reveals that the ego is not the master of its own home; instead, the unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that remain hidden from awareness, but that can unwittingly guide human behaviours. Based on his topography of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious mind, Freud ([1915] 2001b, 141−158) offers a conceptualization of trauma, where he argues that traumatic events are banished from consciousness through the process of repression. Repression is meant to hide unspeakable traumas from awareness, and he argues that screen memories are often created by the mind to substitute for what really happened in the traumatic event (Freud, [1899] 2015, 1–24).[135] While a subject may experience periods of latency during which the traumatic event remains dormant, ultimately what has been repressed in the unconscious refuses to stay buried and keeps trying to return (Freud, [1915] 2001b, 141−158). Psychoanalytic conceptions of traumatic memory offered a precursor to the "missing time" and the lost memories of alien abductees by putting forth a language to describe how memories and experiences could lay dormant and forgotten — essentially "missing" from the awareness of the subject.

Freudian theory was debated from the beginning but has maintained a powerful influence in the fields of psychology and memory studies and, beginning in the 1980s, the idea that repressed

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[133] In defining "memoro-politics," Luckhurst (1998a) refers to the way in which ideas about the nature of memory have become widely debated and have both reflected and shaped political discourse.

[134] Repressed memories refer to the way in which memories have been unconsciously blocked due to the memory being associated with high levels of stress and trauma, and the idea of recovered memories is that we could tap into these hidden and repressed memories and bring them to the surface.

[135] Freud uses the term "screen memory" to refer to recollections that have become concealed by a "screen" as a defense against the original memory (such as forgetting and amnesia).

traumatic memories could be recovered fueled heated debates in these fields; [136] these ideas also spilled out of the confines of the academic disciplines and into popular and political discourse. As Roger Luckhurst points out, it was during this time that institutions sought to reorganize the concepts of memory and identity,[137] where "forgetting rather than ordinary remembering" has become "the present locus of memoro-politics … a politics of the secret, of the forgotten event that can be turned, if only by some strange flashbacks, into something monumental" (Luckhurst, 1998a, 33; Hacking, 1995, 213–214).

It was at this time that "the emergence of sexual abuse" became "*the* model of traumatic forgetting," where

> depending on your politics of memory, sexual abuse has either been finally acknowledged as the scandalous truth after decades of suppression by a society silencing its sufferers, or else sexual abuse is a relatively recent psychiatric diagnosis, one that is profoundly important, but has become subject to rapid inflation. (Luckhurst, 1998a, 33)

Luckhurst notes that "It is not sexual abuse *per se* that is important so much as the *consequences* it has had on models of the psyche and therapeutic practice in general. In effect it has opened a *space of possibility* for abduction" by providing a reconceptualization of memory, in which "the forgotten controls the self, not the remembered" (Ibid.). Other recent diagnoses of traumatic memory, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which became included in the American

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[136] Though many have argued that much of his work is outdated, his ideas of the unconscious mind still inform much contemporary research in these, and related, disciplines.

[137] Luckhurst (1998a) divides the category of "memory" into the categories of "personal identity, the collective practices of commemoration, and the institutional disciplines which determine the means and meanings of recall," and he notes that during the 1980s each of these categories underwent destabilization: "The narrative and continuity of personal memory have been transformed by the effects of crises in collective commemoration (challenges to dominant versions of American history, particularly by African American and Native American groups) and, institutionally, by the revolution in psychotherapies which have located identity in terms of the discontinuity of memory resultant from trauma" (32–33).

Psychiatric Association diagnostic manual during this time, further legitimated this idea that memories could return unexpectedly, and that the processes of remembering and forgetting were sometimes beyond an individual's control.[138]

These ideas fueled the memory wars, which involved heated disputes over this reconceptualization of memory, as many psychologists and memory researchers began to question the reliability of repressed and recovered memories. On one side of the debate, and following Freud's original theory, professionals maintained that the mind could guard itself by repressing traumatic events from awareness, thereby ascribing traumatic memory with special properties that could only be uncovered through hypnosis (Brown, Scheflin and Hammond, 1998, 87; 196; 647; Miller, [1979] 1997, 2; 6; 131; Herman and Schatzow. 1987, 12; Bass and Davis, 1988, 22; Fredrickson, 1992, 171). The other side argued that significant events become stamped on the memory and are seldom forgotten, and that traumatic memories are no different in operation than ordinary ones (Pope, Oliva and Hudson, 1999, 115–155; McNally, 2003a; 2003b; Kihlstrom, 2004, 34–41). This camp further argued that traumatic memories could be open to influence and contamination, and that false memories could be created by suggestion, especially through the process of hypnosis.[139]

These ideas were being discussed all over the place — on talk shows, in the popular press, and on the web — and they gained attention amidst increasing allegations of alien abduction, as well as claims of satanic ritual abuse and repressed childhood sexual assault that exploded in popular culture at the end of the millennium. According to Luckhurst (1998), these debates focus on the idea that the subject needs to be stimulated or provoked in order to remember, and this view has

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[138] This, of course, does not mean that people did not experience PTSD before this, but it became a new category to explain, understand, and diagnose traumatic experiences.

[139] See Clancy et al. (2002); Schacter (1999, 182); Lindsay and Read (1994, 281); and Ofshe and Watters (1996) for more elaboration on studies of traumatic memory.

provided a structure for thinking about contemporary ufology, especially its assertion that memories of alien abduction could be recovered through hypnosis and that these memories could serve as a testimony to the reality of extraterrestrials. Ufology therefore became lodged in these debates, and ufologists sided with those arguing for the authenticity of repressed traumatic memories that could be retrieved through the hypnotherapeutic process. Ufologists adopt the position that one's personal experiences provide them special access to reality, and they privilege hypnosis as *the* method capable of unlocking the truth.

But this privileging of hypnosis is certainly problematic and, as the memory wars reveal, there is little consensus over how hypnosis actually works: "It is the claim of every worker with abductees that hypnosis is the mechanism that unlocks hidden truth, and the claim of every false memory theorist that accounts of Satanists and alien abductors are the effect of hypnotic suggestion" (34). Abduction researchers, such as Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs, and John Mack, argue that the information recalled under hypnosis is more reliable than the consciously recalled story, and they find that the intensity of recovered emotions from hypnosis lends authenticity to the abduction phenomenon. Skeptics, however, contest that hypnotic regression is a major factor giving rise to abduction experiences, especially since hypnosis places the subject in a hyperattentive and hyper-responsive mental state, or trance, where they are more open to suggestion; for these skeptics, hypnosis works to convert discourse into truth, and they see ufologists as misappropriating the internal divisions in the field of psychology to back up their claims.

Importantly, the debates and disagreements within psychology have offered room for ufologists to make the assertion that they, too, follow the disciplinary standards of the field. Psychology is a discipline that encompasses a vast area of study and practice and, since its beginnings, there has

been much debate over whether it should be considered an art or a science. There are some branches of psychology that deal strictly with trying to understand the human mind and behaviour through rigorous scientific testing and experimentation, but psychological practice also requires "professional experience, manner of delivery, empathic intuition, and judgement," making psychological practice more akin to an art (Simon, 23 July 2009). As George Simon points out, clinical psychologists adopt the model of "scientist-practitioner," meaning that

> They draw upon the vast body of scientific knowledge available to them and 'artfully' incorporate principles derived from that body of knowledge into their therapeutic encounters with their clients but, also, they constantly look for and gather relevant data and test hypotheses in order to help increase the scientific knowledge base of the entire field. (Ibid.)

Ideally, psychologists are trained to "adhere to scientific methods in their research, availing themselves to these methods as crucial safeguards against biases in their inferences," but there is a mounting gap between empirical psychology and clinical psychology (or scientists and practitioners), and an increasing number of clinicians are "basing their therapeutic and assessment practices primarily on clinical experience and subjective intuition rather than on controlled research evidence" (Lilienfeld, Lynn, and Lohr, 2015, 1). Lilienfeld, Lohr, and Morier (2001) note that wavering between an art and a science, "many areas of psychology, particularly the so-called 'softer' domains of personality, clinical counseling, and educational psychology" are "especially vulnerable to pseudoscience" because of "the intrinsic difficulties involved in conclusively falsifying claims concerning human behavior" (182).

These vastly different practices are often presented as though they all belong under the same label of "psychology," meaning that the rigorous and scientifically-based elements of psychology

are blurred with a more “artful” psychology — and sometimes this “artful” psychology borders on a “popular psychology,” which includes such things as alien abduction research, as well as parapsychology, extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, channeling, handwriting analysis, and past-life hypnotic regression, to name a few examples (186). These forms of “popular psychology” draw from the symbolic frame of psychology but replace its contents with their own ideas that are based on crafty interpretations and intuitions that suit their own theories; as such, most empirical psychologists argue that these practices do not meet the disciplinary standards required for them to be considered scientific and legitimate.

Ufology has taken advantage of the tensions in psychology, attaching itself to the field to draw upon its scientific prestige, even though most psychologists working in academia would argue that abduction research lacks the rigour of scientific testing and is largely unsupported by evidence. Ufologists have framed abduction research as though it draws from the science of psychology, and in doing so, they have sought to medicalize the abduction phenomenon by employing the language of therapy — and they have presented alien abduction as a diagnosis demanding treatment (Dean, 1997, 57–63). Furthermore, hypnosis is frequently described in ufological circles as a “tool” that can be used to “extract data” and “produce repeatable results,” results that can “be used as scientific data” (Rutkowski, 2010, 273). In this way, the method of hypnosis employed by the abduction researchers is worded to sound scientific, even though there are heavily charged debates in the field of psychology over the scientific reliability of hypnosis.

Relatedly, Roger Luckhurst observes that abduction researchers appropriate the nomenclature of psychology, coining terms such as Post Abduction Syndrome (PAS), Experienced Anomalous Trauma (EAT), and Missing Embryo/Fetus Syndrome (MEFS), to mimic psychiatric formulations and to garner authority (34). Bridget Brown (2007) echoes this point by noting that abduction

researchers use the methods of psychology and psychiatry to frame themselves as a community of experts. She finds that ufologists have been able to create and shape the abduction phenomenon because of the "authority and legitimacy the hypnotherapeutic process confers on them through their ability to 'treat' abductees, whom they have helped render as victims in need of experience," and by drawing on the psychological debates over memory and therapy, ufology became "validated by strands of orthodox psychiatry itself" (Brown, 2007, 24–25; Luckhurst, 1998, 34).[140] This speaks to the way in which ufology has sought to frame itself in accepted scientific and academic languages by appropriating psychological discourse for its own ends.

Of course, most abduction researchers are not professional medical practitioners or scholars trained in psychology. Certainly some (such as John Mack), possess academic credentials, but most are self-taught in their hypnosis practices, and many have learned their techniques from other ufologists or other non-accredited hypnotists. Some ufological organizations, for instance, offer specialized classes (usually for a fee) to teach hypnosis to those wishing to gain the skills required to offer hypnotherapy to possible abductees, and many of these organizations provide support groups and hypnotherapy sessions for alleged victims of alien abduction, which are usually taught by the same individuals who have received internal training from the ufological organizations.

Academics (especially those with empirical psychological backgrounds who see abduction research as a threat to their discipline), argue that the rise of "popular psychology" and its wide acceptance in the American public is enabled by an increase in unaccredited therapy and certification programs that do not offer comprehensive training. Many clinical practitioners who

[140] While ufologists draw from memory researchers who are proponents of the repressed/recovered memory theories, abduction researchers shift this idea to fit in line with ufological discourse. In the ufological story, the control over the process of remembering and forgetting is transferred away from the human mind and onto the alien, who enforces this repression by zapping our memories from our awareness. In this reframing, abduction researchers balance that fine line between science and spirituality; rather than locating repressed memories as a function of the brain itself, ufologists contend that it is a function of otherworldly beings.

claim to have psychology backgrounds have "graduated from 'freestanding' schools, unconnected to university psychology departments, where they typically learn only to do therapy — and sometimes only a vague kind of psychodynamic therapy at that," while others have taken "brief certification courses in hypnotherapy or various counselling programs, and then promote themselves as experts in a particular method" (Tavris, 2015, xv). Academics frequently point to the fact that most of the ufologists practising hypnosis are not governed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and they argue that these unregulated and self-taught practitioners are irresponsible, highly flawed, and based on unsupported and inadequately tested therapeutic and assessment methods.

This argument is criticized by ufologists, who bemoan their exclusion from these official channels, contend that their practices are safe and credible, and claim that their therapeutic techniques ultimately lead to the healing and empowerment of their patients.[141] This again points to the way in which ufology's marginalization from official channels works to validate its own teachings, and it also highlights how ufology has attached itself to postmodern forms of thinking; by making the argument that scientific and academic institutions refuse to recognize the work of abduction researchers, ufologists present their teachings as alternative (but equally valid) approaches that challenge the stuffy, conservative, and exclusionary practices of the conventional academy.

By offering access to hypnosis and therapeutic support groups for self-professed abductees, and by teaching these methods of hypnotherapy to those wanting to learn, ufology has organized itself

[141] For instance, Sean F. Meers defends the practice of hypnotherapy by ufologists and rejects the criticisms lobbied against this practice, contending: "The argument that the abduction research is irresponsible because it is not governed by IRBs is the result of the lack of federal support by official agencies to govern the research. The lack of formalised, structured training programs in the application of hypnosis to the investigation of alien abductions is disappointing but hardly surprising. Objective efforts from academia into the study of abductions are a rarity, and by and large the subject is considered taboo" (Meers, 2016, 25).

around the promise of accessing "the truth" through hypnosis, and these independent and unregulated methods of hypnotherapy provide another instance of the way in which ufology strives to create its own, self-contained community that promotes its own truth claims. For instance, Georg Rønnevig looks at how these "therapeutic settings, like the hypnotic situation and the meeting between abductees in support groups," offer a sort of "initiation rite" that "strengthens a collective sense of what they believe has happened to them," which makes these sessions incredibly powerful and meaningful to self-proclaimed abductees (2007, 126). These intimate therapeutic approaches work to create a sense of community and acceptance among participants, and they reinforce the belief that alien abduction is a real phenomenon.

Even if their endeavours are formally dismissed by most academics, as Bridget Brown notes, abduction researchers practising hypnotherapy have been able to capitalize on the ufological community, gaining celebrity status by becoming "positioned as … healers, heroes, and truth tellers," who are able to use psychological techniques to validate the experiences of abductees and prove the existence of extraterrestrials (2007, 49). In making these claims, Brown argues that these abduction researchers "act as latter-day shamans," yet they "position themselves not as magicians, but as men of science" — therapists who have employed the language of science to gain credibility and to bolster their own truth claims (30): "With one foot in psychoanalysis and one foot in vaudeville, they have shored up power and prestige, at least within the community of UFO/alien believers, by claiming access to knowledge — to reality and truth itself — that alleged abductees themselves lack" (Ibid.).

Brown notices that abduction researchers and aliens share many parallels: by reframing abductees' experiences in terms of psychological trauma and by offering hypnosis and other therapeutic treatments, these so-called experts "treat" abductees by framing their experiences in

terms of psychological trauma, with "abductees as victims, and abduction experts as those capable, like the aliens themselves, of controlling the simultaneously painful and relieving process of confronting the past" (25). Brown draws attention to the ironic way in which both aliens and those who treat abduction use the same powers over memory to control their patients, so that it becomes impossible to distinguish between the alien's abduction and the "expert's" hypnotic examination.[142] Both extraterrestrials and these "experts" resemble one another; the only difference it seems is that the aliens are devoted to making the subject forget, whereas hypnotists induce the subject to remember.[143] This difference is crucial, and by allowing the subject to remember, the hypnotherapist is presented as the hero capable of bringing the truth to light; the abduction researcher helps the abductee move from passive victim to active participant in their abduction encounters and they provide an overarching narrative for the abductee to relocate their sense of place in the world.

Victimization, the Elevation of Personal Experience, and Re-centring the Postmodern Subject

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[142] Brown (2007) also notices that the popular depictions of abducting aliens as clinicians experimenting on human bodies (and especially reproductive organs) reflect technological advances in biotechnology and nanotechnology, and she notices another parallel between "the dominance of the doctor and the dominance of the alien whose abuses abductees recount are often interchangeable" (30). Brown (70–83) describes how the forced medical exam as the principle alien abduction scenario became ubiquitous in popular culture since at least the eighties and she reads the abduction stories alongside contemporaneous discourses of technological-medical management and surveillance of the reproductive body, the technological "progresses" that reduced human autonomy, and the authority of scientific expertise in the postwar period.

[143] These ideas have even been echoed by abductees themselves. In *The Interrupted Journey* (1966)¸ for instance, Fuller writes that after their hypnosis session, Betty Hill made a quip about Dr. Simon's ability to control their memories: "In the elevator going down, they were alone for the first time, with a measurable recall of the incident now thoroughly in their minds. The first thing that Betty could say was in reference to Dr. Simon. 'I certainly,' Betty laughed, 'hope that Dr. Simon isn't really a spaceman!" (Fuller, 259, quoted in Brown, 2007, 31). Like the aliens, the recorded transcripts show Simon instructing the Hills to forget, which hauntingly parallels the aliens' control over their memories: "You will not remember anything that has transpired here until I tell you to recall it. … you will not be troubled by anything you remember" (Fuller, 287, quoted in Brown, 2007, 32). Later, Simon directs the Hills to remember their hypnosis sessions: "You will remember everything" and "I'll see to it that you don't have that anxiety again" (Ibid.). Brown comments that this "last directive in particular suggests a godlike level of control, not only over the Hills' memory, but also over their emotion. The therapeutic gesture is at once comforting – the therapist takes anxiety away – and chilling in the level of external control it suggests" (32).

By attaching their claims to the heated debates over traumatic memory, abduction researchers allow the abductee's own testimony and feelings to serve as evidence of their abduction and, in doing so, they transform this subjective experience into the "truth." For instance, abduction researchers frequently draw on the discourse surrounding repressed and recovered memories in sex abuse cases to legitimate their claims and to present alien abduction as an uncontested form of trauma: "The broadening acceptance of other narratives of repressed memory and victimization in the culture at large" Bridget Brown notes, "contributed to what is perhaps best characterized as an increased willingness on the part of the public to entertain the notion that alien abduction might be real" (2007, 44).[144]

Brown is highly critical of the way in which abduction researchers have adopted certain strands of feminist thinking — especially the impetus to believe the victim — to support their claims. As she notes, abduction "experts, — still mostly men, many of them uncredentialled — have found a means for shoring up their own power and authority by exploiting popular anxiety about these unstable and contested definitions of reality and memory," and she finds that they have done so, "paradoxically, through an appropriation of feminist rhetoric about claiming one's own personal history as a means to empowerment" (42). According to Brown, this impulse to believe the victims — while certainly a strategically important stance for feminism — has also "contributed to a cultural acceptance, and often an embrace, of new accounts of personal and collective history," which has "created the perfect context for the codification of abduction as trauma to be ventilated,

[144] It is therefore not surprising that alien abduction became framed around ideas of sexual abuse and trauma, and these elements frequently appear in abduction stories. For instance, Whitley Strieber draws on this discourse by comparing alien abduction to rape, noting that "scoffing at [the abductee] is as ugly as laughing at rape victims" (1987, 4). David Jacobs makes a similar statement: "No matter how they handle the experience, all abductees have one thing in common: they are victims. Just as surely as women who are raped are victims of sexual abuse or soldiers can be victims of PTSD, abductees are victims who require sensitivity and, if needed, help in understanding what has happened to them and the possible consequences that abductions have had for their lives" (1993, 256–257).

diagnosed, and treated, and for the consequent classification of alleged abductees as victims in need of therapeutic treatment" (38).

Similarly, Roger Luckhurst finds that the affirmation of abuse accounts has had the unintended consequence of "elevating speech into truth, regardless of its content," and he notices that "trauma has been redefined from 'an event' to a view in which it is no longer the observer who determines what should or should not be traumatic, but the patient's own reactions to the event" (2008, 34). In this way, the intensity of emotion felt by the abductee has become taken as evidence of the truth, and this is an important strategy for abduction researchers to argue for the reality of extraterrestrials based on the emotional intensities of their patients' recovered memories.

There is a certain performativity to the abductee's accounts, which allows them to rhetorically thwart the objective or the empirical, and to valorize instead the subjective, the personal, and the private. Since abductees do not require any special qualifications and they are considered experts based solely on their claimed experiences, abduction researchers have created a rhetorical space where abductees can become authorities of their narratives because they see knowledge as derived from personal, subjective experience, rather than from detached, objective observations. Abduction stories are also told with dramatic effect and are presented as emotionally engaging narratives that combine a sense of adventure with an underlying, serious tone; they are written as if they are simply a presentation of the facts that cannot be disputed, since these facts are derived from personal experience and take place without other human witnesses. In this way, alien abduction becomes an uncontested, and consequently a persuasive, form of narrative, which allows the teller to turn her or his life into a story of transcendence and transformation.

Of course, this elevation of subjective experience and emotion as the marker of truth is problematic since it makes it impossible to contest whether or not these experiences are real, but

abductees often find these explanations validating, and the abduction story provides a distorted sense of comfort by offering an explanation for the feelings of uncertainty and distress that many alleged abductees claim to experience. Perhaps the narrative of alien abduction offers a way to make sense of the confusion and uncertainty that is characteristic of the postmodern condition — and this could be why abduction narratives have gained such a popular appeal at the same time as postmodern theories began to permeate popular discourse.

Amidst the postmodern fragmentation of the subject, when understandings of a stable, unified sense of self and secure notions of truth are seen to be eroding, the story of alien abduction (and the idea that the past could be retrieved whole through hypnosis) offers a clear answer to the indistinct and ambiguous feelings of helplessness and victimization that many individuals claim to feel. As Roger Luckhurst notes, alien abduction accounts are "propelled by a traumatic gap whose contents may not, finally, be determinable" (38), but these unknown and unsettling sources of trauma and injury are filled in by the story of alien abduction.

Even if the abduction experience is revealed to be a harrowing ordeal (especially those repeated aspects of probing, implantation, and stolen babies), it still offers a sense of comfort by providing an explanation for the abductee's profound but ambiguous feelings of anxiety and confusion; while postmodern theories often consider the subject as lacking a developed, coherent consciousness, alien abduction accounts allow for the reclaiming of one's misplaced subjectivity by enabling abductees to position themselves as experts of their subjective experience.

In emphasizing subjective experience as the central foundation of knowledge, the abductee reclaims their victimhood through the telling of these stories. In her ethnographic work with alien abductees, Bridget Brown (2007, 7) argues that abduction narratives have a performative function that gives meaning to an individual's personal experience and, through their telling, abductees

often rediscover their misplaced agency since these narratives allow them an outlet to critique existing power structures. That is, abductees can

> transform their powerlessness into a bounded status that enables them to be heard… In contrast to the profound passivity, even paralysis, that abductees describe experiencing during their alleged abductions, the vigor of their involvement in the process of making meaning of, and producing their own stories about, alien abduction was quite marked ... The alien abduction phenomenon can help us think about how people left out of certain narratives of progress create their own stories and fashion truths that square with their own experiences of the world. (6–7)

But this is an imperfect reassurance, and this reclaiming of subjectivity, as well as the empowering and transformative nature of alien abduction, is problematic as it requires agency to be "acquired only through the belief in one's own victimization and oppression," which can lead abduction researchers and their patients to overlook the terrestrial sources that have led to such profound feelings of anxiety and helplessness (7).

Despite the problematic nature of these reassurances, many abductees and abduction researchers emphasize the fulfilling aspects of alien abduction. As Mack ([1994] 2007) discovers with his patients, for instance, many abductees are able to reframe their experiences positively. The creation of a human-alien species suggests new (and possibly liberating) potentials for humanity; as many of Mack's patients recounted, hybrids will "repopulate our planet after the prophesied environmental holocaust" (1994 [1997], 402); therefore, abduction offers hope for humanity in the event that we happen to bring about our own planetary destruction. Many abductees come to embrace the fact that they have been "chosen" by the aliens, perhaps for an interbreeding project, especially since their abduction indicates that they are special enough to

warrant sustained attention as research subjects, which makes them representative of the best humanity has to offer.

Strieber, for instance, describes how "the most important thing [about his abduction] was its essentially *human* effect. I was a human being, and my part of things involved having a human experience" (Strieber, 1987, 76). When Strieber (175) describes how the alien visitors are "deeply afraid" of us, moreover, he effectively demonstrates the way in which abduction refocuses the importance of the human subject. The behaviour of the aliens that Strieber and countless other abductees describe is largely automatic; they are unified and choreographed and their actions seem to be determined by some sort of hive-mind (251). These aliens, many abductees speculate, fear humans because of our astonishing individuality and agency, which they as a group appear to lack; to quote Strieber: "If intelligence is normally centred in a hive or group context, a species such as mankind with individual independence of will might be a precious thing indeed" (Ibid.).

In Neil Badmington's (2004, 81) examination of abduction accounts, he identifies the way in which abductees

> describe a heightened presence or *self*-presence of the human being abducted. In its involvement with the hybrid project, which happens elsewhere and involves others, the human subject finds itself reassured, marked out as authentic and absolutely different from the inhuman. There is, in other words, a close encounter with humanism.

The modern Enlightenment conceptions of rational humanism that postmodernity supposedly abandons emerge again in the traumatic experimentation of the body in abduction: "The human is chosen precisely because he or she is a superior specimen of the 'purely human'" (81). In a mirror

of Cartesian philosophy, abduction reinstates the human self at the centre of the experience, even as it announces its loss: "I am abducted, therefore I am," Badmington proclaims (81–82).

Hence, these stories offer a way to re-centre the subject in a postmodern age at a time when it is presumed to be failing. While the lost time, hidden memories, and the trauma of alien abduction suggest the postmodern fragmentation of the subject, there also exists a need to search for fixed and anchored identities, and abduction paradoxically signals an attempt at re-anchoring the modern, individual, and rational subject.[145] Badmington (2004, 89) therefore sees abduction as "a defence mechanism, a trend with which 'we' reassure 'ourselves' about who 'we' are at a moment of immense uncertainty." In this sense, while alien abduction narratives tend to articulate concerns of posthuman hybridity and postmodern subjectivity, they also offer a reaffirmation of the human, which makes these stories so fundamentally appealing to those who believe in them; alongside the perceived breakdown of modern certainties, the rise of ideas about abducting extraterrestrials fits in, as we reflect on what it means to be human in a world that may seem totally alien to us.

The Story of Ufology

Throughout this chapter, I have examined how stories of UFO sightings and extraterrestrial contact are shaped by, and shape, social and political landscapes in the US, and I have identified the rise of ufology alongside different historical events, notably the Cold War and postmodernity. By considering how these stories latch on to different ideas circulating in American culture, I have traced the appeal of ufology, not just for those who have claimed to have seen a UFO or had contact with aliens, but for a wider public with a concerted interest in these stories.

Ufology, it seems, is perfectly suited to this Cold War and post-Cold War environment, and its inclusivity, openness, and participatory nature allows it to tell an appealing story that resonates

[145] The idea that aliens are interbreeding with human beings to produce hybrid offspring is a perfect example of posthuman concerns, as is the idea of aliens implanting technological devices into unwitting human subjects.

with a disillusioned society that has lost faith in its official institutions. By encouraging a valorization of personal experience, and by promoting the popularization and democratization of scientific discourse, ufology has presented itself in sharp contrast to the rigid, inflexible, and discriminative official institutions, such as the government and the academic and scientific establishments, whose authority has become questioned alongside the rise of the covert sphere and postmodern skepticism. As a rebuttal to official discourse, ufology both indicates and acts out this disillusionment with expert authority, and it makes its own claims to knowledge — claims that have posed a challenge for determining what is real and who, or what, can be trusted.

In its examination of UFOs, for instance, ufology has drawn attention to the limitations of modern science and has criticized official discourse for failing to take into consideration the anomalous sightings that have been reported *en masse* by many qualified observers, and it has sought to create its own avenues to research these strange phenomena. Moreover, by attaching to postmodern discourse, and by mimetically incorporating the language of psychology and therapy, ufologists have sought to legitimate stories of alien abduction to further support the ET hypothesis. While many ufologists find that earlier tales of contact — such as those of the contactees and MIBs — lacked authenticity, alien abduction offers the perfect story to summon *real* aliens into existence; the aliens in these stories are fundamentally ambiguous and these narratives fundamentally blur the boundaries between the true and the false, the real and the fake, the physical and the spiritual, which has allowed these stories to capture the imagination of a wide and diverse public.

Part Three

The Better Story: An Ethnography of Roswell, New Mexico

Chapter Five:

The Roswell Incident and the Logic of Conspiracy

Even though alien abduction research was largely incorporated into ufology's fold — especially as stories of alien abduction increased in popularity across the United States — some of the more traditional nuts-and-bolts ufologists felt threatened by the claims made by abduction researchers, and they worried that the metaphysical and spiritual elements of alien abduction might distract from their attempts at garnering material evidence to prove the ET hypothesis. As mentioned, ufologists from different branches have strategically aligned with one another to promote the overall agenda of ufology, but there remain internal divisions and much in-fighting within the field, and there are ongoing struggles over how ufology's claims should be represented. As alien abduction gained attention, some nuts-and-bolts ufologists wished to reassert their influence over the field, and they continued to see physical proof as necessary for convincing others of the legitimacy of the ET hypothesis — for how else could they get people to believe in UFO and ET phenomena, especially if they had never seen a UFO or experienced an alien contact themselves? But they struggled to reclaim this authority, especially since they had — for several decades — failed to procure any concrete evidence of UFO phenomena.

With abduction researchers able to bypass the demands for concrete physical evidence and still promote the idea that aliens were real and visiting Earth, many of the traditional nuts-and-bolts researchers realized they needed to engage in a similar strategy to present a story explaining away this devastating lack of physical evidence. Since they had not successfully turned up any material proof, they began to speculate that authorities, who seemed interested in undermining ufology and debunking UFO phenomena, might be invested in covering up the fact that aliens have landed on

Earth. By claiming that the evidence is out there, but that it has been concealed by powerful institutions, these ufologists have used conspiratorial thinking to engage in a strategic battle with the official sources that they see as undermining their serious efforts to uncover the truth.

Much of this conspiratorial rhetoric in ufology centres around the Roswell Incident, an event in which, at least according to ufologists, the American government successfully recovered the remains of a crashed flying saucer and extraterrestrial occupants on a ranch near Roswell, New Mexico in July 1947, and then engaged in an elaborate conspiracy to conceal the wreckage and the bodies. While thousands of saucer sightings are reported across the United States each year, the crash at Roswell is arguably the single most important UFO case to date and has gained more attention than any other UFO report in the world. It has also become a template for many alleged extraterrestrial crashes that have followed, as it contains all the dramatic elements needed to produce a well-established conspiracy theory, including the recovery of a crashed flying saucer and the bodies of its alien crew, and the subsequent government cover-up of these findings. The story of the Roswell Incident is therefore special in ufological canon, and there are huge stakes in maintaining the believability of this story, especially since it has attracted the interests of a rather wide and diverse public.

We are not dealing with a small, fringe group of people who believe in this account: numerous public opinion polls conducted from the mid-1990s onward have shown that beliefs in UFOs and the Roswell Incident may not quite be the norm, but they are certainly far from peripheral. For instance, a recent poll taken by the Public Policy Polling firm in 2013 surveyed 1247 registered American voters and asked if they believed that a UFO crashed at Roswell in 1947, and that the US government covered it up. Twenty-one percent of the respondents answered that they believed this account; forty-seven percent responded that they did not; and thirty-two percent were unsure.

Based upon the percentage of respondents who answered "yes," the polling firm estimates that around sixty-six million Americans believe that aliens landed in New Mexico (Unknown author, "Democrats and Republicans Differ on Conspiracy Theory Beliefs," 2013, Q3). While no incontrovertible, verifiable evidence of an alien artifact has ever been officially presented to the public, the idea that a UFO landed in Roswell, for many, remains a compelling one, and this idea of the Roswell cover-up has become a widely held public opinion in American society.

In this section, I reflect on how conspiracy theories, such as those about the Roswell UFO crash, have served as effective forms of storytelling for ufology because they exist as challenges to official explanations, and I consider how these alternative narratives come to offer a more seductive version of events and tell a more appealing story than is afforded by official accounts. To do so, I trace how these beliefs become validated, recognized, and supported as fact. Like alien abduction, which offers uncontestable claims to knowledge, the Roswell Incident has been framed by ufologists using the rhetoric of conspiracy theories, which allows them to present an unfalsifiable story of a government cover-up that is made believable because it latches on to underlying fears about power and secrecy in wider American society. In challenging and undermining official versions of truth and trust, the Roswell Incident brings into focus the conspiratorial mindset and paranoia that grew out of the Cold War climate, and later, postmodernity, and it has succeeded in capturing the imagination of many disillusioned Americans. But, before I can go about explaining its appeal, I must begin by telling the story of the Roswell Incident.

A Conspiracy Theory Was Born: The Story of the Roswell Incident

It began on 8 July 1947, when *The Roswell Daily Record* published the headline: "RAAF [the Roswell Army Air Field] Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell Region" (Unknown author,

8 July 1947). Strange debris was found by W.W. "Mack" Brazel, a ranch foreman, who discovered it on his property while making his rounds. Brazel notified the RAAF of his discovery, and Walter Haut, First Lieutenant at the intelligence office of the RAAF, wrote the press release.[146] Unlike many other UFO sightings, the alleged crash at Roswell was reported not by a private citizen, but by a public information officer (PIO) of the US government, which gave credibility to the story that aliens had crashed on Earth.

The release of this information caused quite a stir across the world, and media in thirty-one other states picked up the news, as did the *London Guardian* (Ricketts, 2011, 248). The next day, however, Brigadier General Roger Ramey notified the United Press to explain that the original release was a misunderstanding and the debris found on the rancher's property was not a UFO but was rather a weather balloon. He further detailed how the debris was immediately flown to Fort Worth, where it was identified by Warrant Officer Irving Newton as a balloon-borne radar reflector. In reports from *The San Francisco News* (United Press, "Army Studies 'Flying Disk," 8 July 1947)*, Clovis New Mexico Press* (unknown author, 9 July 1947, front page), and *New York PM* (Howard, 9 July 1947: P5)*,* Ramey was quoted stating that "The wreckage is in my office right now and as far as I can see there is nothing to get excited about." Ramey and intelligence officer Jesse Marcel (who will appear again later in this story), were also photographed with pieces of foil-like debris allegedly from the weather balloon recovered from the crash site, and these photos were published in newspapers across the United States.

[146] The announcement from Roswell's Press Officer, Lieutenant Walter Haut, read as follows: "The many rumours regarding the flying disc became a reality yesterday when the Intelligence office of the 509 Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force, Roswell Army Air Field, was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disc through the cooperation of one of the local ranchers and the sheriff's office of Chaves Country. The flying object landed on a ranch near Roswell sometime last week. Not having phone facilities, the rancher stored the disc until such time as he was able to contact the Sheriff's Office, who, in turn, notified Major Jesse A. Marcel of the 509th Bomb Group Intelligence Office. … Action was immediately taken and the disc was picked up at the rancher's home. It was inspected at the Roswell Army Air Field and subsequently loaned by Major Marcel to higher headquarters" (Ziegler [1997] 2010a, 9).

That next day Brazel was interviewed by *The Roswell Daily Record* stating that he actually discovered the debris on his ranch on 14 June but was in a hurry to get his rounds made, so he did not pay attention to it (Unknown author, "Harassed Rancher who Located 'Saucer' Sorry He Told About It" 9 July 1947). He did not rush to investigate until he visited the nearby town of Corona and heard about pilot Kenneth Arnold's highly publicized sighting of the "flying saucers" from some other locals. After hearing about Arnold's report, Brazel decided to bring some of the debris into Roswell to be examined (Ibid.). This storyline suggested that Brazel was not too concerned by the nature of the debris and was not in a hurry to report it to authorities until he was introduced to the suggestion that it could be of extraterrestrial origin. Several ufologists have since contended that authorities coaxed Brazel to change his story to sound less urgent, but Brazel's follow-up report supported the contention that the event was simply a big misunderstanding and it was not long before the incident slipped from attention, as newspapers all over the country dismissed the event as a sensationalized error.[147]

[147] Several ufologists have taken issue with the follow-up interview offered by Brazel in the article released by *The Roswell Daily Record* on 9 July 1947, which suggested that he had apparently found the debris on his property quite some time (about three weeks) before reporting it to authorities. These ufologists have speculated that between the first report given by *The Roswell Daily Record* and this subsequent interview, authorities had intervened to coax Brazel to alter his story and timeline, and the story published in *The Roswell Daily Record* was incorrect. Their claim is that Brazel had actually discovered the wreckage in early July, but he was coerced into altering his story so as to discredit him as a witness by making it seem as though he only reported the debris weeks afterwards, and only after he had heard about other saucer sightings in the area. This, they argue, also made it seem as though there was nothing urgent about the situation on the ranch. By stating that the incident had occurred in July (and not June), these ufologists could link Brazel's story to multiple other sightings of a flying object that were reported in Roswell at that time. This also gave a new sense of urgency to Brazel's discovery and made it possible to suggest that actual alien bodies were found at the crash site (Ricketts, 2011, 249).

Leased Wire
Associated Press

Roswell Daily Record

RECORD PHONES
Business Office 2288
News Department
2287

Claims Army Is Stacking Courts Martial

Indiana Senator Lays Protest Before Patterson

RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch in Roswell Region

House Passes Tax Slash by Large Margin

Security Council Paves Way to Talks On Arms Reductions

No Details of Flying Disk Are Revealed

Roswell Hardware Man and Wife Report Disk Seen

Ex-King Carol Weds Mme. Lupescu

Harassed Rancher who Located 'Saucer' Sorry He Told About It

Image of the Roswell Daily Record Headline, "RAAF Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell Region," as well as the caption from the following day: "Harassed Rancher who Located 'Saucer' Sorry He Told About It." Digital image. "The Roswell Incident: How 'UFO Sighting' Led to 68 Years of Conspiracy Theories." *The Week*, 8 July 2015. Web. Accessed 11 October 2017. http://www.theweek.co.uk/us/59331/roswell-ufo-crash-what-really-happened-67-years-ago

Image of Marcel and Ramey with the weather balloon in Ramey's office. Digital image. "1947 Roswell UFO Incident." *International UFO Museum and Research Centre*. 2010. Web. Accessed 11 October 2017. http://www.roswellufomuseum.com/incident.html

For more than 30 years, the story of the Roswell Incident quietly gestated behind the scenes; however, a series of events would reignite interest in the incident and breathe new life into the story of aliens crashing into the New Mexican desert. The first of these events occurred when ufologist and nuclear physicist Stanton Friedman happened upon the case in 1978. Friedman began his career as a nuclear physicist in 1956 after completing his Master of Science degree in nuclear physics at the University of Chicago, and he worked in the field for fourteen years. His interest in UFOs started in 1958, shortly after he began his professional career and, in 1970, he left his full-time employment as a physicist to pursue the scientific investigation of UFOs. Friedman's credentials and experience as a scientist offer him an air of credibility that is often absent in the ufological community, and he became one of the strongest proponents of the nuts-and-bolts strand of ufological thinking, which is exemplified in his public assertions that "the evidence is overwhelming that some UFOs are alien spacecraft," and "UFOs are simply hardware from elsewhere" (Friedman quoted in Clark, 2002, 84; Friedman quoted in Bletchman, 2006, 64).

Friedman was the first civilian to document the Roswell UFO Incident, and he discovered the story while waiting to be interviewed about his UFO research at a television station in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Rothman, 7 July 2015). A station manager there advised him that "the person you really ought to talk to is Jesse Marcel. He handled pieces of one of those things [referring to extraterrestrial spacecraft]" (Berliner and Friedman, 1997, 8). Marcel had retired to Houma, Louisiana where he befriended the station manager and shared his story. Friedman, intrigued by this information, did get in touch with Marcel and found he "sounded straightforward" (9). Marcel described the wreckage to Friedman, claiming that it was "unusual and thoroughly unrecognizable [with] short lengths of Ibeam with odd symbols along the web" (10). Marcel also revealed that he

was ordered by General Ramey "not to say anything" even though he was certain the debris "sure wasn't part of a weather balloon" (11).

As Marcel's testimony started making its way into the public, the *National Enquirer* published an article covering Marcel's account, which stated that the image he took with Ramey and the foil-like debris was staged: the military had lied, and Marcel was initially part of the cover-up (Pratt, 1980). The *National Enquirer* article helped popularize the story for a wide audience, and Friedman became known as the godfather of the Roswell Incident because of his role in resurrecting the story.[148] For the rest of his career, he has maintained a longstanding commitment to the case and has spoken about the Incident to mainstream and alternative media, and at UFO conventions and conferences around the world.

Not long after Friedman had inspired a new interest in the case, Bill Moore and Charles Berlitz, two well-known writers of the paranormal, supernatural, and occult, and friends of Friedman, produced the first book-length publication detailing this alternative account of the events occurring just outside Roswell in 1947. (Friedman was retained as an investigator for the book, but not as an author). In *The Roswell Incident: The Classic Study of UFO Contact* ([1980] 1988), Moore and Berlitz elaborate on Marcel's interviews and include statements from new informants to argue that

[148] As many readers will know, the *National Enquirer* is a notorious supermarket tabloid, which is set apart from the traditional press. As a supermarket tabloid that emphasizes the lurid and sensational, the *National Enquirer* has been subject to numerous criticisms about journalistic integrity and has been deemed a non-credible source for news and information. At the same time, the magazine has a weekly circulation of more than four million. It outsells most other weekly publications and boasts "the largest circulation of any paper in America," and for some issues, readership figures have even hit more than twenty million (Davis and Owen, 1998, 97); hence, the *National Enquirer* is not simply an insignificant and trifling publication, but one that has a very extensive reach and readership across the United States. The magazine contends that it tells a different kind of story – one that is set against the "quality press," which is often characterized as dimwitted and pretentious – and this plays into the popular concern that mainstream, legitimate media is untrustworthy and that alternative publications, while quite often frivolous and fantastic, may, in fact, be more reliable sources of news than the elitist and mainstream press. In this way, the *Enquirer* captures many of the sentiments shared by ufology.

the weather balloon account was merely a cover story contrived by the government to conceal the fact that an extraterrestrial spaceship had crashed in New Mexico.

The Roswell Incident quickly became a bestseller, and Moore and Berlitz's publication offered a template for a whole cottage industry of books discussing the incident. In these subsequent iterations, the story of the crash near Roswell morphed and evolved to fit new evidence, while at the same time it discarded testimony and theories that had been disproved. The original kernel of the story — that a UFO fell from the sky in the New Mexican desert and was subsequently covered up by the government — remained consistent, but specific details of the plot have varied significantly since the initial publication. New witnesses have come forward (often second-hand witnesses and death-bed confessors) to share their version of events, timelines have changed in later versions, as have the alleged crash-site locations, and new descriptions of the recovered debris and alien bodies have been introduced. Moreover, theories about the use of these recovered materials have been added, most notably the theory that the government reverse-engineered this alien spaceship to further technological innovations on Earth and to profit from these developed technologies. By 1997, on the fiftieth anniversary of the purported incident, there were at least six published competing versions of what transpired, and countless more accounts have been introduced since then.[149]

In some of these versions, it has been suggested that the spacecraft was brought to Area 51, a top-secret military base in Nevada, where it was analyzed and experimented on by government officials and scientists.[150] This idea was first popularized by a man named Bob Lazar, who

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[149] In 1997, the most popular key texts about the incident included: *The Roswell Incident* (Moore and Berlitz, 1980/1988); *Witness to Roswell* (Carey and Schmitt, [1980] 2009); *UFO Crash at Roswell* (Randle and Schmitt, 1991); *Crash at Corona* (Berliner and Friedman, 1997); *The Truth about the UFO Crash at Roswell* (Randle, 1994); and *Roswell in Perspective* (Pflock, 1994). Charles A. Ziegler ([1997] 2010a, 1–29) provides a breakdown of each of these different versions to look at how the story of Roswell has morphed and evolved over time.

[150] In other versions, ufologists have also suggested that the debris was brought to the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.

appeared on television claiming that the Air Force base was hiding an alien spacecraft that had crashed in the desert. Lazar said that he worked at Area 51 as a scientist and engineer in 1989 and was permitted access to the recovered extraterrestrial material; however, he was never able to provide concrete proof of the facility's alleged extraterrestrial connections, and universities from which he claims to hold degrees show no record of him. Lazar alleges that he does have these credentials, but he argues that they have been erased by the government as part of the larger conspiracy to discredit those asserting that the Roswell Incident involved extraterrestrials.

In coming forth with his statements, Lazar ignited a frenzy among ufologists and alien enthusiasts. Some considered Lazar a fraud trying to capitalize on the story of the Roswell Incident, while others found his story believable, and were excited by his claims that a "nuts-and-bolts" saucer really did exist.[151] This position was again strengthened when Edgar Mitchell — NASA astronaut and sixth person to walk on the moon — stated on live radio that the government was hiding facts about Roswell: "I happen to have been privileged enough to be in on the fact that we've been visited on this planet, and the UFO phenomenon is real" ("Edgar Mitchell UFO Interview," *Kerrang! Radio*, 23 June 2008). In another interview with *Fox News*, Mitchell clarified that his comments did not involve NASA; instead, he claimed that he had spoken to unnamed — and since deceased — sources, who confided to him that the Roswell Incident involved an alien spacecraft. Many found Mitchell to be a credible figure, especially since he had worked closely with NASA and had served as a United States Navy officer, test pilot, and aeronautical engineer, and his attestation over the reality of UFOs, for many, seemed reliable ("Edgar Mitchell Interview," *Fox News*, 25 July 2008).

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[151] For many years the US government kept the military base a secret, which fuelled the rumours that it was being used for housing and experimenting on alien technology. It was not until June 2013 that the CIA officially acknowledged the existence of Area 51, explaining that it was a testing site for the government's U-2 and OXCART aerial surveillance programs.

Further "evidence" of the Roswell Incident turned up in 1984 with the emergence of briefing papers describing "Operation Majestic Twelve," a code name for an alleged secret committee of government officials, military leaders, and scientists, formed in 1947 by an exclusive order by President Harry S. Truman to facilitate the recovery and investigation of alien spacecraft, like the one that crashed in Roswell. The documents were discovered when ufologist and film producer Jaime Shandera claimed he had received an envelope from an anonymous source containing film which, when developed, revealed images of eight pages of documents that exposed the formation of the secret committee. These documents suggested that a shadow government — a secret group of elite figures — operated behind the scenes of the American government. The documents also detailed how the Roswell spacecraft had been concealed, how the extraterrestrial technology could be exploited, and how the US should engage with alien intelligences in the future.

Not long after the discovery of these documents, Stanton Friedman, along with Shandera and Bill Moore, received anonymous messages that led them to discover the "Cutler-Twining memo" while searching declassified files in the National Archives. The memo was purportedly written by President Eisenhower's assistant Robert Cutler to General Nathan F. Twining, and since it contained a reference to Majestic Twelve, Friedman, Shandera and Moore hoped that this new discovery might possibly validate the original document. Further documents have also turned up in the years following that refer to this secret committee and, collectively, these documents have become called the Majestic-12 (or MJ-12) papers.

These documents are highly controversial in the field of ufology and their authenticity is subject to great debate. Many commentators have noted that it is highly suspicious that the initial MJ-12 papers would be anonymously left in Shandera's mailbox, and they point out that since these are not original documents — they are merely images developed from film — it is nearly impossible

to test their authenticity. Others, such as historian Robert Goldberg, have argued that the later documents, such as the Cutler-Twining memo, were "obviously planted to bolster the legitimacy of the briefing papers" but the ufologists trusted them because they supported their pre-existing notions and beliefs (Goldberg, 2001, 205). Skeptic (or, as ufologists describe him, debunker) Phillip Klass has also argued that the documents are littered with flaws, and he notes typographic errors, location problems, and other discrepancies that likely make them fraudulent documents (Klass, 2000).[152] The documents were also examined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which declared that they were "completely bogus" and fabricated ("Majestic 12." *FBI Records: The Vault,* 2018). Even still, Stanton Friedman and others have remained staunch defenders of the MJ-12 papers. Although the documents are not a physical piece of the spacecraft recovered from the Roswell crash site, according to Friedman, they provide tangible, material documentation that can support the ET hypothesis, which is more than the mystical, quasi-religious abduction researchers can supply. While Friedman contends that not all the documents are credible, he claims that *some* of them are, and while there are a number of fraudulent documents about Majestic Twelve, these documents have been released alongside the genuine ones, perhaps to undermine the validity of the "real" documents.[153]

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[152] Klass's arguments about the typographical and lexicographic inconsistencies in the MJ-12 papers have been met with criticism by some members of the ufological community. For instance, a favourite story of Friedman's — and one he shares at many UFO conventions — is that Klass offered him $100 for every example he could find of government documents that used the same style and size of type used in the memo. Friedman provided fourteen examples and was paid $1000 by Klass, and Friedman uses this story to support his claims that the documents are legitimate.

[153] The documents are widely felt to be contentious in the field of ufology, and Stanton Friedman has taken a lot of criticism from other ufologists for staunchly defending them; however, it seems that many ufologists do not wish to criticize Friedman directly, especially since his academic and professional credentials offer legitimacy to the field. As such, many ufologists have concluded that the documents were not planted simply as a hoax by someone from the UFO community but were actually part of a wider disinformation campaign of the US government to undermine the serious efforts made by Friedman and other ufologists working to uncover the truth. In this way, the original conspiracy theory is simply replaced by another one – and both these theories promote the same story: the US government is aware of the UFOs and will do anything to prevent this knowledge from reaching the public.

The Roswell story gained further public attention after the 1989 airing of an episode of Fox's *Unsolved Mysteries*, which was dedicated to the incident. The program reviewed the evidence that ufologists had uncovered about the case and, importantly, the program was watched by a man named Glenn Dennis, who had worked as a mortician in Roswell in 1947 and had provided contract mortuary services to the Roswell Army Air Field. After watching the *Unsolved Mysteries* episode, Dennis contacted Stanton Friedman and told him that the program reawakened his memories of the incident and, with the help of Friedman, Dennis was able to connect the dots from his past experiences to produce his own version of what occurred in Roswell that summer.[154] Donald Schmitt and Kevin Randle published Friedman's interview with Dennis in their book *UFO Crash at Roswell* (1991), and his story introduced what would become one of the most popular details of the Roswell Incident: that alien bodies were recovered from the site.[155]

For the Roswell researchers, Marcel's testimony, Lazar's claims about the secret military base, Mitchell's statements, the discovery of the MJ-12 papers, and Glenn Dennis's assertions about the alien bodies, all provided clues that there was more to the Roswell Incident than the government was letting on, and it certainly was not a weather balloon that was recovered from the crash site.

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[154] Dennis recollected receiving a strange phone call from the base, in which the caller asked him if he had access to small, child-sized caskets. He received a second call from the same officer asking about mortuary procedures for bodies that had been in the desert for a while. He claims that he was then contacted to pick up an injured serviceman and drive him in the funeral home's ambulance to the base. While at the base, he says he witnessed some strange material being carted in. He also met a nurse who warned him to leave immediately, as well as a red-haired colonel who threatened his life. According to Dennis, that same nurse later contacted him and told him that the military had discovered a crashed saucer, and she had participated in a preliminary autopsy of one of the aliens at the base. When he tried to contact her a few days later, however, he was told that she had been transferred overseas to England; when he tried again to contact her, he was informed that she may have been killed in a plane crash.

[155] In later books on the incident, ufologists have distanced themselves from Dennis, especially since he was exposed as having lied and giving a phony name of the nurse in his account. In *Witness to Roswell: Unmasking the 60-Year Cover Up* (2009) by Thomas Carey and Donald Schmitt, the authors comment that "Dennis was found to have knowingly provided false information to investigators, and must technically stand impeached as a witness" (197); at the same time, they include statements from other witnesses, who "have told us that Dennis had told them about the phone calls for child-sized caskets way back when it happened," and that "Dennis had told them about his run-in at the base hospital long before Roswell became a household word" (145). In this way, Carey and Schmitt present themselves as uncommitted to Dennis's statements, but they do not fully deny his testimony either; they allow his story to still exist as a possibility – even though it is a *very* unlikely possibility.

The researchers also pointed out that Brazel had seen weather balloons on his ranch before and certainly could have identified them — and even if he could not, Walter Haut, who issued the press release stating that the flying saucer had landed, most definitely could. This surmounting evidence raised suspicion against the government's official narrative, and pointed to the possibility that the Roswell Incident really was a cover-up: but a cover-up of what, exactly? Was it a conspiracy to hide the reality of extraterrestrial life, as ufologists asserted, or was it, possibly, a smokescreen for something else?

The "Official" Version

These various tellings of the Roswell Incident attracted the interests of the American public; the books written about the subject could be found on best-sellers lists across the country, and many ufologists had also taken to the Internet to share their ideas with a broad and diverse audience. Further, the *Unsolved Mystery* program brought the story to homes across the country. The program aired to excellent ratings and was re-aired again on 24 January 1990; Arthur C. Fricke (2004, 280) estimates that the program and its re-airing introduced more than ten million viewers to the Roswell story, many of whom called the special toll-free phone number provided after the show to offer further assistance in the investigation.

Fictionally, the story of the Roswell Incident took off in popular culture; it was covered in a storyline by Chris Carter in *The X-Files*, and in a scene from the 1996 blockbuster film *Independence Day*. Moreover, in 1995, Fox aired supposed "found footage" from the incident in a highly viewed docu-drama titled *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction*, and in 1999, the WB released a television series titled *Roswell*, which depicted human-looking aliens passing as teenagers at Roswell's local high school. These examples show just how far the Roswell story has travelled, and they demonstrate how ufologists were able to inspire substantial public interest in the case. To

refresh, Michael Warner makes the point that a public is established through the concatenation of texts through time and, through the repeated sharing of the Roswell story, a sizeable public was formed with a concerted interest in the Roswell events. Individuals across the nation became attracted to this story, especially since there was actual documentation that something really *did* fall from the sky and *did* land on the ranch in New Mexico, and the government really *did* change its story about the nature of this debris. This created mounting pressure on the government to offer an official explanation of what occurred.

Awareness of this historical reality, as well as the extreme resurgence of interest in the case, led New Mexican Congressman Steve Schiff to petition the US General Accounting Office and Air Force to conduct an investigation of what really happened in Roswell in 1947. Schiff was successful, and in 1995, the Air Force released a nearly 1000-page report admitting to having lied about the debris uncovered in the Roswell Incident: it was not simply a weather balloon (Headquarters United States Air Force, *The Roswell Report*, 1995). In this report, they indicated that the material found on the rancher's property was actually the wreckage of a device code-named "Project Mogul," a balloon-borne radar reflector designed to detect Soviet nuclear tests. Hence there really was a cover-up involved in the Roswell Incident, but the report acknowledged that it was not an alien spacecraft and bodies that were concealed; instead, it was part of an espionage project to be used against Soviet enemies during the Cold War. This report has been further corroborated by Charles B. Moore ([1997] 2010), a physicist, engineer, and meteorologist who had worked on Project Mogul in the late 1940s.[156]

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[156] Moore also recounted that he and his team used adhesive tape with flowers printed upon it in the construction, which he suggests may help explain the strange designs that Marcel reported finding on the debris. (Many ufologists have taken issue with this statement and have argued that Marcel, as a high-ranking intelligence officer, would be able to distinguish between extraterrestrial glyphs and simple adhesive tape).

While expectations seemed to be that this release of information about Project Mogul would mitigate concerns and dull the conspiracy theories surrounding the incident, it actually served as fodder for even more conspiracy theories and escalated the belief that extraterrestrials had been uncovered at the site.[157] Since a cover-up had been acknowledged to have happened, it prompted the question of what other secrets the government was keeping: If the government could lie back then, was it still lying now? The report also indicated that some governmental records had been destroyed, which suggested that important evidence was still not being shared.

The fact that Congressman Schiff was successful in having the incident investigated by the government provides insight into the scope and importance of the event in the United States and highlights the reach of the ufological movement. While no estimate of the money spent on this investigation is available, it is certainly possible to hypothesize that an inquiry involving the Department of Defence, the Department of the Air Force, the congressional member's office, the US General Accounting office, and the many staff members, investigators, and archivists hired to conduct the study could cost hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars (Ziegler, [1997] 2010a, 10). The tremendous expense of getting the government to conduct the investigation demonstrates the considerable significance of the incident in US history and it shows the extensive political reach of ufology in the United States. As Jodi Dean describes it, "ufology emerged as a sort of advocacy group" to challenge "the limits to and criteria for government secrecy" (Dean, 1998, 35); as well, the resurgence of the Roswell Incident and the subsequent investigation further publicized the ufology movement and showed that it could be taken seriously by the government.

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[157] While the acknowledgement of a military project made sense to some, others believed that it was not that people were mistaking secret government and military technology for UFOs, but that an increase in UFO activity during WWII and the Cold War was the result of "alien intelligences systematically engaged in the observation of this planet and its civilization," who concentrated "their efforts on monitoring those areas exhibiting the highest levels of scientific and technological activity" (Moore and Berlitz, [1980] 1988, 18).

Following this skeptical response to the Project Mogul account, a supplemental report was released by the Air Force to reiterate the findings, titled *Roswell: Case Closed* (Headquarters US Air Force, [1997] 2011). Like the initial release, this report did little to quell the negative reaction and many were left unsatisfied with this explanation.[158] For numerous advocates of the Roswell Incident, the discovery of aliens, it seemed, made for a more plausible explanation of what had transpired. While the "official" versions offered reasons for the government's handling of the Roswell Incident — reasons that did not involve the incredible leap in believing that extraterrestrials had been found on Earth — this account is largely dismissed by the ufological community. But what exactly made it possible for some people to believe the counter-explanation that the government was still conspiring to withhold information about the recovery of extraterrestrials, as opposed to the government's official report that has been supported by independent scientific experts?

Cosmic Watergate: The Historical Context

To answer this question, it is helpful to consider why the story of the Roswell Incident lay dormant for thirty years before exploding back into popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s; hence, it is necessary to look at the historical context surrounding the resurgence of interest in this case, as this offers insight into why the conspiracy theory account could be imagined and believed. Certainly most ufologists would state that the story became popular because it was at this time that Jesse Marcel came forward with information about the cover-up, but I would argue that Marcel's

[158] Ufologists were particularly skeptical of the official account that explained why people asserted that they saw bodies amidst the crashed debris. In the report, officials claimed that the aliens seen by witnesses were actually anthropomorphic test dummies dropped from high-altitude research balloons; however, since these dummy tests did not begin until 1954, the Air Force explained that witnesses might have "consolidated" this event with other events in their minds. In other words, they explained that local observers who might have witnessed the debris from the Project Mogul experiment might have also witnessed the dummy drops, and possibly other accidents involving human beings, and, when the story remerged thirty years later, their fallible memories combined all these different things together and created the impression that alien bodies were recovered from the Roswell Incident.

testimony was deemed credible largely because it connected to ideas that were circulating about government secrecy.

I have already discussed much of this context in my previous chapters, but it is helpful to elaborate on a few points to explain why the Roswell Incident became such a pivotal expression of Cold War skepticism and postmodern paranoia. Antigovernment sentiment, such as the idea that the government has conspired to hide UFO phenomena, have informed ufology since its inception (especially with Donald Keyhoe's claims that the government was aware that flying saucers were real), but it was not until the rediscovery of the Roswell Incident that these conspiratorial notions really came to take centre stage in ufological discourse. A few events in particular, significantly shaped the way the Roswell Incident was imagined, and they made the conspiracy theory believable to many.

The first event came about after amendments were made to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in 1974, only a few years before the story of Roswell erupted back into popular consciousness. The original FOIA was passed in 1966 and was intended to let the public in on what government agencies were doing, especially amidst increasing perceptions that the government was withholding information from the American public. Specifically, the act allowed government documents to be made public, unless there was good reason to keep them a secret, and it was intended to balance several conflicting elements: "the benefit of voters having more information, the need to protect national security and the importance of government personnel being able to have private interactions" (Rothman, 21 July 2016); however, the 1966 version of the act "had very little concrete effect," leading to amendments being made in 1974 (Ibid.).

These amendments significantly strengthened the FOIA and shortened the response time so that the FOIA could not delay, deny, or otherwise obstruct the requests. Various ufological

organizations mobilized to take advantage of the amendments made to the act and they filed several requests for information under the FOIA. Over the course of the next few years, thousands of pages of documents were released, including those offering insight into the government's UFO programs, as well as those stating that US pilots continue to chase and be chased by UFOs, though several of the documents remained redacted, fueling ideas that further secrets were being withheld. The released documents left little doubt that there had been a conspiracy of silence about UFOs by the government, and this emboldened many in the UFO community when Friedman proposed the idea of the Roswell Incident only a few years later.[159]

The 1974 amendments to the FOIA were made largely in response to the Watergate scandal, another event that helped revive interest in the Roswell Incident. The term "Watergate" refers specifically to the attempt of President Richard Nixon's administration to conceal its involvement with a break-in at the Democratic National Committee (DNC) headquarters, but has come to encompass an assortment of secret and often criminal activities carried out by the Nixon administration, and is sometimes used more generally to describe any clandestine activities carried out by the US government. Taking place in the early 1970s, the Watergate scandal was still fresh in the minds of many Americans when Friedman first caught word of the alleged Roswell conspiracy, and Friedman discursively linked the Roswell Incident to Watergate to play on the public's concerns of government corruption.

Describing Roswell as "the Cosmic Watergate," Friedman intentionally used this term to draw a stark parallel between the clandestine activities undertaken by the US government in the 1970s and those that purportedly took place in Roswell in 1947. Friedman's revision of the term has since

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[159] Of course, there is room to speculate on how much the government's UFO projects were sinister plots to undermine ufology and suppress ideas about UFOs and ET and how much may be owing to government incompetence, or even to intentional misinformation campaigns to distract from real espionage projects taking place during the Cold War.

become a popular catch-phrase in the ufological community and it points to the way that the social and political climate of the United States in the 1970s and 1980s contributed to the resurrection of the Roswell story. As mentioned in my previous chapters, the Cold War saw the development of the covert state, which led to a dramatic transformation in public confidence in the government, and this framing of the Roswell Incident as the "Cosmic Watergate" seems to draw from the understandings of power and secrecy that manifested during the Cold War era.

Several congressional probes, notably the Church Committee in the Senate, also revealed many government secrets and abuses of power during the Cold War; hence, throughout the second half of the twentieth century there appeared to be endless revelations of clandestine, undemocratic, and often immoral or criminal acts engaged in by the United States government. Though the government would claim that these actions were taken for the sake of the nation, they were often made at the expense of citizens and they involved the repeated, secret violation of the rights of American citizens by the very government that was sworn to protect them. With Watergate (along with other government scandals that came to light, such as the Iran-Contra affair and the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment), an opaque shadow fell over a government once believed to be transparent and trustworthy, and the historical evidence of these real conspiracies and the exposure of real plots helped to energize and validate beliefs in other sorts of conspiracy theories. Roswell's rediscovery, then, came at the perfect moment; as glimpses of once hidden secrets became revealed, people were able to imagine that even more schemes may have taken place away from the prying eyes of the public, and this created the perfect climate for spawning conspiracy theories like the Roswell Incident.

The Symbolic Packaging of the Roswell Story

Another way to trace the appeal of the Roswell Incident involves a close examination of the rhetorical devices used by ufologists to tell their stories. Moore and Berlitz's *The Roswell Incident* ([1980] 1988), for instance, introduced a cover-up theory by proposing that the government has conspired to keep secret the events of that summer and has concealed any material evidence that could be used to confirm that the wreckage was really a product of visitors from outer space; while the later Roswell books might differ in detail from this original account, they have consistently presented this conspiratorial version of events. Of course, most professional historians do not consider these works to be reliable histories, and they argue that they fail to measure up to the standards of academia; they are not representative of peer-reviewed research that systematically studies and presents objective and unbiased accounts of the Roswell Incident, and those who adhere to the official explanation and who maintain faith in traditional institutions tend to dismiss these accounts as fanciful nonsense. However, a closer engagement with these books reveals their appeal, especially when we consider how they borrow from the symbolic frame of academic texts, but unlike the dry and detached style of much academic writing, they are usually written less as a methodical study and more like a story. That is, the Roswell authors have carefully worked to make this story appealing and accessible for a lay readership and their version contrasts sharply with the stuffy and objective research reports typically produced by official bodies.

For instance, *The Roswell Incident* is a rather slim book for making such ground-breaking claims, and at first glance, it might seem surprising that such a text could convince many of the reality of the Roswell conspiracy. The book itself provides little in the way of methodology and it offers scarce insight into how the authors conducted their research and interviews, but in their presentation of the Roswell Incident, Moore and Berlitz imitate many elements found in scholarly works, such as appendixes, footnotes, a works cited page/bibliography, charts, and diagrams,

which gives the appearance that the book is a nonfictional piece of research, and these techniques have been repeated in the various Roswell books that followed.

Of course, these timelines and charts are often filled in with contested details, the diagrams of the crash sites are merely speculative reconstructions, and the appendixes are often filled with unsubstantiated and possibly forged documents[160] — but all of this is presented as fact and is meant to supply the reader with evidence of the Roswell Incident. Further, the works cited pages are usually just a list of "suggested readings" for those interested in Roswell and UFO phenomena more generally, and there are very few in-text citations used to reference external sources.[161] Many of these texts also list various ufological sources but fail to cite other authors that contradict or question their theories. As such, many critics have pointed out that the Roswell authors omit data contrary to their arguments, quote things out of context, use forged or fake documents as evidence, make claims without substantiating them with evidence, and introduce extraneous information to sensationalize their texts (Ziegler, [1997] 2010b, 31).[162]

Despite these criticisms, by packaging their works as nonfictional histories that objectively recount the event, and by mimicking the contents found in academic research, these authors present their books as though they are investigative reports or histories that are not unlike other scholarly works, and this framing is further supported by the fact that most often texts about the Roswell

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[160] For instance, some of the MJ-12 documents included in the appendix of Berliner and Friedman's *Crash at Corona* (1997), are presented as if they are valid, uncontested documents that support the contentions made in the text, despite the fact that official sources have deemed them to be forgeries.

[161] In Moore and Berlitz's (1980/1988) publication, for instance, there are just over twenty-five bibliographic listings, most of which are from magazine sources or pulp presses, and most of these sources are not addressed at all in the body of the text. Similarly, many of Stanton Friedman's books include bibliographies that are several pages in length, giving them the appearance that they are backed up by substantial research, but these references are frequently listed without context, and there are few in-text citations directing readers to the sources used to back up his claims.

[162] Benson Saler, Charles A. Zeigler, and Charles B. Moore's *UFO Crash at Roswell* ([1997] 2010) offers one of the few scholarly treatments of the Roswell Incident from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities, and their text informs my own analysis; however, the authors do little to situate the Roswell Incident within broader ufological debates and they offer surprisingly little discussion about the nature of conspiracy theories and the logic and rhetoric of conspiracy theorizing, therefore my analysis seeks to fill in these gaps.

Incident (along with other texts about UFO and ET phenomena), are placed in the nonfiction sections of bookstores and libraries. Since their subject matter is based in some way on historical events it is not uncommon to find these texts shelved in American history or related sections, which legitimizes these works as valid historical accounts; as Ziegler comments, “as evidenced by reviews, commentaries, and readers’ letters in UFO journals, they are accepted [as nonfiction] by true believers” (31). He further observes that even skeptics tend to treat these works as histories, but they describe them as “histories debased by poor methodology, and hence are unreliable” (31–32). Even though skeptics are critical of the various Roswell texts and categorize them as flawed histories, the treatment of these books as nonfiction invests them with greater authority, and believers frequently view the various works on Roswell as “histories that are substantially accurate, although different in the details” (31).

The Roswell authors also substantiate their truth claims by drawing from legal and juridical discourses and they base the validity of the Roswell Incident on their informants’ statements, which they further use to support their contentions. Ufologists have had to adjust the criteria used to establish their truth claims, especially since they have little or no physical evidence to support their version of events, and the crux of the Roswell conspiracy theory largely rests on witness statements. In this way, the credibility of their witnesses’ testimonies becomes their measure of the truth, and they spend much of their texts establishing the reliability of their informants, describing them as “honest and good faith” witnesses (a typical expression used by ufologists to depict the witness as moral and trustworthy). Ufologists frequently point out that a person’s sworn testimony is admissible in a court of law and is taken as evidence if that witness is considered

reliable,[163] and in their books, they seek to establish their informants as frank, honourable, and straightforward individuals whose expertise and backgrounds invest them with the authority to offer knowledge of what really happened during the Roswell cover-up.

For instance, a large focus of *The Roswell Incident* (as well as the texts that followed) is based on Marcel's testimony, particularly his insistence that the debris "certainly wasn't anything built by us and it most certainly wasn't any weather balloon" (Moore and Berlitz, [1980] 1988, 72). Marcel's testimony is taken largely at face value, and in their account, Moore and Berlitz present a great deal of his biographical information to portray him as a reliable witness. In the Roswell books that followed, Marcel continues to be presented as the star witness upon which much of the case rests, and since he comes from a military background and was originally involved in the event, these authors present his testimony as entirely truthful. After the incident, however, an independent researcher reviewed his assertions and found that Marcel embellished some of his military and educational experience, possibly to enhance the legitimacy of his claims (Todd, 1995, 1–4).[164] Many of the statements he made about his background did have a factual core, but his "pattern of embellishment … suggests deliberate deception" (Ziegler, [1997] 2010b, 58). As Charles A. Ziegler argues, this "does not demonstrate that other portions of his tale are untrue, but does demonstrate a willingness to lie, to stretch the truth to make a *good or better story*" (59, emphasis mine).[165]

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[163] Skeptics contend that while this testimony might be considered in a court of law, to be able to *prove* something as substantial and significant as the reality of ETs visiting Earth requires more than testimony, and they make greater demands for the evidence required to make these assertions.

[164] Kal K. Korff has further investigated Marcel's background and he comments that "Marcel's tendency to exaggerate was specifically noted in his military files by none other than the commander of the base at Roswell at that time, in a review of his performance that was signed just after the incident occurred" (July/ August 1997). Of course, ufologists have noted that this note could have been planted by the commander in order to undermine Marcel in the event that he spoke out against the government.

[165] I emphasize Ziegler's words here, as I find that they capture the significance of narrative in the retelling of the Roswell Incident. As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, good storytelling is central to the believability of the

Along with Marcel's testimony, other witnesses were interviewed, some of whom recounted seeing or handling the debris or both, and they provided descriptions of the unusual properties of the recovered material. Most of their informants, however, offered second-hand accounts describing what they had heard about the incident from others, and several informants used testimony they claimed to have heard from deceased family members or friends, which makes it impossible to question the original witnesses. The Roswell authors also often include death-bed confessions and reports of potential witnesses who mysteriously disappeared before they could share their stories, again making it challenging to cross-examine their informants. Of course, skeptics are highly critical of the way in which testimony is used in many of the Roswell books. As Ziegler summarizes:

> The skeptics maintain that the authors of these books break all the generally accepted rules of investigative reporting and historical research because they misquote witnesses, ignore testimony that contradicts their claims, accept the testimony of witnesses who are preconditioned by the media and/or by the interviewers themselves, accept conflicting testimony of several witnesses on the same topic, accept internally contradictory testimony, cite testimony from anonymous witnesses as the sole evidence for some of their assertions, accept testimony contradicted by physical evidence, and display an overreliance on the background of informants as an indicator of truthfulness. (Ziegler, [1997] 2010b, 31)

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version of events that suggests that aliens have landed on Earth and the US government has hidden this information from the public.

These skeptics also point out that testimony on its own is often unpredictable and erroneous, and they note that the Roswell Incident is based solely on these claims, which makes it fundamentally flawed.

Even if this testimony is shaky and unsubstantiated, ufologists have been rather successful at using their witnesses' stories to create holes in the official account of the Roswell Incident. Consider, for example, Brigadier General Roger Ramey's insistence that the flying saucer account was bunk, a claim that is held in stark contrast to Marcel's assertion that the Roswell Incident involved aliens and a sophisticated cover-up. Both stories are told by individuals involved in the original event and both parties also had reasonable incentives to lie or embellish their stories: Ramey's account, for instance, withheld key information in the interest of protecting secret government operations, and Marcel may have exaggerated his involvement in the case and invented the story of the alien cover-up for fame and attention, which could be why he waited over thirty years to speak publicly about the incident. There is also evidence that both parties were not exactly truthful in telling their version of events: Marcel was caught fabricating his credentials and he was known to exaggerate his involvement in military operations even before the Roswell Incident, and the government openly admitted that Ramey's story about the weather balloon was a lie intended to hide Project Mogul. Even though both witness accounts are problematic, ufologists dismiss Ramey's assertions in favour of Marcel's and they use his testimony to buttress much of their case.

These opposing versions of events raise the question of who can be trusted, and ufology thrives on unsettling these notions of trust and authority. Ufologists need not prove their case entirely so long as they can create reasonable doubt and punch holes in the official narrative, and despite evidence to the contrary, ufologists present Marcel as a noble and brave informant who has been

discredited and disparaged by the shady and dishonest conspirators in the US government — which is, for many, a more appealing version of the story than the claim that Marcel is a liar. By carefully framing their story to present Marcel as an honourable and honest witness in contrast to the shady and corrupt establishment, ufologists create room to imagine that there might be some truth to his claims, and they exploit feelings of disillusionment in governmental authorities to present their stories as accurate.

The ufologists' stories of the Roswell Incident are therefore based on creating reasonable doubt, and the authors of the Roswell books present any and all "evidence" that *might* support their contentions to fuel uncertainty and to make people question the official explanations. In fact, even the authors of the Roswell texts admit that their evidence is sometimes uncertain and tenuous at best; however, they present as much evidence as they can in the hopes that just one piece of information might be accurate. For instance, Moore and Berlitz produce as possible evidence a letter dated to 1954 from a mysterious man named Gerald Light that claimed that President Eisenhower was aware that the extraterrestrial aircraft recovered from the Roswell crash was still being held at Muroc (Edwards Air Force Base). The authors present this letter with the statement, "assuming this letter is not a hoax, there are several key points which seem to emerge as one examines it" (Moore and Berlitz, [1980] 1988, 133). They acknowledge that there is little known about Light himself and contend that "admittedly the evidence is circumstantial at best, but it is nonetheless interesting" (134). Despite the circumstantial and perhaps counterfeited nature of this evidence, it is presented anyway, for as the authors acknowledge,

> if only *one* of the many individuals mentioned in this book who claim to have witnessed the crash and/or subsequent recovery of an extraterrestrial vehicle is telling the truth — then perhaps at this very moment we sit at the verge of the

> greatest news story of the twentieth century, the first contact with live (or dead) extraterrestrials. (158)

Friedman makes a similar point when discussing the MJ-12 papers:

> Clearly if the original documents: The Eisenhower Briefing Document (EBD) of November 18, 1952; the Truman-Forrestal Memo (TFM) of Sept. 24, 1947 (page 8 of the EBD); and the Cutler-Twining Memo (CTM) of July 14, 1954 (found in July 1985, in Box 189 of Entry 267 of Record Group 341 at the National Archives by Jaime Shandera and William Moore) are genuine, then the consequences are enormous. Aliens are visiting Earth; the government has recovered at least one crashed saucer and several alien bodies; and a very significant group of outstanding American scientists and military leaders has collected, reviewed, evaluated, and kept secret all kinds of information about the visitors. Man is NOT alone [*sic*] and the government has covered up the biggest story of the millennium at least since 1947. (Friedman, 2008, 376–377)

If legitimate (and that is a big "if") these documents would confirm the conspiracies surrounding the Roswell Incident, as well as the suspicion that the government has been engaged in a substantial cover-up to keep UFOs a secret from the public.

In presenting their information this way, the Roswell authors carefully create reasonable doubt. They may not have a "smoking gun," but they do have endless circumstantial evidence (even if some of that evidence is possibly faked and exaggerated) and they use this "evidence" to make space to imagine alternative versions of events. Further, by overwhelming readers with unceasing suggestions of possible evidence, they divert criticism away from individual pieces of their evidence. The authors acknowledge that some of the stories told by their informants and some of

their evidence could be embellished, and they acknowledge themselves that it might not all be true; but if only *one* piece is legitimate, then it is possible to conceive that extraterrestrials really did crash on Earth, and what a story that would be!

Their evidence does not have to be good, but it must be plentiful, and ufologists are successful not because they have solid, robust evidence and testimony, but because they have so many hints and fragments that can be pieced together to tell an imaginative story of aliens being found in the desert and then "carted off, in utmost secrecy, by the military" (Moore and Berlitz, back cover). Much of the information in these books is presented in such a way that it fits into the larger narrative being spun by the authors, regardless of whether that information is completely accurate, exhaustive, or thoroughly analyzed, and many details that might refute their versions of events are left out in favour of the alien cover-up explanation. With the Roswell case there is a shift in nuts-and-bolts ufology, and the aim of ufologists is no longer about simply uncovering physical evidence of a flying saucer, as it was throughout the fifties, sixties, and seventies; it is now directed at finding *any* possible hint that might indicate government collusion, and then using this as "evidence" to support their contentions that aliens landed in Roswell.

Conspiracy Theorizing as Storytelling

Ufologists take these fragments and disparate pieces of information and weave them into a compelling and coherent conspiracy theory and this conspiracy theorizing has become an important rhetorical strategy for ufologists to convince others of the truth behind their stories. As Peter Knight (2003, 16) defines them, conspiracy theories are "an interpretation of history" that "claims that things aren't always what they seem and that things haven't just tumbled out by coincidence in the normal, more-or-less random fashion, but that they have only got like this because someone with evil intentions planned it this way." In other words, a conspiratorial view

suggests that whatever happens in society is the result of a direct design by some powerful individuals or groups who have taken intentional and immoral actions to enact their wills, and it sees everything as connected.[166] Conspiracy theories also share a common distrust of the official story and conspiracy theorists are heavily suspicious of elites and experts and skeptical of the assertions made by these epistemic authorities.[167]

Of course, ufologists would deny that their stories are conspiracy theories, especially since the "conspiracy theory" label is often dismissive and belittling. The term "conspiracy theory" is generally used to suggest that the interpretation offered is entirely incorrect, and stemming back to Richard Hofstadter's ([1964] 2008) examination of conspiracy thinking and the "paranoid style in American politics," it carries with it the pejorative impression that the believer is mentally disturbed and wrong; as Jaron Harambam (2017, 10) notes, the popular image of a conspiracy theorist views them as "a petty minded, insecure, socially disenfranchised, distrusting, militant, authoritarian, and stubborn narcissist looking for attention and control in a complex and unsettling world." Relatedly, Peter Knight (2003, 16) observes how a conspiracy theory that has been proven is usually called something else, such as "investigative journalism, or just well-researched historical analysis," and, while "there are undoubtedly conspiracy facts," conspiracy theories are usually treated as "misleading speculation[s]" that are inherently wrong. Since conspiracy theories are regarded as pathological and are dismissed as faulty science, they are also often considered to

[166] According to Barkun (2013), conspiracy theories tend to rely on the view that the universe is governed by design, and they embody three principles: nothing happens by accident or is the matter of chance, nothing is as it seems, and everything is connected (3).
[167] While conspiracy theories generally share a particular sort of logic, it is also important to look at individual, stand-alone theories; rather than simply treating all conspiracy theories with the broad sweep of the brush, an individualized examination of specific conspiracy theories allows researchers to tease out the different nuances in each theory and it helps to reach a better understanding of what makes these stories so believable and appealing. While I am addressing the logic of conspiracy theories in general, I am particularly interested in what alien conspiracy theories, and specifically the Roswell Incident, can tell us about those who believe in these stories.

be dangerous to politics.[168] Ufologists have therefore distanced themselves from this labelling, presenting their work instead as nonfictional historical accounts. I, however, do not intend to use this label disparagingly; instead, I am interested in how ufologists have been able to mobilize conspiracy theories to offer creative and seductive stories about secrecy and the operations of power in contemporary American society and I wish to draw attention to how this rhetorical framing serves an important function for the ufologists, as well as for those who believe in their accounts.

The pathological treatment of conspiracy theories as paranoid, illusory, and dangerous serves only to discard conspiracy theories as debased forms of thought, and it does not help to understand why these ideas have such massive appeal for many people. In contrast to this dismissive view, I propose that adherents of the Roswell Incident so adamantly defend the conspiracy theory because the story holds several important functional elements for its believers; hence, I offer what Peter Knight (2003, 21) describes as a functional approach to conspiracy theories. In this way, I do not simply look at whether the Roswell conspiracy theory is true or false, but I consider the function that this conspiracy theory fulfills for those who believe in and circulate it. As Knight notes, this view "does not see the believers in conspiracy theory as unwitting dupes but as active shapers of theories that help them to make sense of a confusing world," and he notes that conspiracy theories are perhaps "a kind of popular sociology," one that offer a way to make sense of things such as "structure and agency in a time when the official version of events and more academic forms of explanation fail to capture the imagination of a disillusioned public" (Ibid.). This is not to say that

[168] Jaron Harambam (2017, 20) describes how conspiracy theories are treated as dangerous and perilous to society and, in doing so, he raises the counterpoint that other forms of extreme thinking are similarly destructive: "Yes, paranoid beliefs may very well result in disastrous atrocities: the historical evidence these scholars put forward is both convincing and terrifying; however, reading Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer [1944], Hannah Arendt [1963], and Zygmunt Bauman [1989] one could easily make convincing arguments that rational science and instrumental reason are just as perilous to democratic societies."

I think that conspiracy theories are unflawed interpretations of history, or that the story of aliens being recovered from the desert in 1947 is accurate, and there are certainly problematic assumptions involved in making these claims, which I will address throughout this section. However, my focus of this analysis is to examine the logic behind conspiracy theories, and I consider why some people find them to be completely debased forms of thinking, while others contend that they offer seductive and appealing explanations for why things are the way they are.

Karl Popper (1963) was one of the first individuals to point out the errors in conspiratorial thinking by making a distinction between scientific statements and nonscientific statements; he claims that scientific statements can be falsified, whereas nonscientific, or pseudoscientific statements cannot.[169] Scientific theories are created when a hypothesis has been tested and has accumulated enough evidence to support it, and when it becomes accepted as a valid explanation of phenomena and offers a framework for observations and facts; scientific theories are also falsifiable, which does not mean they are false, but that there is a possibility that they could be proven false. Conspiracy theories, in contrast, are unfalsifiable. In other words, they are incapable of being contradicted by observation and cannot be proven false; hence conspiracy "theories," by their nature, cannot exist as actual *theories*, and as Michael Barkun observes, they also tend to incorporate whatever evidence exists against them, so they become closed, unfalsifiable systems that are "a matter of faith rather than proof" (2013, 7).[170]

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[169] Of course, as I have noted above, the boundaries between science and pseudoscience are always a bit murky, and there have been many examples of "good" ufology that make it challenging to label all ufological practice as pseudoscientific; see, for instance, Massimo Pigliucci and Maarten Boudry's *Philosophy of Pseudoscience: Reconsidering the Demarcation Problem* (2013). They argue that it is much easier to label something as pseudoscience and something else as legitimate science than it is to give an account of why something fits in either category. Hence, they find that it is important to look at such instances on a case-by-case basis, since "the devil is in the details" (Bauer, 2014, 95). By looking closely at the Roswell Incident, it becomes clear that the case presented by ufologists is largely unfalsifiable, which makes it largely a matter of faith rather than a matter of objective truth.

[170] What renders claims largely or entirely pseudoscientific, Scott O. Lilienfeld, Steven Jay Lynn, and Jeffrey M. Lohr (2015, 183) argue "is not that they are necessarily incorrect, but rather that their proponents have typically insisted that they are correct, despite compelling evidence to the contrary." Further, in describing the general nature of

The Roswell Incident is a case *par excellence* of unfalsifiablity. Conspiracy theories maintain that a group of evil agents has taken control or is plotting to assume control over an institution, a region, a nation, or the world, and they are usually employed to explain an event or situation whereby these shadowy figures have secretly enacted their will, often at the expense of ordinary citizens (Butter, 2014, 1); yet since conspiracies are by nature secret, usually we do not have access to the evidence that could prove the conspiracy theory, and we do not even know if that evidence really exists. This is certainly the case in Roswell, where the government has been cast in the role of the plotter intent on withholding important information from the American public. At the same time, there is little direct evidence to suggest that the American government is keeping secret its knowledge of extraterrestrial beings, so ufologists have linked together all sorts of disparate "evidence" to fashion their story.

Moreover, since many adherents of the Roswell Incident allege that the government is engaged in a continuous cover-up, all proof to the alternative is discredited in advance and any debris or evidence found that could show the material was really of earthly origin is dismissed outright. Mark Kingwell (1996), for instance, describes what happened when a piece of metal found at the alleged crash site was determined to be part of the weather balloon, and not a piece of extraterrestrial metal, as the conspiracy theorists had assumed: "They reacted by agreeing (as they had to) about the weather balloon — only to suggest that it was actually the balloon that caused the alien ship to crash" (273); the conspiracy theory therefore explains away the lack of material evidence involving the UFO crash and it incorporates the evidence against it to support its own

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conspiracy theories, Sunstein and Vermeule (2009, 204) take issue with their "crippled epistemology": "The acceptance of such theories may not be irrational or unjustified from the standpoint of those who adhere to them within epistemologically isolated groups or networks, although they are unjustified relative to the information available in the wider society, especially if it is an open one" (Ibid.).Conspiracy theories, they argue, point to a "distrust of all knowledge-producing institutions, in a way that makes it difficult to believe anything at all" (209).

contentions. Further, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, most believers in the Roswell Incident did not abdicate their position, even though the government released an official explanation of the alien crash; instead, they skillfully moulded the government's explanations into further evidence of their own theory.

For many, the unfalsifiability of the Roswell conspiracy theory makes it a nonsensical or irrational story that cannot be taken seriously, but for others, the story serves important purposes. Instinctively, "it is often assumed that the primary purpose of a belief is epistemological, to know something true about the world" (Friesen, Campbell, and Kay 2015, 515), so to the extent that people want to be seen as objectively "correct," unfalsifiability is viewed as a major problem since it cannot be tested, measured, and valued. "But being accurate," Justin P. Friesen, Troy H. Campbell, and Aaron C. Kay (2015, 515) point out, "is only one psychological motivation among many." They go on to list a variety of different motivations that tend to shape people's belief systems, including how "people want to view the world and their social groups as orderly …, view their social systems as legitimate …, be valued ingroup members …, see the self as a certain, secure and valued member of society …, have fulfilling relationships …, and see the self as meaningful …." In this way, "despite having negative connotations to scientists and empiricists" unfalsifiability "may have psychological utility" and unfalsifiable beliefs perform specific functions for adherents (516).

The unfalsifiability of the conspiracy theory charges it with a special power: since it cannot be proven either way and cannot be suppressed by contradictory evidence, it becomes impossible to refute. Like the alien abduction researchers who were able to root the truth of extraterrestrial visitation in the intimate experiences shared by their informants, these nuts-and-bolts ufologists have similarly made claims that their evidence is indisputable and unchallengeable by embracing

this conspiracy theory logic, and this has made the Rowell Incident a resilient and durable narrative that is able to survive as a possible explanation for the historical event despite informed refutations to the contrary.

Further, the conspiracy theory narrative of the Roswell Incident involves a certain kind of storytelling; it is a very creative story that assumes a dramatic narrative form and is told with vivid, lurid details that work to capture the imagination. Conspiracy theories are good yarns that share many structural parallels with fictional stories, and they can exert a powerful hold on the imagination "not *despite* [these] structural parallels … but in large part *because of* them" (Gottschall, 2012, 111). They resemble fictional stories in the sense that there is no concrete proof of them being factual, though they may draw on many factual elements to provide credence to their claims. In fact, this reliance on factual events gives conspiracy theories their strength; they take distinct and disjointed factual events and weave them together into a coherent plot using creative storytelling devices, and in doing so, they are presented as nonfictions, which works to suppress the fictional nature of their narratives. Hence, conspiracy theories impose "stories where they do not exist," and in this way, they "connect real data points and imagined data points into a coherent, emotionally satisfying version of reality," thereby blurring the boundaries between the factual and the fictional (Ibid.).

They also work to tie everything together, maintaining a masterful level of coherence by searching for connections between events to show how seemingly accidental and unconnected things are really part of a more elaborate plot, and they work to connect the dots in such a way that things *just make sense*. In other words, they attempt to offer a coherent, totalizing narrative that fits together disparate pieces of a puzzle. Fredric Jameson (1988a), for instance, argues that conspiracy theories are popular because of their ability to create a "cognitive map" of society,

meaning that they offer an explanation for why things are the way they are, and they provide believers with a sense of completeness; but, Jameson finds, they ultimately fail at achieving an understanding of social relations and are unable to represent the complexities of our social realities:

> Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, is *the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age*; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content. (356)[171]

Jameson's argument is that conspiracy theories, though they attempt to do so, are unable to produce legitimate knowledge, making them a debased, though widespread, form of logic in postmodern American society.

In other words, conspiracy theories create their own grand narratives that mimic rational, modern thought in their framing of a total, complete, and coherent system. In their overarching design and all-encompassing framework, conspiracy theories give shape to, and offer an explanation of, history. They constantly fit new pieces of information into their wider design and offer a kind of grand narrative to explain the cause of things; however, the impulse to totalize in conspiracy thinking reveals itself to be impossible. As Mark Fenster ([1999] 2008, 93) argues, conspiracy theories follow a perpetually circular search through a "constant process of interpretation" where even the most trivial fact or coincidence finds itself "related to a host of other facts" that become used as new evidence for the theory: "this interpretive desire is an active and endless process that continually seeks, but never fully arrives at, a final interpretation" (Ibid.).[172]

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[171] There are certainly problematic connotations with Jameson's evocation of the "poor person," which comes across as patronizing and condescending, and which places blame on the lower classes, even though conspiracy theorizing cuts across class lines.

[172] Fenster argues that conspiracy theories, while they might seem progressive in the way in which they give a voice to a populist resentment of authorities are, at the end of the day, putting forward a distorted view of historical causation that ultimately leads people astray from real political engagement.

Conspiracy thinking is therefore endlessly circular and forever incomplete; while it gives the impression of a totality or a "cognitive map," as Jameson concludes, it ultimately fails at producing a "real" map of our social totality.

For those who do not espouse the logic of the ufological community, conspiracy theories are therefore clearly flawed interpretations of history and they are unable to produce reliable maps of the world; these individuals also find it inconceivable to conclude that an event like the Roswell Incident is simply the result of the specific intentions of a group of plotters. For them, it makes more sense that the incident involved a combination of mundane activities, covert operations, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, and that the ufologists' key informants lied to insert themselves into history; these factors, along with pure governmental incompetence, they argue, led to the government's mishandling of the event, which created the idea that aliens were recovered at the site (not that aliens really *were* found in the desert). In other words, these individuals tend to emphasize that abstract institutional structures and accidental or contingent events are the real makers of history, and they see the Roswell conspiracy theory as a simplistic and unrealistic depiction that puts too much focus on the deliberate and corrupt intentions of individuals.[173] The conspiratorial undertones inherent in the ufologists' arguments, therefore, do not allow them to adequately critique these mechanisms.

But the simplicity of the conspiracy theory is exactly the point, and it is this tidy explanation that makes the conspiracy theory so appealing. By simplicity, I do not mean that the Roswell conspiracy theory is uncomplicated, and anyone who tries to research the conspiracy theory will find themselves stuck in an intricate and tangled web of ideas and information. Since conspiracy

[173] Of course, as Skip Willman (2002) argues, the conceptual opposite of conspiracy theories – this contingency theory of society – is similarly constructed on flawed foundations: it "constructs an ideologically coherent social reality rooted in social fantasy" (21) and the belief that all history unfolds by chance or luck is as fanciful a notion as the idea that conspiracies steer it: "they represent two sides of the same coin" (25).

theories try to link often unrelated pieces together to show how everything is connected, the various threads of the conspiracy theory are themselves complex, layered, messy, and certainly not straightforward. However, there is an overall simplicity to the answers provided by conspiracy theories; they thrive on the gaps in official stories and they take advantage of the murkiness of historical events by filling them in with a clear and direct explanation that agents are working behind the scenes and are withholding important information from the public.

Conspiracy theories offer the "pleasure of control, of finding the correct answer to the riddle of power" (Fenster, 1999, 93) and they provide a coherence for the subject by describing an intelligible society of which they are a part. Extraterrestrial conspiracy theories, in particular, seem to offer a tidy solution for otherwise impossible-to-pin-down sources of power. By connecting so many different pieces of information together into a coherent story, the Roswell conspiracy theory attempts to offer a tidy answer to the complex workings of power in contemporary society and it allows the believer to interpret and make sense of their place in an otherwise puzzling and contingent world. Here, I draw again from Peter Knight (2003), who makes the point that conspiracy theories serve an important purpose for believers by allowing them — "as nonprofessional historians" — to "try out ideas about the nature of historical change" (17). [174] It follows then that the Roswell Incident is embraced by its adherents because it contains this functional component and tells a version of the events that believers find credible and useful for explaining their place in the world.

[174] In fact, conspiracy theories share many important parallels to academic traditions of theorizing. For instance, the "hermeneutics of suspicion" that Paul Ricoeur (1970) identifies in the works of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud shares parallels with conspiracy theorizing. In their resolution that there are hidden symbols, and disguised, concealed, and repressed mechanisms underlying human activities, and in their refusal to take people's actions, ideas, and realities at face value, psychoanalytic, Marxist, and Foucauldian traditions exhibit similar strategies of suspicion and "reading between the lines" that underly conspiracy theorizing.

Throughout this chapter I have intended to situate the Roswell conspiracy theory in its historical moment, and I see the Roswell story as a product of this history; as a conspiracy theory, Roswell provides a tidy explanation for the way in which power has operated in American society from the Cold War on. While we have sometimes caught glimpses of the way this power functions — for instance, the Watergate scandal hinted at the atrocious activities happening behind the scenes in American politics in the 1970s — for the most part, power has remained secretive, mysterious, and hidden, operating in the shroud of the covert sphere and clandestine government affairs, yet the Roswell conspiracy theory allows us to make sense of what is happening behind the scenes and it seeks to bring the "truth" into the open.

In that sense, the Roswell theory draws attention to the popular notion that democracy is receding, and it plays into the underlying sense that democratic politics is merely an illusion. As Daniel Hellinger (2003, 205) reminds us, "in a world where international elites promote pluralist democracy and market transparency, American foreign policy continues to be conducted through opaque processes that bear the hallmarks of conspiracy," and "the post–World War II era has been characterized by repeated scandals involving intelligence agencies, whose missions include covert operations that thrive in a seamy social space." In this way, conspiracy theories such as Roswell work to "introduce subjective and individualized forms of accountability into the otherwise impersonal, structural forces that, according to social scientists, journalists and historians, move our world" (208). That is, the Roswell conspiracy theory is a functional response created by ordinary people to explain impersonal forces that are difficult to grasp, and it draws attention to the fact the United States *is* brimming with government secrets. As such, conspiracy theories are not based directly on logic or fact, but they do point toward real social problems, and they are not *exactly* wrong.

The Roswell conspiracy captures — even if in a bizarre and fantastical way — a view of the world and American politics and society that is not entirely groundless and that seems to *fit* for its proponents. By weaving these stories in with other stories about American social and political life, and by explicitly connecting the dots between disparate events, they seem to register for many who share a particular sort of despondency about American politics, and who see in these stories an explanation for how things have become the way they are. Conspiracy theories, though faulty, do point to real social grievances and concerns held by many individuals, and the Roswell conspiracy theory in particular hints at the feelings of powerlessness, confusion, stress, disappointment, and decline that have been experienced by many Americans since the end of WWII.

Moreover, the Roswell conspiracy theory draws attention to the flaws inherent in the official explanations of the Roswell Incident, as well as in the official responses to UFO phenomena more generally. For many, there is an absence of convincing stories on the part of officials to explain UFO phenomena and to account for the government's original interest in it, and while authoritative explanations might be "reasonable," they are often not taken as believable. This is, at least in part, because of the rhetorical nature of the government's (and the scientific establishment's) stance on these phenomena: the official responses to ETs and UFOs have been largely dismissive. Consider for example the title of the government's report, *Roswell: Case Closed* ([1997] 2011), or the earlier Condon Report's official title, *Final Report of the Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects* (1968). These titles hint at the government's attempt to squash ideas about aliens in their tracks, and the official explanations are meant to provide a complete account and a definitive and final response that is intended to cast out other sorts of stories; yet this dismissiveness suggests that they have their own agenda. In contemporary American society, official reports often battle it out with unauthorized ones, and people must choose between stories that appear compelling and seductive,

and ones that are combative and dismissive; for many, ufology, as an open, democratic, and participatory community, offers a more convincing story than the closed-minded and exclusive one presented by traditional authorities. The ufological explanations provide an avenue for ordinary individuals to access answers for themselves, which is in large part why ufology has become so attractive for so many Americans.

Further, while the official story intends to offer a finalized account, it is really unable to forge an ending, whereas the conspiracy theory is able to offer a sense of (distorted) comfort and understanding of the world. As such, the Roswell Incident has served as a linchpin for the ufological community and there are huge stakes in maintaining that it unfolded in the way that ufologists have described: it could prove that aliens have visited Earth and that the government knows about it. The alternative explanation, that there were no aliens discovered, is certainly not as enticing as the story that aliens have been uncovered and that *we* know that *we* are being lied to. The Roswell Incident "theorizes" (even if wrongly) a more coherent explanation of the way that power operates in contemporary American society than is afforded by the official account of what transpired, and in doing so, it offers a sense of comfort by providing a unified explanation of what is going on.

In considering the storytelling nature of the conspiracy theory, then, it seems that the truth or falsity of the Roswell Incident is not as important as the function that the narrative serves. People's perceptions of the world are inherently interpretive and "whether an account is regarded as valid is a function of the social context and conventions that the members of those contexts use to construct validity as a criterion for truth claims" (Maines, 1993, 29). Truth, in the case of Roswell, is established not by the epistemological standards that the scholarly community uses to assess historicity, but by a different set of criteria accepted by the ufological community. These standards

are not focused as heavily on evidence or empirical data, but instead on the function of the narrative, which offers an explanation for the way things are. As such, conspiracy theories about Roswell, and alien-government plots in general, feed the compulsive need for meaningful experience by offering answers that explain the way that things are and how they came to be, and they help to make sense of the complex workings of power in our everyday lives. Conspiracy theories draw upon an affective function that finds meaningfulness in this world and they seek to provide a solution (however inaccurate) to our problems.[175] By weaving together ideas into a cohesive narrative structure framed by a sense of suspicion, the Roswell conspiracy theory may not tell us the "truth" about the purported conspiracy, but it does tell us a lot about American social and political life. The story does not have to be true — it only needs to be viewed as a good story that registers for those who embrace it, and, in accepting this version of events, adherents are able to express a deep disillusionment toward modern politics; in other words, the Roswell conspiracy theory rings a better bell than the truth alone because it has a better story to tell.

In emphasizing the function of the Roswell conspiracy theory, and conspiracy theories in general, I am certainly not trying to champion these sorts of beliefs or ideas, and it is important to keep in mind that most of the conspiracy theorists I have spoken with exhibit a simultaneous sense of empowerment — because they *know the truth* about what was *really going on* behind the scenes[176] — and disempowerment — because they feel powerless to enact any significant change in the world, as oppressive and secret forces seem to thwart their every effort. They experience

[175] Mark Fenster (1999) also touches on the affective force of conspiracy theories by looking at how conspiracy theorizing constitutes "a form of play" that stirs "a sense of pleasure" (xx–xxi; 14; 212). According to Fenster, conspiracy theories allow participants to experience a dizzying rush of feelings associated with discovering conspiracy, which also produces feelings of excitement and fulfillment.

[176] As Fran Mason (2001, 47) argues, conspiracy theories act as a "centering device for subjectivity by allowing all the world's random events to be explained in terms of the paranoid's version of conspiracy." The "paradox of identity in conspiracy theory," Mason explains, expresses both a postmodern decentred subject, but also expresses a meaningful, rational, and centred identity, or subjectivity, by apparently locating the self within the secret knowledge of the powerful (Ibid.).

feelings of jubilation and excitement because of their discoveries, but they also feel rage, devastation, frustration, and exhaustion because of their awareness of the conspiracy theory — and holding these conspiratorial views can be quite debilitating for believers.

Moreover, by adhering to this style of thinking, believers in the Roswell Incident work to create a paradoxical logic in which it becomes impossible to uncover the truth of what happened that summer of 1947, as any attempt to explain the incident only serves to fuel the conspiracy; this unsettling of trust and truth has larger implications for American society — a point I will address in my conclusion. In this section, however, my goal has been to trace the appeal of the Roswell conspiracy theory by considering how it has served as a comforting narrative that allows believers to “theorize” and make sense of their social worlds, and I have attempted to show why this version of events can be taken as a more believable account than the official narrative.

Chapter Six:

The Symbolic Topography of Roswell and the Performativity of Ufology

Ethnographic Storytelling

Throughout this dissertation, I have considered some of the ways in which ufologists have framed their arguments to present their own truth claims as alternatives to official explanations. From employing conspiratorial logic to explain away their lack of evidence, to rooting knowledge solely in personal testimony to make their claims uncontestable, ufologists have utilized a variety of different strategies to convince others of their assertions and, as I have already shown, these claims have attracted the attention of a rather sizeable public. So far I have considered how these arguments have been presented in print, and much of my analysis up until this point has examined ufological arguments made in books, journals, and online; but ufologists also engage with their public face-to-face by presenting their work at UFO conventions and festivals, where they perform their arguments to an audience. The next part of this dissertation considers how ufology plays out in these concrete physical spaces. Specifically, I examine how ufologists have presented their research publicly at the International UFO Festival in Roswell, New Mexico, which I attended during the summers of 2013 and 2014.[177]

At the festival, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork and spoke with ufologists, their audiences, and the people who make up the Roswell community to get a sense of why Roswell has become such an important site for ufology, and to look more closely at how ufologists perform their

[177] I stayed in Roswell for a couple of months both summers and I extended my stay beyond the duration of the festival, so I could experience the day-to-day, lived realities of the inhabitants and visitors in Roswell and consider the everyday landscape of the city, rather than simply focusing on the festival rhythms and movements. This allowed me to compare the ordinary city environment to the *special* atmosphere of the festival. I also attended two consecutive festivals to obtain both synchronic and diachronic perspectives of the events. I attended numerous festival events, and I spoke with tourist promoters, participants, residents, and visitors, whose oral accounts inform a large portion of this chapter.

arguments. As I paid attention to the stories circulating at the festival, I came to realize that I was using these stories to create my own narrative; as Rodolfo Maggio (2014) acknowledges, all anthropological production is to a certain extent a story, and it is important to critically reflect on the storytelling nature of this work.[178]

While conducting my fieldwork, I became a recipient of stories; many people told me all sorts of things about their own experiences with UFOs and ETs, and I had the opportunity to observe the ufologists' public performances of their research and ideas. As I listened to and recorded these stories, which were often obscure and fragmented, I had to find ways to weave them together into a unified narrative to make sense of them, and this required subjective, intuitive work on my part.[179] Importantly, in an ethnography, we not only tell other's stories, but we also tell our own stories, so my voice makes its way into this account. By inserting my ethnographic voice into this discussion, I also become a character in this story, which marks a change of tone from my previous chapters.[180] In this ethnography, I am not just sharing information about ufology, but I am using

[178] While ethnography is certainly a form of storytelling, it is more specific than a free-for-all kind of storytelling: to borrow a phrase from Carole McGranahan (2015), it is a "theoretical storytelling." It relies on a particular set of methods, such as participant observation and thick description (Geertz, 1973), and the intent of ethnography is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice.

[179] Moreover, I faced certain struggles when attempting to interview individuals with their own stories about aliens and UFOs. For instance, some potential interview subjects became deterred when I presented the ethics review form that my university institution required I ask research subjects to sign. In my informal conversations, these people shared a variety of stories about their beliefs in extraterrestrials and their reasons for visiting the site, but when I presented the form, they were often unwilling to sign and did not want to engage any further. This is not all that surprising — in a space where conspiracy theories run rampant, speaking to someone with a bureaucratic form that requires a signature conjures images of the ominous and threatening institutions that feature prominently in these conspiratorial imaginings. I therefore focused my interviews on those key participants whom I describe above and relied on other methods to gauge the motivations of other attendees, such as paying careful attention to audience questions and the discussions that followed the public lectures.

[180]Of course, my voice is not simply objective, but is imbued with its own set of assumptions and ideas; hence, it is important to be reflexive of the research process and my own positionality as an ethnographer. My position as an outsider to the community (and to the country itself) offers a rich perspective for the study of the festival. When I began this ethnographic research, for instance, I was just beginning my PhD and had not yet sufficiently investigated the story of the Roswell Incident or the dynamics of the ufological community. While this sometimes made it challenging for me to understand or appreciate everything that I experienced, it also meant that I was less entangled in the history, had less ability to impose my own interpretations on UFO phenomena, and I was simply able to observe and record what I saw and heard. Furthermore, as a Canadian citizen, I bring a vital dimension to this area of research. Most current work on Roswell, and the phenomena of alien sightings and beliefs in general, has been conducted by a

my insight as a participant-observer of the ufological community to attempt to see how ufologists and their public experience the world, and I am, in a sense, telling a story — about Roswell, aliens, ufology, and the United States more generally.

Aliens Everywhere

It is helpful to begin this story by looking at the site of Roswell itself. Before I analyze the performative strategies in the presentations given by ufologists at the festival, I first need to establish why Roswell has become such an important place for ufology. Obviously, the story of the Roswell Incident itself has played an important role in attracting visitors to the city. After the resurgence of interest in the incident, Roswell became a place of pilgrimage for people with a deep investment and interest in the history of the alleged UFO crash, and many individuals found themselves drawn to Roswell, looking to see for themselves what they believed had been hidden by the shroud of government secrecy. As more and more people started visiting Roswell, the city, the Roswell community, and the ufological community began to embrace this attention and started to promote Roswell a hotbed for conspiracy theories and a place to celebrate all things alien.[181]

As I toured throughout the city, I noticed aliens everywhere; nearly every store window is marked with them, murals of "little green men" are painted on the sides of many commercial buildings, and the streets are lined with lampposts decorated with large alien eyes on the domes. There is a great deal of industriousness to a lot of the alien figures displayed at the local businesses downtown, such as the fresco of a Mariachi band painted on the exterior of a small family-run Mexican restaurant; the hand-carved alien statues posed outside an art and hobbies store; and the

handful of American researchers; yet there are great critical insights and observations that can be achieved more readily through a traditional outsider's ethnographic perspective, such as my own. In a way befitting of an outsider to the US, I was perhaps more awed by the vast military presence that surrounds the Roswell area, and this allowed me to come to see Roswell as a symbolic site that represents the vastness of America's hidden and secret military industrial complex.

[181] For a town with a population of 50 000, Roswell receives an estimated one hundred thousand visitors each year and is especially busy during the UFO Festival celebrations.

theming of the local paraphernalia store, fittingly named Area 420, a pun on Area 51, the secret military base in nearby Nevada, and 420, a number commonly associated with "stoner culture." There are also several stores dedicated solely to selling UFO and alien-themed items,[182] and larger companies have also capitalized on the alien frenzy: a wall in the local Walmart displays a mural of aliens dressed as a family of tourists, the McDonald's fast-food restaurant downtown is designed to look like a flying saucer, and the local Arby's sign advertises "Aliens Welcome."[183] It seems that the local community has embraced the invasion of aliens in Roswell and is actively engaged in promoting this theme to capitalize on the tourist dollars brought to the city by those interested in the Roswell story.[184]

Image of *Starchild* gift shop. Digital image. *3 for the Road Blog.* 14 January 2008. Web. Accessed 11 October 2017. http://3fortheroad.blogspot.ca/

[182] During my visit there were at least eight gift shops dedicated predominantly to alien-themed merchandise. One of these shops, *Starchild*, is over 20 years old and claims to be the first and oldest alien gift shop in the world. Many of these stores were open seven days a week and until 9:00 p.m., suggesting the tremendous demand for their wares.

[183] These displays struck me as peculiar local adaptations for what are otherwise very standardized and cookie-cutter corporations, and they speak to the overall importance of promoting the alien theme in Roswell.

[184] The Roswell Incident is therefore an important story not just for the ufological community, but for the city itself, which had been struggling economically ever since its military base closed in 1968, when the city lost 10 000 civilian and military workers overnight, leading to the collapse of the Roswell real estate market. As Roswell's economy collapsed, stores closed and businesses moved, taking with them thousands more families and millions of dollars, and the unemployment rate rose to well over twenty percent as young people began to move away (Claiborne, 12 July 1993). Over time, a largely rural, resource-based agricultural industry returned to the city and helped to stabilize the local economy, but the tourism industry has also unexpectedly contributed to the revival of Roswell's economy.

Image of local hobby store (far left), and images of gift shop interiors. Taken on June 29, 2013. Personal images.

Image of Roswell street light (left); image of Roswell McDonald's (right). Digital image. *3 for the Road Blog.* 14 January 2008. Web. Accessed 11 October 2017. http://3fortheroad.blogspot.ca/>

Image of "Mariachi Alien" mural on exterior of Mexican restaurant. Taken on June 29, 2013. Personal image.

Gazing upon these images and displays, I was instantly reminded of Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality (1988, 5–6; 120–128). According to Baudrillard, in contemporary American consumer society reality has been displaced by hyperreality, where simulacra dominate and pervade every level of existence.[185] The "little green men" and extraterrestrial displays that have taken over Roswell are a perfect instance of simulacra and they gesture to the hyperreality of American culture. These alien images, or simulacra, have no firm origin, no referent, no foundation; they are images with nothing much behind them. In other words, they are signs that merely reflect other signs and have no relationship to reality whatsoever — there is no *real* image of an alien from which they are modelled. At the same time, they serve as a major source of consumerism, and people from all over the world have made the pilgrimage to this postmodern tourists' paradise to view these images.

Further, while Roswell has become a popular destination for conspiracy theorists and believers, it is important to mention that the actual crash did not happen in Roswell, but instead occurred roughly 100 miles away, just outside Corona, New Mexico. Despite this, very few people go to the actual crash site when they visit Roswell, and fewer still could even say where exactly this crash site is (there are multiple theories of the crash site and there is no consensus over the actual area). Roswell itself has become a mecca for alien tourism, even though the "Roswell" Incident occurred well outside the town. In this sense, Roswell is a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1988, 170): there is no actual crash site, and there are no "real" aliens and no "real" spaceships to see in Roswell, but only endless signs to gaze upon. The alien theming of the city has therefore encouraged visitors to come to Roswell, drawn in not simply for the history of alien visitation but to engage in the spectacle of the American fascination with aliens.

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[185] I offer Baudrillard's definition of "simulacra" on page 211 of this dissertation.

Ufologists have taken advantage of the popularity of Roswell as a tourist destination by founding the International UFO Museum & Research Center (IUFOMRC), which has become a place for ufologists to unite to discuss their ideas and to share them, face-to-face, with their public. Established in 1991 by two key participants in the Roswell Incident, Walter Haut and Glenn Dennis, along with Max Littell, a real estate agent in Roswell who helped find the first location for the museum, the IUFOMRC has become an important fixture in the Roswell community and has drawn in tremendous crowds since it first opened. In the summer of 2001, for instance, the museum recorded its one-millionth visitor, and each year since, the museum attracts around 150 000 visitors from all around the world (Briscoe, Mark, personal interview, 9 July 2013; "International UFO Museum & Research Center History," 2013). It also claims to be the second most visited museum in the state of New Mexico, and as the museum brochure states, "each month every state in the US is represented as well as an average of 34 foreign countries" (unknown author, "International UFO Museum and Research Center, Main Brochure," 2013). The museum has become a sort of "headquarters" for ufology, and, as its website boasts, the IUFOMRC is a "leading information source in history, science and research about UFO events worldwide" (unknown author, "UFO Museum History," 2010).

Image of the IUFOMRC exterior. Digital image. "International UFO Museum and Research Center, Roswell, New Mexico." America's Library. *Rodden's Inc.* Accessed 11 October 2017. Web. http://www.americaslibrary.gov/es/nm/es_nm_ufo_1_e.html

Image of a map of the US on display inside the IUFOMRC. Visitors use pushpins to locate where they are travelling from and the pins are removed at the end of each week. This image shows the pins as they were on June 30, 2013, just before the International UFO Festival was set to begin. 30 June 2013. Personal image.

Images of the museum interior and displays. Taken on June 30, 2013. Personal images.

What I found most interesting about the museum is that a significant part of the collection on display is dedicated to the Roswell Incident, despite there being very little actual evidence or materials to showcase. Instead, there are numerous framed newspaper accounts of the incident and photographs taken of the notable individuals who were involved. The primary physical artifact on display is a piece of metal found at the supposed crash site, which was discovered during a 2002 Sci-Fi Channel–sponsored archaeological dig and was later tested and revealed to be a piece of jewellery. Alongside this material is a sizable exhibit dedicated to the dig itself, which includes an account of the excavation, along with images taken during the archaeological investigation. Since the dig turned up no physical evidence of extraterrestrial life, this piece of uncovered metal is one of the only physical materials to display in this exhibit. In this way, the museum seems unlike other museums; rather than focusing on artifacts and physical objects, it instead uses newspapers, placard captions, and photographs to create a story for visitors; hence, I see the museum as another

example of Baudrillard's hyperreality, since it exists merely as a collection of signs upon signs, again with no referent to Reality.

Through the various efforts of the city, the local community, and the ufological community, Roswell has been recognized as an important site to visit for those with an interest in aliens, UFOs, and conspiracy theories. These efforts to make Roswell into a theme-park style attraction have established the city as a tourist destination, and visitors flock to Roswell to engage with the spectacle of the alien. But it is not just the conscious efforts of individuals that have allowed Roswell to become the "alien capital of the world," and its appeal cannot simply be attributed to fact that the famed UFO crash is said to have occurred in the desert just outside the city. Certainly, the Roswell Incident is an exceptional story of a UFO report, especially since the government originally did misreport the event as a flying saucer crashing in the desert; as we have seen, however, there have been many other UFO sightings and alien contact accounts taking place all across the United States, and all around the world, yet, it is Roswell that has become internationally recognized above all the others, and its name has become synonymous with conspiracies, government secrecy, UFOs and ETs. I argue that this is because the stories told by ufology are contained in the very topography of Roswell, and this has made Roswell an important site for capturing the imagination of ufology's public.

In the "Middle of Nowhere," or the Heart of America's Military Industrial Complex?: "I've a Feeling We're Not in New Jersey Anymore"

To understand why Roswell has become such a significant site for encapsulating ufological ideas, it is helpful to visit the city to see how these ideas are embedded into its very landscape. As mentioned, I made this visit in the summer of 2013 and again the following year, and during my

stays, I realized that Roswell was more than just a physical place on the map; it is an imaginative *site,* a symbolic space that contains within it a set of specific meanings and ideas.[186]

The first hints of this discovery came to me even before I landed in New Mexico. As I prepared to depart Pearson Airport in Toronto to take the roughly five-hour flight (with a brief layover at Dallas-Fort Worth), I approached the US customs officer with my passport. Expecting to be met by the usual indifferent or intimidating officer, I handed over my papers. He asked where I was going, and when I told him my destination, his interest was instantly piqued. “Roswell?” he questioned. I spoke a bit about my research and how I was heading down to study the UFO Festival, which takes place there each summer. His demeanour changed, and we spent a few minutes talking about Roswell, UFOs, and the possibilities for alien life in the universe and here on Earth. As he wished me well on my journey, he disclosed that “there has gotta be something else out there,” and he admitted that he had personally seen lights in the sky that could not be explained.

As my journey continued, I found myself engaged in another spontaneous conversation about Roswell, when during my layover in Dallas, I asked a flight attendant where I could find the Roswell boarding gate. Coincidentally, the flight attendant’s mother lives in Roswell, so we struck up a quick conversation about the city. She was rather curious as to why I was going to a place “in the middle of nowhere,” and when I told her I was going to research the city, she seemed a bit surprised. She told me that there was not much to see or do there, except, perhaps, that “alien stuff.”

After the layover in Dallas, I made my way on to the next airplane, which would arrive directly in Roswell. At the closing of the short flight, several other passengers began loudly joking with one another: “We should be on a flying disk,” one said. “There are probably more aliens in Roswell

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[186] In using the word *site* to describe Roswell, I am emphasizing the symbolic nature of Roswell rather than thinking of it merely as a locality.

than people," another retorted. Similar jests were exchanged back and forth as the airplane landed in the vast, open desert.

When we touched down at the airport, I rented a car from the airport rental car service and made my way to my hotel, which I would call home for the next several weeks. At both the hotel and the rental service desks, the hotel receptionist and the car rental clerk were, like the flight attendant, also somewhat bewildered by the fact that I was staying for so long in Roswell, especially since I was not visiting any friends or relatives, was not employed in the area, and did not have any involvement in the military school there. They mentioned that Roswell was a good place to spend an afternoon visiting before heading off to see other sites but emphasized that it was more of a place for passing through — the car rental clerk even suggested I take a trip out to the Grand Canyon in Arizona, rather than spend all my time in Roswell.

I had not anticipated that my fieldwork would begin well before attending the UFO Festival, but through these brief encounters, I noticed a few things. The experiences with the customs officer and my fellow airplane passengers, for instance, reminded me of just how entrenched the story of the Roswell Incident has become in American culture, finding itself embedded within the popular lexicon. Further, the encounter with the officer and specifically his response that "there has gotta be something else out there" — which was provoked after I began to discuss the city —suggests that the site of Roswell evokes ideas about the unknown and it raises the possibility that there is more going on than meets the eye. Conversely, my experiences with the flight attendant, hotel receptionist, and car rental clerk suggested a different view of Roswell, as a place "in the middle of nowhere," simply a spot on the map in rural America, where there is not that much to see. I did not realize it at the time, but these encounters offered some important hints about the *idea* of

Roswell and the way in which it has come to be a site that is viewed as both empty and full of meaning.

While in Roswell, I conducted research about the city's history to get a sense of how Roswell has developed into the *site par excellence* for ufology. One thing that struck me was the longstanding military presence in Roswell, which began with the foundation of the New Mexico Military Institute in 1891, a private military school, which still operates today (LeMay, 2008, 39). Despite the Depression, the population boom in Roswell lasted through the 1930s, and in the 1940s the military expanded their operations in the city, creating further growth and development (55).This began in 1942, first with the construction of the Roswell Army Flying School, followed soon after by the formation of the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF), later renamed the Walker Air Force Base (AFB), which was built three miles south of the central business district in Roswell. The RAAF was home to the 509th Bombardment Group, as well as the Boeing B-29 that was used to carry out the atomic bomb attacks on Japan; after the war, Enola Gay returned to the RAAF (73). By the end of the war, the military expanded their operations in Roswell, and the city was known as the site of the largest Strategic Air Command (SAC) in the world.[187]

As home to the largest SAC, Roswell became a bustling military hot spot full of government secrets. What is more, a robust military presence was also established around the city: roughly 225 miles north of Roswell was the heart of the American nuclear homeland, Los Alamos Laboratories, which housed the Manhattan Project, and just over 100 miles west of Roswell was the Holloman Air Force base in Alamogordo, as well as the White Sands Missile Range. Its location in the heart

[187] The vast military presence had an enduring influence on Roswell's development: its population increased threefold, employment opportunities were plentiful, and federal spending in the city was astronomical, with roughly $1 million a month being pumped into the local economy (105; Claiborne, 13 July 1993). This period of military operations, then, marked what was considered by many citizens of Roswell as a successful and prosperous time for the city.

of the American military-industrial complex certainly helped make it possible to imagine why Roswell is a site that connects to ideas about government conspiracies and military secrets.

There has been a long history of government secrecy in Roswell and the surrounding area, largely due to this active military presence. On 16 July 1945, for instance, prior to the dropping of "Little Boy" on Hiroshima, the first plutonium-implosion atomic bomb, called "Trinity," was detonated at the testing grounds in Alamogordo "against the backdrop of White Sands, the pale blue backcloth of the mountains and hundreds of miles of white sand — the blinding artificial light of the bomb against the blinding light of the ground" (Baudrillard, 1989, 4). Illuminating the sky over a mile across, the blast reportedly could be seen from as far away as Amarillo, Texas (Wellerstein, 16 July 2015). To quell suspicions of this strange vision in the sky, the army announced that an ammunitions magazine had exploded in the area, but only three weeks later, Enola Gay bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, suggesting that something more may have happened at the military testing site. At the time, however, secrecy was not necessarily seen as the same thing as conspiracy, and since the military and the bomb brought prosperity to the region, it was largely supported. Hence, suspicions over these covert operations did not happen immediately, and, for quite some time, many citizens seemed to unquestioningly embrace the military activities undertaken in Roswell and the surrounding area, as they heralded a period of economic prosperity for the region.

While there appears to be little in the historical record that details concerns about the covert military operations happening in the area during and immediately after WWII, over time, speculations started to emerge about the classified projects being undertaken by government officials in Roswell and elsewhere (which were spurred on in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the conspiracy theories about the Roswell Incident, as well as the revelations of several

government conspiracies undertaken since WWII, as I have discussed in my previous chapter). For many, it made sense that if the government was able to mask the highly classified and technologically sophisticated Manhattan Project in the desolate and empty desert, then perhaps it was capable of holding onto other sorts of secrets — maybe even secrets regarding its knowledge of extraterrestrials on Earth. Hence, many individuals began to wonder what else might have happened in Roswell that had been covered up, vanishing like a mirage in the desert. The Roswell Incident, like the detonation of Trinity, took place in the middle of nowhere — far removed from urban civilization — where the military could operate unseen and with little accountability; this led to speculation that more was going on in this place than meets the eye.

Some even began to postulate that the Roswell Incident and the Manhattan Project were connected. That is, perhaps aliens really did crash in Roswell in 1947 because they were coming to Earth to prevent the American government from engaging in any more nuclear experiments. Or, perhaps this was not the first spaceship that had landed in the immense desert, and aliens had been working secretly with the government by supplying the military with the intelligence and technology to create this weaponry, which did seem otherworldly in its destructive scale.[188] With its central location in the middle of the US nuclear and weapons complex, Roswell is not simply another rural American city; instead, it is a place with a deeply entrenched history of clandestine government operations, which encourages the idea that the government really did cover up a spaceship and alien bodies.

However, the military operations that took place specifically in Roswell were fleeting, and in 1967 the Walker AFB permanently closed, apparently due to funding cutbacks (LeMay, 2008,

[188] Some have even surmised that technologies developed since the Roswell Incident, such as night goggles, fibre optics, bulletproof vests, lasers, and even cell phones, were all possibly reverse-engineered from the debris recovered from the UFO crash.

117).[189] Despite the closure of the Walker AFB, Roswell remains in close proximity to other, still active, military locations, such as Los Alamos, White Sands, and the Holloman and Kirkland Air Force Bases, which are still used for military research and development.[190] That these sites are all concealed in the desert is very significant, and this desert landscape provides an important clue as to why Roswell has been able to connect to ideas about extraterrestrials. Power in the immense expanse of land that surrounds Roswell seems invisible, and this creates a tension: the vacant and empty desert is simultaneously brimming with military activities and secrets. Far from being in the middle of nowhere, Roswell and these surrounding areas are secretly housing America's military industrial complex, so its very topography and history have allowed Roswell to become *the site par excellence* for conspiracy theories and tales of alien cover-ups. A visit to Roswell perhaps allows for a moment of reflection about the nature of secrecy in America, as well as its shadowy and sometimes nefarious Cold War history, and the need to visit and commemorate Roswell is spawned by a desire to preserve these skeptical and cynical attitudes against the opaque nature of power in American society. The drive to commemorate may be motivated by the fear

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[189] While the government claimed that the closure was the result of funding reductions during the Vietnam War, as General Curtis LeMay (Air Force chief of staff and former chief of the Strategic Air Command) recounts in a *Washington Post* interview with William Claiborne, many people in Roswell at the time and even today, believed, and believe, that President Lyndon B. Johnson closed the base because this part of New Mexico voted heavily for Barry Goldwater in the 1964 election (Claiborne, 1993; LeMay, 2008, 117). While the Walker AFB was merely one base in a long list of other defence facilities slated for closure, and while Johnson still narrowly won Chaves County by roughly 200 votes, many theorized that the closure was a political decision made to punish the county's citizens. Interestingly then, the closure of the base brought about a sort of conspiracy theory of its own, which appeared before the resurfacing of the conspiratorial imaginings about the Roswell Incident in the 1980s.

[190] Furthermore, Roswell and these surrounding bases are linked to a network of military locations that have been used for testing nuclear weaponry and rockets that extend across the American Southwest, covering swaths of land not just in New Mexico, but also in Nevada, southeastern California, and parts of Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and Texas (Kuletz, 1998/2016, 10). These military bases are located in stretches of empty desert; as Valerie Kuletz ([1998] 2016) writes, "this region includes all five of the major North American deserts: the lower Great Basin Desert in Nevada and the southeastern margins of California, the Navajoan Desert in the Four Corners area, the upper Chihuahan Desert in New Mexico, the upper Sonoran Desert in California and Arizona, and the Mojave Desert in California, Nevada, and Arizona" (10).

that the Roswell story may simply slip from attention, and as a result, we might forget what awful things the government has done.[191]

Since the desert provides a barren emptiness that allow these military activities to be kept away from the prying and inquisitive eyes of American citizens, perhaps this is why there seems to be a high concentration of UFO sightings and lore in this region of the United States.[192] It is certainly quite possible that people spotting unidentified flying objects in this area are really catching glimpses of strange and advanced — but human-made — aerial objects that have been developed in these clandestine locations, and these sightings are more common in the desert because the sky becomes a prominent screen onto which one's attention — and imagination — falls.

With its undulating peaks and valleys, followed by the long stretches of flat land, the horizon is everywhere in Roswell, and there is also something about the vastness and openness of this landscape that encourages ideas about UFOs, aliens, and other sorts of anomalous beings; gazing at the immaculate skyline, it is not hard to picture UFOs flying on the horizon, as the edge of our

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[191] This urgent need to memorialize spaces, Erika Doss (2010, 2) argues, is related to the American "obsession with memory and history and the urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public contexts." She argues that the need to erect memorials in the US "represent[s] heightened anxieties about who and what should be remembered in America," and memorials "harness those anxieties and control particular narratives about the nation and its publics" (Ibid.). The need to create memorials, she finds, is "typified by adamant assertions of citizen rights and persistent demands for representation and respect," so memorials become "shaped by the affective conditions of public life in America today" (Ibid.). In other words, memorials become spaces that are able to express a certain kind of emotion or feeling, and they are frequently erected in response to feelings of "grief, gratitude, fear, shame, and anger" (Ibid.). As such, memorials become symbolic sites that respond to "emotional appeals and affective investments," and, in this way, Roswell itself has become some sort of memorial, a symbolic site marked by an emotional appeal that evokes feelings about grand conspiracies and the overwhelming sense that *we* are being lied to (15).

[192] The infamous Area 51 base located in Nevada is another notable site in this vast area that is connected to UFO lore. It is tucked away off the Nevada State Route 375 — also known as the "Extraterrestrial Highway" — a lonely highway with no cell service and with fewer than 200 cars travelling on the route daily. The ET Highway also passes by several other alien-themed stops, including the Little A'Le'Inn in Rachel and the ET Fresh Jerky shop in Hiko. Those interested in making an extensive extraterrestrial pilgrimage often start on the ET highway in Nevada, making their way to Roswell, or vice versa. Along the way, they pass through Ely, NV, known for an alleged UFO crash on 14 August 1952, where 16 alien bodies were supposedly recovered and then the crash was covered up. The route continues through Kingman, Arizona, where a UFO was said to have crashed in 1953, about eight miles northeast of Kingman Airport. Another popular stop is Aztec, New Mexico, also known as "the other Roswell," where a flying saucer was said to have crashed in 1948.

world disappears into the atmosphere and the wider, limitless universe is cast into view. As I drove around the city, it seemed no wonder that Roswell has been dubbed "the alien capital of the world" — the very geography lends credence to ideas about aliens and UFOs, as the landscape extends into this endless sky.[193]

Image of Roswell's skyline, taken on June 29, 2013. Personal Image. Roswell, New Mexico.

[193] There seems to me to be an important connection with the landscape and ideas about paranormal or supernatural beings, which is not exactly new or specific to Roswell (though Roswell's landscape produces a certain type of imaginary), but which has endured throughout human history in the stories told about strange and fantastical beings. For much of human history, forests were seen as the primary abode for strange and magical creatures, such as fairies, gnomes, elves, and trolls. The forest was an untamed wilderness in which ideas about the fantastical and supernatural could be projected, especially since much of the forest remained unknown and mysterious. Even today, the natural forest landscape remains viewed by many as a probable location for housing strange things, which is perhaps why sightings, such as those of Big Foot (or the Yeti) in the vast mountain regions and forests in the Pacific Northwest, or the glimpses of the Loch Ness Monster in the waters of the mysterious Scottish Highlands, remain so enticing. Relegated to the typically unseen and unfettered realm of nature, it makes sense to project onto these places the idea that they house fantastical secrets and mysterious beings. Of course, in our modern society, where much of our natural world has become tamed and the landscape has been controlled, there is less open land onto which we can project our fantasies about strange and mystifying creatures. As such, I propose that this taming of nature means that these fantasies are now often projected upward, toward the sky, which is why ideas about extraterrestrials have become so prevalent in an era of industry, infrastructure, and urbanity.

Again, I am reminded of Baudrillard's musings when considering the desertscape of Roswell. In *America* (1989), which reads as part travelogue and part philosophical disquisition, Baudrillard describes how he came to the United States, rented a car, and drove all around the country in search of what he calls "astral America," which he explains is "not social and cultural America, but America of the empty" — those deserts, freeways, mineral surfaces, etcetera — which represent the imaginary that is America (5). Baudrillard sees America as a glittering emptiness, the pure symbol of the hyperreal, a world of simulation where the Real has ceased to exist, and he finds that the desert landscape best captures the imaginary of America. Perhaps it is appropriate that the site of Roswell — the home of ufology — is surrounded by desert, and Baudrillard argues that the desert offers a symbolic expression of the simulacrum that is America: America is a "desert for ever," he contends, to describe the pure surface that signifies the emptiness and illusion he sees as characteristic of contemporary American society (Baudrillard, 1989, 121). In its embrace of conspiracy theories and alien images, Roswell too has become a site where reality and unreality, fact and fantasy are no longer discernable; yet, for many visitors, this hyperreality becomes "more real than the real" itself (1987, 28).

This is why the Roswell story continues to resonate, and why the name "Roswell" has become a synonym for government and alien conspiracies. It is not Grover's Mill, New Jersey — where the fictional Martian invasion took place during "The War of the Worlds" broadcast — that has become *the* alien capital; instead, it is Roswell, New Mexico. Despite the popular appeal of Welles's broadcast and the ideas it encouraged about Martian invaders, there is certainly not an extensive tourism industry dedicated to aliens in Grover's Mill. The importance of Roswell's symbolic topography — its history, its landscape, its hyperreality — cannot be overstated as

reasons for why the city has become a place for extraterrestrial and conspiratorial imaginings: it is from this very background that the Roswell myth is drawn.

The International UFO Festival

Consequently, people from across the United States have made the pilgrimage to Roswell to see for themselves the secrets hidden away in the desert landscape and to gaze upon the spectacle of the American fascination with aliens. As mentioned, the city, the local community, and the ufological community have taken advantage of this interest in Roswell and have transformed the city into a tourist destination for people to come and celebrate aliens, UFOs, and conspiracy theories. The peak of this celebration takes place during the International UFO Festival; held on the anniversary of the purported crash, which often coincides with the Fourth of July celebrations, it has become an important event for bringing visitors to the city and has created a space for a vibrant community of UFO buffs to come together to revel in stories about aliens and to discuss the more serious implications of government secrecy and the ET hypothesis.[194]

[194] Like the museum, the festival emerged from grassroots initiatives when, in 1995, Mainstreet Roswell (a partnership of local businesses and property owners) became involved with the UFO theme and sponsored and promoted the creation of a UFO festival. Support for the UFO Festival grew just as the city was about to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the crash in 1997. The festival, which for that year was dubbed *Encounter '97*, attracted the attention of press across the country. Mainstreet Roswell determined that the city, the UFO museum and the festival were featured in 450 magazines, including *Time* magazine, which ran a cover story on Roswell that summer, and in 1009 articles (Paradis, 2002, 30). The media certainly helped popularize the festival, and the New Mexico State Department of Tourism estimated that the free publicity was worth $4.4 million (Ibid.). The *Encounter '97* Festival ended up attracting a global audience of between 40 000 to 50 000 people, thereby doubling Roswell's population overnight (31). Since then, UFO tourism has pumped millions of dollars a year into the city's economy. While no festival has topped *Encounter '97*, even when I attended for my fieldwork over fifteen years later, the festival was still a tremendously popular event and brought in visitors from across the United States and all over the world.

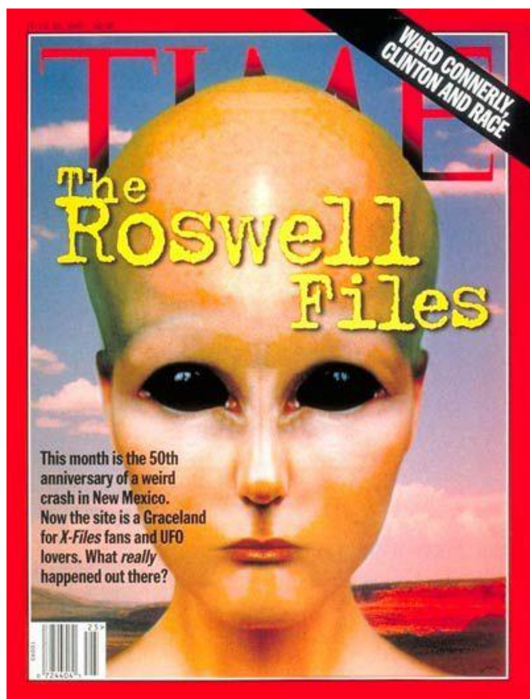

Image of "The Roswell Files" *Time Magazine* cover used to advertise the Roswell UFO Festival. Matt Mahurin, 23 June 1997. Accessed 11 October 2017. http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19970623,00.html

One thing that struck me when visiting the Roswell UFO Festival was this interesting tension between the celebratory and the serious; Roswell has become a kitschy and commodified space that brings in tourist dollars, which contrasts with the somber story of government secrecy told by the ufologists at the site.[195] This tension between the serious and the playful is marketed during the UFO Festival, where community-based events, such as cookouts, street fairs, vendors, sidewalk sales, live music, carnivals, costume contests, and parades take place alongside serious and somber presentations given by leaders of the ufological field, who lecture about the "facts" of UFO phenomena.

[195] This tension between the serious treatment of the alien alongside the playful and commodified is addressed in Badmington's book *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within* (2004).

Images of promotional brochures for the 2014 UFO Festival. Personal images.

In Roswell, conspiracy theories and counter-culture criticism awkwardly fuse with leisure, entertainment, and commodification, and despite being a space critical of the government, many of the events at the festival are government-sponsored, which perhaps downplays the seriousness of UFO beliefs and sanitizes the controversial elements of ufology; in other words, the commodification of the event seems to weaken its potential for dissent.[196] At the same time, this sanitization is important because it also opens ufology up to a different kind of audience and allows ufologists to engage with an expansive public. While most conventions held by ufological organizations are rather serious and bleak in their tone and are usually exclusive to the staunchest ufologists, the more lighthearted atmosphere at the UFO Festival makes the event attractive both for serious believers and for those with a playful interest in conspiracy theories and UFO and ET

[196] As I will discuss in more detail below, ufology is certainly not exempt from commodification, and even the more spiritually-oriented ufologists and New Agers are staunchly capitalistic; ufology and New Ageism tend to refocus the religious and the spiritual in the market and they have become focused on the exchange of commodity goods, such as self-help books, healing stones, and other spiritual products. Many abduction accounts have also become tremendously profitable, and a travelling circuit of ufologists and abductees hold UFO conventions and festivals to sell their books and charge (often extravagant) ticket prices to listen to their stories. At the UFO Festival, the selling of New Age products and alien merchandise tend to go hand-in-hand.

phenomena. In other words, the UFO Festival attracts all sorts of individuals with varying degrees of interest in ufology and it offers these individuals the opportunity to engage with ufology; it also allows ufologists to perform their arguments to a diverse public, many of whom are willing and eager to listen to their entertaining narratives.

The Performativity of Ufology

Ufology is built on the telling of stories, but it was not until I found myself listening to the Roswell lectures that I realized the sheer importance of storytelling and performance for making ufology so convincing and attractive to its public. The festival atmosphere creates an open and inviting space and it offers a podium for ufologists to present their belief claims as objective facts, and, as I watched their lectures, I observed how ufologists strategically crafted their performances to convince those listening of their authority and legitimacy.

The Simultaneous Appropriation and Dismissal of Science

One of the predominant strategies employed by ufologists involved the careful interplay of an acceptance and criticism of science, whereby ufologists appropriated science when it was convenient for their claims and dismissed it when it was not. Sociologist Roy Wallis (1985, 598) uses the term “sanitization” to describe the efforts made by practitioners of the so-called “pseudosciences” to gain public validation by adopting the methods and forms of mainstream science; by packaging itself as a scientific venture, ufology can be said to practise this “sanitization” to lay claim to the cultural prestige of science.

In her article, “The Flexibility of Scientific Rhetoric: A Case Study of UFO Researchers,” Anne Cross (2004, 3) examines this simultaneous embrace and dismissal of the scientific community to explain how “UFO research has survived as a source of claims — claims accepted by some audiences as scientific — despite its rejection by conventional science.” In examining the

ufological community, Cross finds that scientific rhetoric is "extremely flexible, in fact far more so than is usually acknowledged in discussions of science as a form of authority," hence she looks at the way that scientific authority and legitimacy is constructed by ufologists (4). She finds that these "fringe researchers" make the case for their legitimacy by employing several strategies, "few of which involve actual research," such as "taking the symbolic frame of science and replacing the content with its own set of completely different facts and theories" to re-appropriate "the cultural meaning of science to support its own endeavours" (29; 3). Remember, as I pointed out in my third chapter regarding Thomas F. Gieryn's boundary work and the historical treatment of ufology, science is not absolute, and ufologists have taken advantage of the ambiguities of science to present their "discipline" as a valid alternative.

Agreeing with Cross's argument that ufology performs a cultural repackaging of scientific authority for its own aims, I consider how language is used strategically during these talks to establish legitimacy by emulating scientific discourse. For instance, at the festival, UFO investigators largely see and present themselves as scientific researchers, and often couch their research in advanced scientific terms. Many of the lectures were filled with science-heavy descriptions, which for the layperson (such as myself) were rather difficult to understand. By relying on scientific jargon, ufologists work at presenting ufology as merely another branch of science. As Cross points out, the very name "ufology" is also intended to mimic academic disciplines. Ufology is marketed as a "bona fide profession" — as simply one of the many "-ologies" — and it is therefore packaged to parallel scientific authority and downplay its actual exclusion from mainstream science (9).

The importance of the appropriation of scientific language and methods for the establishment of trust and authority in pseudoscience is reflected in the study conducted by Paul R. Brewer

(2013). In his article, "Trappings of Science: Media Messages, Scientific Authority, and Beliefs About Paranormal Investigators," Brewer looks at how the presentation of pseudoscientific ideas cloaked in scientific discourse works to construct scientific authority. Brewer's study finds that "compared with control participants, those who read a story that presented paranormal investigators as using a rigorous approach, technical language, and technological devices were more likely to see such investigators as scientific and credible" (324–235).[197] While Brewer's study focuses on paranormal investigators researching ghosts and haunted houses, his findings can aptly be applied to the field of ufology, and his study demonstrates the importance of scientific-sounding explanations for establishing legitimacy and believability.[198]

In recognizing the importance of scientific discourse for establishing legitimacy, ufologists place a very vocal emphasis on scientific research, empirical data, hypothesis testing, and other staples of mainstream scientific practice, and in their writings and presentations, they often insist upon using empirical approaches and following the scientific method and fervently defend their research techniques as scientific.[199] As Cross points out, ufologists frequently discuss the

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[197] Paul R. Brewer (2013) also notes that there is a classic cultivation effect for audiences who watch a significant amount of paranormal programming, whereby the more participants watched programs on paranormal events, the more they tended to see the paranormal investigators as scientific and credible and the more they tended to believe the phenomena as legitimate. Deducing from this, it could be hypothesized that the vast proliferation of the Roswell Incident in pulp fiction and popular media has led to the formation of an audience who is willing to accept the legitimacy of these ufological accounts.

[198] Similarly, Glenn G. Sparks and Marianne Pellechia (1997) study the effects of news stories about UFOs on readers' UFO beliefs to investigate the influence of scientific authority on these beliefs. In their study, they found that participants were more likely to express beliefs in UFOs when a news story included a scientific authority. Interestingly, they also found that a scientific authority who discredited the existence of UFOs did *not* produce lower levels of UFO beliefs. While Sparks and Pellechia acknowledge that the reason for this finding is not yet clear and needs to be explored further, they suggest the possibility that simply mentioning a scientist in a story about the paranormal might lend legitimacy to the story, regardless of the explicit nature of the scientist's comments (170).

[199] The discussion of potential physical evidence featured strongly in a lot of the festival talks, giving emphasis to the importance of physical data for supporting ufological arguments. For instance, much of the excitement at the 2014 festival revolved around the discovery of a strange material found at the alleged Roswell Incident crash site that had been sent off for testing. Professional geologist and instructor of geology and other Earth sciences at the New Mexico Military Institute, Frank Kimbler (2014), was at the UFO Festival to discuss the isotopic analysis that was being conducted on this debris. While the analysis of the material had not yet been completed, much of the festival conversations focused on the potential outcome of this investigation. The debris was later found to be of human origin and did little to support the position that aliens landed in the desert. At the same time, the discussions revolving around

replicability of their experiments, and place significant emphasis on documentation, evidence, and empirical data (9). Yet, as she underscores, there are certainly problems when evidence is coming from recorded transcripts of hypnosis sessions, for instance, or when sky-watches, second-hand testimony, and intuition are presented as rigorous science, as is often the case in ufology (4; 9). Additionally, she finds that the "empirical grounding" emphasized by ufologists often "lies in data collected under nonexperimental conditions, by laypersons, sometimes referred to as 'civilian researchers'" (9). Clearly, the methodologies of the ufological community are often a drastic departure from conventional science, yet ufologists frequently defend this unconventional research as scientific.

At the same time, ufologists work to distance themselves from conventional science. Ufologists like to boast about their purported scientific objectivity, but they also draw attention to the flaws of the scientific establishment and they frequently raise the issue that science is unable to offer resolutions to matters of great public interest, such as providing an answer to the question of the UFOs. Ufologists also frequently draw attention to their exclusion from these official sources, and it seems they even embrace this marginalization. At the UFO Festival, it was quite common for ufologists to emphasize their unfair treatment by official institutions, and this became as much a part of the dialogue as did the discussions about the possible nature of UFOs. As I have argued already, ufologists are certainly not wrong to point out this exclusion, and it is very clear from the history outlined in my third chapter that governmental and scientific authorities have taken a strong stance against the study of UFOs, even actively campaigning to debunk this research; however, there is also something very strategic to this posturing, and ufology survives (and thrives) because of its oppositional stance taken against the government, the scientific establishment, and academia

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this analysis served to emphasize the importance of good testing and good science alongside more flawed and dubious research methods, perhaps serving to elevate the latter.

more broadly. It is this stigmatization that fuels ufology's power and public voice. The appeal of ufology lies in the way that it offers a forceful alternative to official institutions; if these institutions were to change their attitudes and welcome the study of UFOs, ufology as it currently operates would cease to exist. So, while ufologists are critical of their treatment by orthodox institutions, they also deeply depend on this marginalization, and there exist strong incentives for ufology to remain distinct from these official sources so that it can maintain its control over UFO discourse.

Hence, at the same time as the ufological community appropriates and emulates science for its own ends, it also engages in a critique of contemporary science. In Cross's words, ufology "attaches itself to scientific principles" but it "must also put distance between itself and conventional science in order to begin to explain why UFO research was cast out of mainstream scientific practice" in the first place (5–6). Ufologists must find ways to account for this rejection, and one of the strategies, as noted above, centres on the claim that official organizations are involved in an elaborate conspiracy to discount ufology as a legitimate field of research.

Other ufologists downplay the conspiratorial nature of this rejection and instead emphasize the flaws inherent in conducting scientific research; during the festival, many emphasized that the peer-review process is subject to significant human error, where egos, politics, vested interests, moral and religious objections, and the evasion of responsibilities can get in the way and derail the scientific process. Therefore, many ufologists borrow from Thomas Kuhn ([1962] 1996) the ideas of a paradigm and paradigm shift, and they argue that the current paradigm is exceptionally flawed and is rigorously controlled and guarded by scientists already operating within this paradigm.

The concept of a paradigm refers to an established consensus of scientific work being done within a prevailing framework. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* ([1962] 1996), Kuhn establishes science as a problem-solving exercise, which from time to time discovers anomalies

that cannot be solved within the existing paradigm. When enough anomalies build up, this enacts a crisis period, whereby scientists begin to operate outside the existing paradigm, and this may lead to new ideas and changes in the basic assumptions within the ruling theory of science, resulting in a "paradigm shift" in which the new paradigm replaces the old one. An example of this is the shift from Newtonian physics to Einsteinian relativity. Ufologists claim that the only reason ufology is considered a pseudoscience is because it does not fit in with the current theories of science, and hence a new paradigm is required for ufology to be embraced.[200]

The notion of the paradigm allows ufologists to argue that modern science is limited and cannot comprehend the vastness of UFO and ET phenomena. For instance, the Copernican Revolution was a favourite analogy offered by the ufological community at the festival to emphasize how accepted science has been wrong many times in the past and to explain how we will eventually overcome the ideological barriers that prevent us from recognizing the truth that extraterrestrials have been interacting with human beings on Earth. Galileo was another favourite, with the ufologists frequently comparing themselves to Galileo and his struggles with the Catholic Church around disseminating scientific knowledge.[201]

According to many ufologists, then, current scientific practice cannot adequately answer questions about UFOs and aliens, and we must move to a new paradigm of understanding to be

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[200] Notably, Kuhn was close friends with distinguished abduction researcher John Mack, who argues that the Western scientific paradigm was limited in explaining the experiences of alien abductees. As I mentioned in my fourth chapter, Mack contends that abduction shatters the "consensus reality" constructed by science, and he calls for a new reflection on reality, whereby aliens can be considered both real and psychological at the same time ([1994] 2007, 4). While Mack does not exactly claim the material reality of alien abduction, he considers how abduction operates as a belief system alongside a larger tradition of visionary encounters and he argues that an expanded notion of reality is needed to allow us to account for experiences that may not fit into the Western materialist paradigm but that deeply effect people's lives. Mack's work helped popularize Kuhn's theory of the paradigm shift to the wider ufological audience.

[201] One need only read the title of Stanton Friedman and Kathleen Marden's *Science Was Wrong* (2010) to appreciate the steadfast criticism made by ufologists against the modern scientific paradigm. In this text, Friedman and Marden dissect the various instances through history when conventional scientific discourse dismissed the work of researchers and scientists who fell outside the predominant paradigm, and who later developed their work into new cures, theories, techniques, and inventions that have since revolutionized our world.

able to comprehend these phenomena. Kuhn’s points about the ideological imports involved in the human component of science, as well as the shifting and flexible nature of science are important ones to recognize, and the championing of Kuhn’s theory again speaks to the way in which academic criticism has been appropriated by the ufological community; however, using Kuhn’s theory of a paradigm shift as an argument for the benefits of ufology as a debased, but valid science, has its flaws. As Kuhn outlines, a paradigm shift does not happen easily and requires constant anomalies that can be detected in repeatable experiments, but in the case of ufology, the existing evidence has not done enough to convince science proper of the ufologists’ legitimate expertise, especially since much of their evidence cannot be empirically tested and is based largely on personal testimony and experience.

Another strategy to explain ufology’s exclusion involves a direct criticism of the scientific method. Even though the scientific method is, at times, emulated by the ufological community to enhance its legitimacy, it is also staunchly criticized for its shortcomings and limitations. Many of the lecturers, for instance, argued that the scientific method is short-sighted, and it does not properly approach the vast array of unexplainable but documented phenomena that suggest an extraterrestrial presence on our planet. These ufologists suggested that we must abandon the methods of traditional science in favour of ufology’s unorthodox experience-based methods of data collection, such as hypnosis, sky-watches, reliance on witness testimony, telepathy, intuition, and the use of aliens as informants (Cross, 2004, 5; 8). As I have mentioned, ufologists frequently emphasize the value of this first-hand knowledge over scientific research, and the elevation of personal experience and testimony allows ufologists to make uncontestable claims.

Cross makes a similar observation regarding the ways in which ufologists emphasize their experiences as a basis for establishing truth; here, she quotes ufologist and self-described “alien

hunter" Darrell Sims, who also spoke at Roswell's UFO Festivals in 2013 and 2014: "You want a scientific institution to tell you that aliens exist? I already know that aliens exist because when I was four years old one was standing next to my bed" (Quoted in Cross, 2004, 5). Sims repeated this same line during the talks I watched in Roswell, and I heard many similar expressions from other ufologists at the festival. The underlying message is that science is not needed to tell us what we have experienced: *we already know* — and ufology offers a space for this personal experience to be privileged above other claims to knowledge.

In emulating academic and scientific institutions, even as they criticize them, ufologists seek to present their arguments and methodologies as rational and scientific even though they are labelled as irrational and unscientific by these traditional establishments. Jodi Dean (1998, 16) draws attention to this tension when she asks, "What about situations where this supposedly common rationality and language produce strange, contradictory, incredible, irrational results?" She highlights how ufologists engage a public sphere envisioned to be a space for reasonable discourse — a space with a commitment to establishing a common rationality. It is in this space that ufologists and their public "think they speak and reason like everyone else, but everyone else finds what they are saying incomprehensible and irrational" (Ibid.). While ufologists emulate rationality and present their claims as empirically-founded and scientifically-based, the dominant public sees these efforts as shallow attempts at mimicking the scientific and academic establishments and it finds that ufology lacks the substance of legitimate scientific research. At the same time, in presenting ufology as a serious and scientific pursuit that maintains important distinctions from the establishment, ufologists have capitalized on the weight of this perceived scientific legitimacy and distrust of official institutions, and this has allowed them to form a substantial public of their own.

Populist Performances

These strategies taken by ufologists are therefore not so much directed at convincing the scientific community of their legitimacy; instead, they are directed at convincing the layperson to embrace their field as valid and reasonable, and, by drawing from the scientific establishment while simultaneously maintaining these distinctions, ufology is presented as a popular and democratic scientific organization that contrasts with the largely inaccessible and opaque establishment. The openness of ufology is emphasized time and again at the festival, and this becomes another important tactic for ufologists to win over their audiences, especially since ufology promises to grant access to knowledge about what is going on behind the scenes. In other words, ufologists evoke a sort of populism whereby outsiders are permitted to become insiders and are given access to a special knowledge about the way in which power operates in their daily lives.

A main part of this populist performance involves the frequent declaration that participants should "do their own research." This phrase was uttered time and again during the talks, so much so that it could be considered the unofficial slogan of the UFO Festival. It was often introduced by the speakers who positioned themselves as originally being skeptical of UFO phenomena but were later convinced after "doing their own research." This evolution from being skeptical to then "digging" to uncover the truth and to dispel the lies surrounding the government cover-up suggests that the answers are obtainable if one only takes some time to look into them. It also suggests that those who remain skeptical have not followed through with proper research and have not evolved along this path towards enlightenment.

Throughout the various talks, many of the speakers emphasized that the audience, too, could engage in their own research and that anyone has the potential to also make this transition. There is an underlying sense that *we* (the ufologists and true believers) know what is going on and that

the truth is being distorted or withheld by the corrupt institutions that govern us; in this way, the ufologists claim to take the power to determine truth and knowledge away from the "elites" (those academics, scientists, and government officials who typically hold domain over those standards of research) and place agency and knowledge back into the hands of everyday people. This democratic and populist emphasis on "doing your own research" creates an impression that we all can and will make that journey from unconvinced to convinced, as "evidence" falls into place around us, so long as we are open to accept it (and are not closed-minded, like those short-sighted skeptics).[202]

Despite the prevalence of this mantra, the actual requirements for "doing your own research" are left largely unexplained. There were few directives given at the talks that I attended that could help enlighten the audience on how to follow through in conducting one's own research, and there was little explanation of what "doing your own research" actually constitutes. In lieu of a direct answer, some of the speakers expressed that the audience was already underway with engaging in their own research by coming to the festival, listening to the talks, and reading the ufologists' books: as Roswell researcher Donald R. Schmitt (2014) put it, "How many have actually gone out and looked into it [the Roswell Incident] themselves? You are here, you are looking into it for yourselves. That is step one. Now take some of the information and share it. That is the best thing you could do, not only for us, but for yourselves as well."

This was followed by the moderator, Aaron Sagers, reinforcing this idea:

> And the thrust of that is that, yes, ratings matter, social media matters, web traffic matters, making things trend matter, but I think at the end of the day, it means *you*

[202] Interestingly, many ufologists are protective of their own research and are somewhat territorial when it comes to naming their informants or allowing other authors access to their raw data. In this way, the democratic message of "doing your own research" seemed somewhat ironic and contradictory; while the ufologists guard their own research, they simultaneously espouse the idea that others should conduct their own.

> *guys matter*! These guys are writing books and putting it out there, but you guys are the ones that continue the message. And to all you younger folks too, you are like potential protégés and future researchers, and you guys matter as well! (Sagers, 2014)

As these quotations suggest, by coming to the UFO Festival people are already engaged in doing their own work and looking into things for themselves. In this way, "doing your own research" involves listening to the alternative narratives proposed by the speakers with an open and inquisitive mind and embracing these alternative narratives as being just as legitimate, if not more so, than those provided by officials and the scholarly and scientific communities. The phrase "doing your own research" is therefore performative in the Austinian sense of the term; it allows ufologists to bestow expertise and authority on their audience and it initiates them into the fold of ufology. Simply by listening to the talks at the festival, individuals can become ufologists and they are granted privileged status as insiders, capable of uncovering the truth for themselves.

Of course, listening to the talks and reading the ufologists' books does not really constitute undertaking one's *own* research; instead, the information is still being mediated by other sources, the UFO researchers, who serve as gatekeepers to that knowledge. The speakers are therefore positioned as leaders who unveil their information and make it open and accessible at the festival (and in their books), and it is up to the members of the audience (and the readers) to determine for themselves which sources are trustworthy, and which are not. Consequently, the ufological leaders must present themselves as honest figures who engage in an admirable struggle against the prevailing elite forces to get this information into the hands of the audience, often at their own expense, making trust an absolutely central component for the success of ufology. Hence, the

speakers at the festival must engage in credible performances to gain the confidence of their audience.

Staging Ufology

The lectures are therefore all about building an emotional connection with their public and establishing inclusivity and trust, and one of the ways in which ufologists encourage this trust is by presenting themselves as respectable individuals who possess a deep knowledge about UFO and ET phenomena. The festival allows for the staging of a professional community, whereby the leading experts in ufology are given a platform to speak, and their lectures are held in large conference rooms and designed very much like academic conferences. During my visit, the professionalism of the community was reinforced by the mannerisms and dress of the speakers. For instance, they usually wore professional attire and most of their talks were well rehearsed, giving the impression that great care and preparation had been given to the lectures, and the presenters were quite comfortable with speaking and were knowledgeable about their material.

As already explained, language and rhetoric were used to convey legitimacy, with speakers appropriating scientific jargon to construct ufology as a scientific undertaking. Most of the talks were quite serious, as the speakers addressed the grave implications of government secrecy, alien abduction, and cover-ups, and many of the talks relied on the knowledge of a specialized audience who was already familiar with the intricacies of ufology. Furthermore, the speakers worked to distance themselves from the common perceptions and stigmatization directed at the ufological community: “We are not part of a ‘local kook society’,” Stanton Friedman (5 July 2013) contends, suggesting instead that they are qualified and capable specialists in their field.

While framing themselves as experts, the speakers also carefully position themselves as ordinary individuals, and throughout their performances, they often straddle the line between being

specialists on the subject and being relatable and charismatic "regular Joes." An example of this was made acute in the talk, "On the Road (to Roswell)" by Thomas Carey and Don Schmitt (5 July 2014), in which they spent a majority of their lecture focusing on their own, often comedic, experiences of travelling around the United States and researching the Roswell Incident. Very little of their talk focused on the events that had transpired in 1947 and the evidence that they had accumulated in relation to the Roswell Incident. Instead, for much of the lecture they discussed how they had to stay in roach-infested motels when conducting their interviews, and they described the misadventures they had while they were tracking down their informants. Throughout this speech there were constant references to what they could afford, which was apparently not a lot, and they made frequent mention of the fact that they are certainly not rich and famous. At the same time, the speakers spent a lot of time name-dropping various celebrities with whom they have engaged because of their research into the Roswell Incident.[203]

While these stories struck me as somewhat odd, especially since they provided little in terms of an actual commentary on the Roswell Incident, it appears the presenters were engaged in a carefully crafted and strategic performance to gain the trust and support of their audience. That is, the speakers emphasized the challenges that the ufologists have faced in conducting their research and making it available to the public. Several of the speakers recounted how they have been criticized publicly and how they have sometimes been ostracized because they have dedicated their lives to making people aware of UFO phenomena. The talks also emphasized the reluctance of mainstream media to take their work seriously. As the speakers made clear, ufologists must make

[203] For instance, they shared a story about Steven Spielberg exploiting them for their research experience when making *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and how he ended up paying them only $1000 compensation for their consultation. Another digression involved a story of how Montel Williams invited Schmitt onto his show, only to have Williams refuse to open his mind about UFO phenomena and instead criticize Schmitt's views.

many sacrifices to make their information available, as they selflessly engage in an exhaustive struggle to petition the government and other elite forces to disclose information and to recognize the importance of the ufological movement in creating a more open and transparent society. In this way, the ufologists are presented as everyday martyrs wanting to help champion the cause, unlike the distant elite and academics in their ivory towers.

The deliberate emphasis on sacrifice and the frugality of ufological work can also perhaps be seen as an effort to distract from the commercialization that is an inherent part of ufology. The skeptical community often draws attention to the lucrativeness of ufology, and they have argued that ufologists have introduced fantastical elements into their narratives to entertain their audience, gain fame, and sell more books — a point that ufologists firmly reject. Several of the speakers at the festival seemed rather sensitive to these perceived criticisms of ufology as a profiteering field, and as the example given above demonstrates, they were careful to highlight the faults in this argument by demonstrating the unglamorous aspects of ufology.

At the same time, the skeptics' claims that ufologists gain certain rewards for sharing their stories suggests two plausible motivations for those engaged in ufological work; that is, the financial and psychological rewards for being experts in this field.[204] This cynical observation emphasizes the fact that celebrity, notoriety, and financial gain can, in some cases, be motivating

[204] While the cost for entry at the International UFO Festival in Roswell was rather nominal when I attended, outside the festival there exists a travelling ufology circuit, where top ufologists are paid to travel nationally and internationally to speak at UFO conventions and conferences. Ticket prices at these events frequently cost between $50–$200 apiece, and sometimes much more. Moreover, most of the speakers in attendance at the UFO Festival are bestselling authors who have garnered significant profits from their book sales, and a large part of the UFO Festival involves the opportunity for fans to meet with speakers in the IUFOMRC, where they set up booths to sell and autograph their books, which certainly creates opportunities for ufologists to make a profit. When I visited one of the ufologists' booths and started asking him questions about his work, for instance, he told me that he would not continue speaking with me unless I purchased a copy of his book. Similarly, many of the presentations went into little detail about the subjects that were supposed to be presenting, and frequently the presenters simply said that all the details of their research could be found in their books; often they refused to give any concrete details, even when prompted by audience members during the Q and A sessions; instead they informed the audience that they needed to pick up their books and research the subject for themselves.

factors for those engaged in ufology, and some ufologists may intentionally sell fiction as fact to make a profit. Arguing against the skeptics, many ufologists acknowledge in their talks that they have profited from their work through book sales and ticket sales at conferences, but they point out that it is unfair to criticize them for simply trying to make an honest living. The profits, they contend, allow them to continue with their work and make more individuals aware about the nature of government secrecy and the alien presence on Earth, and they are certainly not living a lavish lifestyle by speaking about UFO and ET phenomena. Following this line of reasoning, an alternative postulation could be that the ufologists truly believe in, and are sincere in their work, and the notoriety and profits that may come from this are secondary and only help them share their message with a wider audience. The ufologists are careful to present this alternative postulation at the festival, and by appearing as trustworthy and honest, they create a space where their conspiratorial convictions and often-unsupported arguments are accepted by this lay audience.

The Common Enemy

In addressing these criticisms, ufologists are careful to point out that they are not elites — they are merely ordinary people united against a common enemy: “The Establishment” — and their goal is to mobilize a public that takes UFO and ET phenomena seriously so that ufology can stand against these oppressive forces. In their lectures, therefore, the ufologists also used aggressive and antagonistic language against those who discount ufology, and they offered forceful and galvanizing conspiratorial statements to mobilize their audience. Even as a dispassionate observer, I found it hard to not get swept up in the emotional rhetoric of the performances given during some of the lectures.

The conspiratorial nature of the arguments presented during the festival was especially effective in producing an emotional and affective response in participants.[205] The term "theory" implies the locutionary; a theory is assumed to contain an objective statement of facts that are used to understand the world.[206] Yet conspiracy theories are not simply dispassionate statements of facts; they also carry an illocutionary force and perform a particular function, and while they are framed as objective "theories," that is not really the case. In their polemical approach, conspiracy theorists offer impassioned and accusatory utterances directed against the establishment in an attempt to delegitimize its position.

Conspiracy theories, at their core, are therefore not impartial attempts to understand historical events (as the term "theory" implies), but are rather primarily occupied with denouncing and accusing, as a way to enact change. In other words, conspiracy theories not only seek to understand the world (however inaccurately, as they attempt to make sense of complex historical processes) but also to change it: the weight behind the conspiracy theory incites the idea that *we* have the ability to change this course of history through *our* awareness of it. This was acutely expressed in one of the festival talks given by ufologists Tom Carey and Don Schmitt (2014), in which Schmitt stated: "If we are wrong, it doesn't change anything; if we are right, it changes everything!" Here,

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[205] When I consider this conspiratorial nature, I am not simply looking at the individual statements being made by the speakers, but also at the aggregate statements that constitute the formation of the wider conspiracy "theory" that takes centre stage at the festival: chiefly, that extraterrestrials are present on Earth and that our governments are aware of this and are keeping it a secret from us.

[206] I take the terms *locutionary* and *illocutionary* from Austin ([1962] 1975). To reiterate, his work on the performativity of language theorizes the power of using words to change social reality. Austin makes a distinction between constative utterances — those statements traditionally looked at by philosophers as true or false — and performative utterances — which need not be true or false, but that carry out an action simply by speaking (3–4). According to Austin, when we speak, we are often "doing things with words" in such a way that we really do enact changes in the world. To further clarify the distinction between performative and constative utterances, Austin uses the terms *locutionary* and *illocutionary acts*. The locutionary act refers to the act by which a meaningful statement is articulated, and the illocutionary act refers to what a person does *in saying* it (94–95); here, Austin makes a distinction between the meaning of the utterance and the force of the utterance — the latter being where the performativity of speech takes place.

the very utterance carries with it the idea that we are changing the course of the world — an empowering and emotional message that seemed to resonate with the attendees at the festival.

By using this conspiratorial rhetoric, and by speaking from what they present as an authentic, moral position, ufologists can connect with people emotionally, and through the emotive and performative lectures given at the festival, the unfalsifiable interpretations of ufology tend to succeed, often to the confusion of those who fall outside the ufological community. As I watched the audiences respond to the lectures with such intense enthusiasm and interest, I realized that the lecture performances had an almost religious quality to them, with the ufologists as the ordained ministers giving sermons to their audience of devoted parishioners. It seems that within the festival atmosphere, the ufologists are granted the authority to make their claims to the audience, and their conspiratorial speech acts really do seem to enact a change in the way in which knowledge is evaluated and understood at the festival; ufologists therefore use conspiracy theories to delegitimize other forms of thought in favour of their unfalsifiable but emotionally charged interpretations.

To reinforce these conspiratorial sentiments, the ufologists frequently spoke out against those who claimed to be skeptical or unconvinced about the possibility that ETs and UFOs are real and are interacting with human beings on Earth. They appeared to be highly concerned about their credibility, so they presented a united front against official sources and those who disagree with their claims; while ufology is at times a rather territorial and suspicious field, the sharing of a common enemy helps to foster a sense community mobilized against the skeptical voices of their debunkers. Consequently, there was often open hostility directed at anyone who considered themselves a skeptic, especially if they maintained these views after hearing the information presented during the talks. As one of the speakers, alien abductee Travis Walton (2014),

commented for instance, if skeptics "can come up with a scenario that might explain things, they act as though it does explain things," and just because something "hasn't been proven true, doesn't mean that it is not true." Many of the lecturers pointed out the way in which skeptics portray themselves as objective truth-seekers, but, they argue, skeptics are simply arrogant and egotistical people who claim to have a God-like knowledge of the universe. (Of course, these ufologists ignore the fact that their own truth claims are flawed and often based on questionable and faulty methodologies).

In their presentations, the ufologists habitually explained how the term "conspiracy theorist" has been framed as a derogatory way to dismiss a critical thinker, while skeptics were presented as ignorant "sheeple" who are not looking at, or are just unwilling to look at, the *right* information that will reveal to them the truth. These criticisms were made usually prior to the Q and A sessions, so they set the tone for what kinds of comments and questions would be appropriate.[207] At times, the discussion bordered on vehemence toward this skeptical community and there were, on many occasions, mean-spirited comments made by some of the presenters, directed against those who have challenged their findings.

Importantly, this heated language was aimed at a skeptical community that was not visibly present at the festival, but that has been quite vocal about ufology on various media platforms. In this way, the skeptical community is unable to respond to these criticisms at the UFO Festival, which creates an echo chamber whereby the ufologists' arguments are supported and reinforced and opposition is largely suppressed.[208] By speaking against them, the ufologists brought them up

[207] Most of the questions and audience discussions also seemed supportive of the positions argued by the ufologists, which indicated to me that many of the visitors already held views that aligned with those of the presenters.

[208] In more recent years, concerns have been lobbied against the Internet and social media sites for creating different echo chambers for similar-minded people to go to reconfirm their existing views. This is supported by algorithms developed by companies such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook that are based on an individual's previous searches, so with each new click, one is often able to find their own beliefs confirmed. For instance, ufological ideas are

only to dismiss them *en masse.* They did not seem interested in establishing debate or dialogue, and they frequently evaded discussions addressing the individual pieces of the skeptics' arguments that may serve as valid challenges to ufology; in doing so, they presented a generalized sentiment that skeptics are wrong, and *we* (the ufologists) are right, and there is no point even engaging with those who disagree since they are simply unwilling to open their minds up to the truth.

Donald R. Schmitt suitably summarized this overall attitude of the ufological community against these skeptics and debunkers, stating:

> We really could care less what they think, because all it is, is their opinion. It's not even an educated opinion. Because they've never walked in our shoes, they've only attacked our witnesses from afar. They typically wait until they pass on, and then they are so brave, that 'well they were UFO buffs back in 1947, they were into science fiction, they were just making up stories for the publicity at that time.' But they are so convinced they are right, why do they always have to engage us, debate us, challenge us, attack us? (Schmitt, 2014)

After spending several minutes discussing skeptics and their claims, Schmitt somewhat ironically followed up his statement with: "We don't even acknowledge their existence, because they provide nothing! Nothing! And they never have. Because *we have had a good reputation of policing our own efforts…*" (emphasis mine).

Schmitt's declaration, though contradictory, is intended to dismiss the skeptical arguments directed against ufology by boldly suggesting that these positions are so invalid that they do not even exist and will not be heard in the ufological community. This produces a somewhat ironic contradiction: ufologists are critical of skeptics and official sources for simply dismissing their

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frequently shared among those who already possess an interest in ufology, and this one-sided information works to reconfirm one's pre-existing views.

claims, but ufologists are likewise often unwilling to take seriously the oppositional arguments directed against ufology, and, in painting the picture of these official sources as entirely evil and oppressive forces conspiring against them, they skirt serious debate and dialogue. The staunch dismissal of academic experts, and the outright opposition to objective facts that go against the ufologists' versions of events, suggests an indifference to the truth that makes it challenging, if not impossible, to come to any sort of mutual understanding.[209]

Relatedly, Schmitt's statement raises concerns over credibility and authority, which feature so strongly in debates about UFOs and aliens. Here, he insinuates the question of who is justified in deciding what is true, and what standards are used for establishing truth. As he notes, the ufological community polices its own efforts and has its own, internal standards for determining legitimacy, which, from his perspective, are quite valid. Of course, these standards differ markedly from those of the skeptical community, and from those of mainstream academic and scientific institutions, who see the epistemological standards of ufology as failing to match serious scientific and scholarly inquiry; but by mounting an emotive opposition against official sources and their claims to knowledge, ufologists have successfully dodged criticism and unsettled ideas of trust and truth so that they can present ufology as an alternative source of knowledge to their public.

The Ufological "Public" at Roswell

By way of their emotive performances, ufologists seek to inculcate their audiences with their teachings. Moreover, by transforming the city, suspending daily routines, and blurring the

[209] Harry Frankfurt (2005) describes this indifference to the truth as "bullshit." Frankfurt offers a theoretical framework for "bullshitting," and he compares bullshitting to lying, noting that in both instances the liar and the bullshitter are trying to get away with something; however, while lying is a conscious act of deception and the liar has a clear idea of the reality of the situation but wants their audience to believe in the opposite, the bullshitter is unconnected to a concern for the truth and does not care about it at all (33–35). This "indifference to how things really are" is the essential ingredient of bullshit, and bullshitters ignore the truth rather than simply acknowledging and attempting to subvert it (34); their ultimate goal is not to report the facts (or lie about them), but to shape the beliefs and attitudes of listeners in a certain way.

boundaries between participant and spectator, the festival atmosphere in Roswell creates a liminal space separated from everyday activities, which allows participants to play around with the ideas of ufology. The UFO Festival provides an open and safe environment to discuss beliefs in aliens and conspiracy theories that are otherwise stigmatized in mainstream American culture; as a visitor from Houston who had his own UFO experiences told the *Roswell Daily Record,* he was glad for "a chance for believers to discuss UFOs without being ridiculed" (Quoted in Schneidmiller, 2 July 1995, 1). At the festival, those with views outside the mainstream can express them in open conversation without concern for repercussions, thereby elevating their stories and providing a levelled playing field in which a multitude of different voices can be heard.[210] Here, Jodi Dean's (1998) discussion of online UFO communities can also be applied appropriately to the social space of the festival; she writes that in these spaces, believers "can find and connect with those myriad others also dismissed by science. They can reclaim rationality on their own terms" (9).

Those assembling at the festival are given an open opportunity to express disdain for the government and the scientific establishment, and their views are recognized by those like-minded others who also participate.[211] Even those who might not be fully convinced by the claims made

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[210] Of course, the space is not without tensions, especially since the field of ufology is itself informed by internal debates. In seeking to attract a wide public with interest in ufology, various strands of ufology are represented at the UFO Festival, including traditional nuts-and-bolts researchers whose interests lie in the physical evidence of flying saucers, as well as alien contactees and abductees, who use the festival as an opportunity to speak about their own experiences interacting with extraterrestrial beings. These different voices strategically come together at the festival, but there are noticeable struggles over who has the power and authority to determine what will be represented, how it will be represented, and who has the authority to do the representing. For instance, in the second year of my visit, a group of alien contactees (and some other presenters who had interest in and experience with UFOs and extraterrestrials) decided to host another conference simultaneously with the International UFO Festival, but not affiliated with the official event. This "Startdust Conference," as it was named, was held on the second floor of the local Antique Market. Due to its more obscure location and the competition it faced from the main event, this conference had many fewer participants than the very well-attended, city-sanctioned festival, and this group struggled to be recognized by the larger ufological community. When I mentioned their talks to one of the speakers in the official festival, he implied that they were not a great source of information and described them as rather eccentric. Despite the UFO Festival espousing some more radical and fringe ideas, there still seemed to be a hierarchy to whose ideas were acceptable and legitimate.

[211] While ufologists usually lack social influence and power on their own, through their united stance at the festival, they are able to achieve a platform that has the potential to threaten larger society. Although the views of individual believers are frequently dismissed, through the formation of this ufological community, which reaches its pinnacle

by ufologists seemed interested in, and entertained by, their stories, and I was surprised at how few skeptical voices spoke out against the claims of ufology.[212] Even if the individuals in attendance may not have fully believed every argument presented by the ufologists, they seemed more than willing to entertain their stories, and as I glanced around, I noticed that most attendees appeared deeply engaged in the performances.[213] Many in the audience sported furrowed brows, and they listened somberly and intently to the information being provided. After the lectures and during the "expert panels" (during which a group of ufologists sat together to answer audience questions about a specific topic), numerous individuals from the audience asked a variety of detailed questions, demonstrating their comprehensive knowledge of the topics being discussed. The audience was largely engaged and animated and most of the talks were met with applause; I even found myself suspending my judgements of ufology and I became completely engrossed by the emotive, powerful, and convincing stories being shared.

The ufologists' performances persuaded and inspired. By pointing out that official institutions do not function as they should, by contending that science and academic discourse is limited, and by proposing that powerful elites have infiltrated the government and are pulling the strings behind the scenes, the ufologists made arguments (or stories) that resonated with many of those in attendance. Further, the significance of these stories seemed heightened by the landscape itself, a

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during the UFO Festival, their collective force is taken much more seriously (the example of the US government conducting two expensive investigations on the Roswell Incident is perhaps a case in point).

[212] There was only one occasion in which I witnessed a skeptical audience member voicing her concerns with the talks. In a lecture given by abductee Travis Walton (2014), titled "Good Skepticism and Bad Skepticism: Maintaining Integrity in the Conduct of Investigations," a younger woman in the audience questioned the way in which abduction research is conducted by ufologists: "So your title here says 'good skepticism versus bad skepticism and integrity of research'; so far, I have heard you talking about deficiencies from the other side, and trying to use that as proof for your own claims, but I have no idea where your integrity of research is coming from, or what you are talking about…" This was the only oppositional question that I had heard given at the festival. Most of the questions were largely accepting of the speaker's positions and there were few challenges made to their methodologies and arguments.

[213] Most individuals attending the festival already have an interest in ufology, so their views tend to mutually support and reinforce each other; in this group setting, there seems to be a greater susceptibility to suggestion and persuasion, especially when attendees are listening to the emotional rhetoric of other participants.

landscape, which I have already noted, conjures ideas of government conspiracies, military might, and vast, but impalpable sources of power that operate on ordinary citizens. Through their presentations, the ufologists drew upon an underlying sense of despondency about American politics, and their talks seemed to register with those who find that the purely rational and instrumental modern worldview is inadequate for explaining their own place in the world. By offering more colourful, lively, entertaining, and emotionally satisfying narratives to explain the world, ufology, it seems, provides its believers with a *better* story, which is why ufology has continued to survive, and thrive, as an alternative to official discourses.

Conclusion:

Appealing Aliens: Alternatives to Official Culture

“Trust No One” and “The Truth is Out There”

Throughout this dissertation I have told a story. It is a strange story about UFOs, friendly humanoid beings, malicious Men in Black, and ambiguous alien abductors, but it also tells a more familiar tale about living in the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a tale that touches on ideas of scientific and technological “progress,” military expansionism, governmental secrecy, and modern rationality. Of course, it is an imperfect story — as all stories are — but I have attempted to offer a balanced and sympathetic take on the emergence of beliefs in *real* aliens and the rise of ufology in the United States, and I have used this story to help understand the appeal of other stories — in particular, those that are denigrated and dismissed as irrational by official culture but that continue to flourish in American society.

I began this story by offering the term *real* aliens, a term that emphasizes the way in which extraterrestrial beings are made real because of the beliefs that people invest in them. While ideas about *real* aliens might begin with phenomenological experiences that people have had, my interests lie in the way that these experiences are already shaped by existing cultural understandings. That is, even if something does underlie an alien encounter or a UFO sighting, I argue that there is always a leap that needs to take place to connect these experiences to extraterrestrial beings, and I have attempted to show how and why people have come to interpret the unknown as *alien.*

To do so, I have traced the rise of *real* aliens in the United States since “The War of the Worlds” broadcast and I have sketched the growth of ufology in the decades following; in this historical treatment, I have looked at how ideas about extraterrestrials interestingly parallel terrestrial discourses by considering how the image of the alien, along with ideas about the suspected motivations of extraterrestrials, have changed over time in response to historical, social, cultural,

and political events taking place in the United States. I have also examined the performative functions of ufological discourse, which have allowed ufology to serve as an enticing explanation for the unknown, and I have considered how the appeal of ufology also extends to those who have not had a phenomenological encounter of their own, but who find the ufologists' stories useful for explaining their experiences in the world. Overall, I have sought to establish how these stories about aliens are shaped by, and shape, the world around us, and I have attempted to explain how and why the stories told by ufology have been able to serve as such appealing alternatives to official sources, those epistemic authorities who have, in the modern age, become invested with significant power to make determinative statements about the world.

By questioning the premise that our traditional epistemic authorities can provide us with the truth, and by arguing that official, mainstream culture only offers us an appearance of reality — one that is designed to fool us into thinking that we are free individuals with agency, when in fact, we are not — ufologists tend to see the world as an illusion. Ufologists point out that we are unable to trust these illusory "official" sources that claim to offer us access to the truth, and by using a variety of different techniques to present alternative (and sometimes even contradictory) ways of knowing, the overall discourse of ufology emphasizes a postmodern worldview that make truth and fiction, image and reality difficult to pin down. But ufologists still hold onto the idea of the truth, and their quest is simultaneously a modernist and postmodernist one. While ufologists distance themselves from the scientific establishment and academia, they simultaneously embrace these traditional ways of knowing, and much of ufology is dedicated to the ceaseless search for evidence. Ufologists pride themselves on the detective-like work of ufological research and they are committed to using rigorous testing and experimentation to uncover the bare facts that will expose the truth.

But the distrust that fuels their thinking means that we can never fully access the truth ourselves: while the "truth is out there," we can "trust no one," to borrow the popular catch-phrases from *The X-Files.* Ufology therefore serves as an alternative to official sources, but it remains an imperfect alternative; it offers enticing explanations for the way that power operates in this world, but for ufologists, the truth remains forever elusive — it is always just out of reach. However, in its endless quest for the truth, ufology is not rendered a useless endeavour; instead, the quest propels ufology forward and gives it its lasting appeal. Knowledge of the existence of aliens would put an end to ufology: knowledge circumvents the need to believe, but the foundations of ufology are built upon belief itself; and, while ufologists may not offer a final truth, they do offer partial, tantalizing glimpses of a version of reality that *feels* believable, at least to their own public.

"I Want to Believe"

To conclude this dissertation, I look at how ufology's challenge to the establishment extends beyond this debate over the existence of aliens, and gestures to wider societal concerns. For instance, Jodi Dean (1998) argues that the tensions between ufology and official discourse make explicit not just the futility of coming up with a consensus over UFO phenomena, but also signal the impossibility of coming up with *any* kind of consensus: "there is no overarching conception of reality" from which we can evaluate competing claims and there is no longer any common ground on which to establish debate (170). In other words, Dean argues that the tensions raised by ufology signal a wider epistemological crisis in American society — one in which it has become impossible to determine what is true and what is false.

Certainly, the epistemic uncertainty signalled by ufology plays itself out in American politics today. We live in a world in which Donald Trump can win an election by drawing upon emotional

rhetoric as opposed to facts,[214] in which the term "post-truth" is named word of the year in 2016 by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in which the editor of an alt-right news source can be placed on a level playing field with a university professor, and in which legitimate academics with stacks of peer-reviewed evidence are often seen losing debates to people who simply declare that they are wrong and accuse them of being part of a conspiracy. For Dean, ufology is both a symptom of, and a contributor to, this epistemological crisis, which has led to the radical relativizing of any claims to rationality or truth and made it impossible for many of us to engage politically. Yet, by looking at why some people have found ufology so attractive — as I have attempted to show throughout this dissertation — we can get a sense of how to oppose these alternative discourses; the best way to challenge alternative truth claims is to learn to tell more open, honest, and *better* stories about the world.

It is not so much that we have lost *all* ability to reason, and ufology does not signal that we have lost *all* connection to the truth, but ufology does point out that our traditional epistemic authorities are imperfect and cannot provide us with "some magically unmediated access to reality" — even though our modern worldview has held science as *the* epistemic authority above all other claims to knowledge (Melley, 2000, 19).[215] Ufology offers a strong example of how belief can operate

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[214] Importantly, Trump seems well-attuned to the conspiratorial thinking pervasive in the United States, and during the election he strategically exploited these conspiratorial anxieties. Trump portrayed himself as a crusader against the corrupt political establishment, which was epitomized by his opponent, Hillary Clinton, and he offered a voice to the "silent majority" through his impassioned and emotive rhetoric. His populist sentiments allowed him to appeal directly to "*the American people,*" and during his campaign, he portrayed himself in stark contrast to the "elite" forces, who he cast as the enemies of the American nation. Despite being a billionaire and real estate mogul with a global brand and business interests across the world, as well as having connections with the political and Hollywood elite, Trump was able to distance himself from the "establishment" through his rhetorical style. While he often fumbled through the debates and offered little in terms of actual policies, his polemical stance against Clinton and the "status quo" that she was perceived to represent seemed to resonate for many American voters. As such, Trump connected with his supporters emotionally, and the impassioned cheering from the crowds at his rallies reminded me of some of the audiences at the UFO Festival in Roswell, who cheered as the conspiracy theorists accused the government of lying and demanded that it disclose its secret knowledge about aliens.

[215] Of course, Dean fails to consider how ufology, though appealing, remains a marginalized discourse (and, as I have argued, ufology depends on this marginalization to survive as a source of claims). Luckhurst (1998b) makes this point by offering some historical perspective. Ufology is certainty not the first marginal discourse to appropriate the

outside powerful institutions and social structures, and the appeal of ufological discourse underscores how the single, objective, unequivocal, and irrefutable truth as proposed by modernity fails to capture the experiences of many people.

In its critique of authoritative power structures, ufology points to the fact that there is something lacking in official discourse. Ufology reminds us that this *is* a world where intelligence agencies spy on us, where the CIA is engaged in clandestine, and sometimes nefarious operations, where politicians are often caught in a lie, where multinational corporations play a role in producing scientific research, and where the mass media industries serve elites and manufacture consent — in other words, it *is* a world where truth and trust *are* shaky, and ufologists are not wrong for expressing a deep cynicism towards contemporary American politics. In this way, ufology forces us to reconsider the limitations of our modern worldview and our faith in traditional epistemic authorities, which cannot provide us "with a strong sense of security about the truthfulness of the knowledge they produce" (Harambam, 2018, 319).

The persistence of ufology and the appeal of the stories it tells about aliens and UFOs also suggests that there is something lacking in the purely rational and instrumental worldview upon which our modern world is largely organized, and it reveals that not everyone is convinced by the materialist paradigm and its appeals to reason and rationality. Like the abducting aliens whose skin is marked by silvery, stony hues, so too is the world full of shades of grey, and ufological discourse points out that there is much to our world that we do not (and maybe cannot) know. While it appropriates scientific discourse, ufology also re-centres ideas about spirituality, faith, and belief that were supposed to be abandoned in the modern, disenchanted age; as Brenda Denzler (2001)

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language and methods of science to support its beliefs, and Luckhurst traces how the Spiritualists at the end of the nineteenth century were "linked to both radical politics and the heart of the political establishment" (536). And, as he contends, the Spiritualists did not relativize any possibility of the truth: "there was no crisis of reason, no collapse of the Real" (536).

observes, "the ambiguous nature of the [UFO] phenomenon threatens to make theologians of us all" (103). According to Denzler, UFO and ET phenomena sits precariously on the edge between religion and science, or what she calls the "lure of the edge," and ufology has lodged itself between the "language and praxis of a scientific modernity along with the myths and symbols of an ancient and venerable human quest that first found a home in religion" (159).

Though flawed, ufology also opens new possibilities by re-centring its discourse on personal experience. Under the modern worldview, personal experiences are treated as naïve and illusory, but ufology has survived as a challenge to official, expert knowledge because it is hard to convince people that their experiences are not real; as Ben-Yehuda put it, "it is exceedingly difficult to persuade people who saw and experienced very strange and incredible sights or contacts that they had actually not experienced anything" (1985, 156; 161). The embrace of ufology is therefore not so much a signal of people turning away from science to become irrational and unscientific, but the persistence of beliefs in aliens draws attention to the limitations of a purely modern worldview, and ufology serves as a reminder that not everything can be adequately explained by scientific and instrumental reason alone; the pendulum has been swinging for some time toward the side of science, but ufology reminds us that there are other claims to knowledge worthy of consideration.[216]

Rather than trusting official sources and epistemic authorities who deny their own experiences, ufologists "bricolage from different ways of knowing and from different forms of knowledge brand new realities, brand new truths that are more appealing because they are not based on cold facts

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[216] Ufologist Jacques Vallée makes this argument: "Skeptics, who flatly deny the existence of any unexplained phenomenon in the name of 'rationalism,' are among the primary contributors to the rejection of science by the public. People are not stupid and they know very well when they have seen something out of the ordinary. When a so-called expert tells them the object must have been the moon or a mirage, he is really teaching the public that science is impotent or unwilling to pursue the study of the unknown" (1990, 21).

alone but also on those *warm* underpinnings of knowing" (Harambam, 2017, 255). Ufologists take advantage of the affective nature of stories about aliens and government conspiracy theories, and they privilege inner subjective knowledge over the distant and "objective" knowledge of the establishment. Their stories are also different from the dry and dismissive ones offered by these official institutions, so ufology is presented as a populist, open, and democratic alternative. While the epistemological standards of ufology differ markedly from those established by the scientific and scholarly communities, ufology ultimately succeeds because it embraces an emotive narrative that provides an explanation for those struggling to make sense of their place in a complex world. For many, these stories just *feel* right.

In tracing the appeal of stories about aliens, it is time I return to the initial question that informs this dissertation: "Do you believe in aliens?" While there may not be objective proof to support the contention that aliens are real and visiting Earth, I do find that the stories told about them are powerful and convincing. These stories give meaning to indifferent and impersonal forces, provide answers for the unknown, and offer enticing explanations for why things are the way they are — and there is something about them that draws me in. But these stories are never fully satisfying. While ufologists may look at official institutions with disdain and distrust, and while they may question the methods and motives of government officials, scientists, and academics, the ufological community does not have some special and privileged access to "reality" and "truth," and their unfalsifiable claims about extraterrestrials tend to draw critique away from the very terrestrial sources that cause our problems. Still, they remain compelling. Lodged between fact and fiction, stories about *real* aliens will us both to believe and to doubt, and in answering this question, I am reminded of the poster that hangs in Fox Mulder's FBI office, which reads: "I *want* to believe."

Epilogue:

Roswell at the Border and the Making of Aliens in America

The Imaginary of America and the Creation of Aliens

The story of America is, in many ways, a story about aliens. In this dissertation, I have told part of this story. I have examined the rise of *real* aliens in the United States by looking at how UFO-sighting reports and ET contact accounts are fundamentally shaped by their social, cultural, and political contexts; accordingly, I have argued that the arrival, or invasion, of stories about aliens fits alongside prevailing historical frameworks and ideologies that have shaped American discourse in fundamental ways, in particular, the Cold War context, and later postmodernism. The second half of the twentieth century seems like a natural place to begin to tell this story. Ideas about *real* aliens came into fruition in the years following "The War of the Worlds" broadcast, and the "modern era" of ET and UFO phenomena traces back to the 1940s; however, this historicization fails to consider the way in which these stories about aliens are also fundamentally shaped by more deeply rooted ideas in the American imaginary. Perhaps it is necessary to look back even earlier than the twentieth century to get a sense of why stories about aliens have materialized so predominantly in the United States.

The United States is built upon a particular set of mythologies and has a distinct national character, and there are a common set of perceptions and values that are deeply entrenched in the stories of the nation. What is more, there seems to be something about this idea of America and its founding myths that encourages stories about aliens. For instance, from its very beginnings, the United States has embraced a very different kind of national genealogy. Starting with the Puritans, America was understood as distinct from the rest of the world and was marked with an inherent importance — and this notion of exceptionalism became a defining myth of the national character of the nation. Perhaps these ideas of the exceptional and "special" quality of the nation have something to do with why *real* aliens have invaded the United States. Certainly, there are other

popular stories about extraterrestrials that have occurred outside the US; however, as I have shown, a large number of the most popular stories of ET encounters occur on American soil, which speaks to the perceived specialness of America as *the* country of imagined first contact with beings from other planets. It makes sense that America, as "a city upon a hill" that "cannot be hidden," is imagined as the predominant location on Earth that seems to attract extraterrestrials (Winthrop, [1630–1649] 1996, 10). Not only are the eyes of the world turned on America, but so are the eyes of the entire universe.

But this special "chosenness" is met with a jittery anxiety, and a deep distrust has permeated American culture since its Puritan beginnings; as Peter Knight (2003, 1) argues, conspiracy thinking in America is built into its foundations and "drew life from [the] sense of mission that convinced Americans of their special role in history." Seeing their vocation as a struggle of cosmic dimensions and viewing themselves as God's faithful and chosen people, the Puritans who settled the colony believed the Devil had unleashed his wrath upon them and they found themselves engaged in a Manichean battle of good and evil against his external forces (Butter, 2014, 12).

The Puritans imagined their colony threatened by the intrusion of mysterious enemies — the Salem witches and the so-called "Indian Devils" (Goldberg, 2001) — and their encounters mark some of the first invasion narratives in the United States. David Seed argues that they "set a paradigm" whereby "the godly terrain of the emerging nation is described as under siege from demonic, invisible forces that have forced an entry even into the citadel of the home" — a narrative that is indeed repeated in stories of alien invasion and abduction (Seed, 2007, 64).[217] The intrusion

[217] Ironically, these invasion narratives failed to take into consideration the fact that the Puritans themselves were invading land that had long been occupied by indigenous people; instead, they saw these Native Americans as evil intruders of their colony

of hidden and mysterious extraterrestrial enemies then, did not come out of nowhere; they fit in with this longstanding tradition of invasion narratives in the United States.

These stories about aliens are therefore also shaped by a particular and potent kind of conspiratorial thinking that became enshrined in the imaginary of America.[218] Peter Knight (2003, 12) succinctly summarizes the significance of conspiracy thinking to the American ideology. "Conspiracy thinking," he writes, "draws power by merging with and reinforcing traditional American values and beliefs," and it is informed by "a sense of mission, Protestant supremacy, concern about encroachments on liberty, anti-elitism, maintenance of the racial order, and the sanctity of private property. In the midst of diversity, conspiracy thinking nurtures a sense of peoplehood while discovering the enemies of the American dream." Knight sees conspiracy thinking as a pervasive and fundamental aspect of American political thought stemming all the way back to the foundations of America, and these conspiratorial imaginings have worked to create "aliens" in the United States.

The conspiratorial and paranoid undertones that fuel ideas about extraterrestrials were therefore not simply born from the Cold War context; while the Cold War gave expression and shape to these ideas, they flow in continuity with a much deeper past. When stories about *real* aliens started to materialize in the second half of the twentieth century, they were not completely strange — or alien — but were made familiar because they touched on the memories and ideas that underlie the American imaginary itself. In their simultaneous familiarity and strangeness, there is something deeply uncanny to these stories about extraterrestrials and it is not all that surprising that

[218] See Richard Hofstadter ([1964] 2008) for a historicization of the "style" of paranoid thinking in American political thought, as well as Bernard Bailyn (([1967] 1992) who traces this paranoia back to the American Revolution.

extraterrestrials have invaded the United States — *aliens* have been seen as invading the nation from its very beginnings.

In these stories about aliens, then, we can sometimes catch glimpses of other sorts of stories; as Susan Lepselter (2012, 129) puts it, we might be able to hear in these uncanny stories "the distorted echoes of histories whose wounds have never healed." Perhaps this is why alien abduction narratives are so captivating and horrifying; they parallel, in distorted form, earlier stories about "aliens" in the American nation. For instance, Lepselter, along with Patricia Felisa Barbeito (2005), Michael Sturma (2002), and Andrew Panay (2004), all observe how stories about alien abduction seem uncannily familiar to the captivity narratives dating back to the Puritans, in which Native Americans were accused of kidnapping white settlers: "it is not hard to hear the Indian captivity narrative layered inside this uncanny, unfinalized UFO abduction story like sediment" (Lepselter, 2016, 62).

Importantly, these authors draw attention to how present-day stories about extraterrestrials weave into one another and form a resemblance to, and resonance with, other narratives, and these strange stories about extraterrestrials are made more meaningful because they reflect familiar cultural memories and histories. In tracing the parallels between captivity narratives and alien abduction stories then, it is possible to see how the American nation has worked to create "aliens" — not extraterrestrials — but indigenous ones who were constructed in these narratives as completely "other." At the same time, I agree with Lepselter, who argues that "it would be a mistake to say that the UFO abduction story is symbolically 'about' that single history of American conquest" (2016, 52); however, as Lepselter contends, in evoking stories of Indian captivity narratives alongside alien abductions, it becomes possible to reveal "how the captivity narrative points to multiple other social memories" and "how bits of those stories accrue inside its form, and

create new stories with social and poetic effects" (52–53). While the Indian captivity narrative provides one poignant example of how stories about extraterrestrials seem to reflect episodes of American history, there are many other memories layered within these stories.

Ethnic and Extraterrestrial Invaders

This takes me to another story. While visiting Roswell, in the sweltering summer heat of 2014, I found myself sitting at a meeting. That summer, headlines warned of the "growing illegal immigration crisis" in the United States as an influx of more than 57 000 Central Americans (mostly women and children) arrived at the US-Mexico border and illegally entered the United States (Miller, S.A., 20 September 2014). Those who were found were transported to detention centres across the southern US to be held, processed, and to have their cases looked at legally; one such processing centre was established at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Artesia, a short (forty-mile) distance from where I was conducting my research in Roswell. Here, 160 Central American immigrants awaited processing (and many more were on the way), with many likely to be sent back to the devastated homelands that they had fled. With the FLETC centre being converted into a temporary immigrant processing facility, many residents came forward to protest these developments, which sparked an impromptu town hall meeting for them to come and voice their concerns.

Despite being an unplanned meeting, the building was packed: the seats were filled and those who arrived late had to stand at the back of the gymnasium, and I would estimate that over a hundred and fifty residents were in attendance[219]; moreover, five news crews had set up to record the meeting for their local and national broadcasts. The meeting began with a panel of governmental officials — many of them Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents —

[219] The total population of Artesia in 2015 was recorded at 12 043 people.

describing to the audience the government's plans to use the centre as a place to hold Central American women and children (from infants to the age of seventeen),[220] who had crossed the border illegally, and the remainder of the meeting was devoted to the government personnel answering questions from the audience.

For over three hours, I listened as many anxious residents voiced their concerns about having the undocumented immigrants held in their community and in such close proximity to their homes. "Who doesn't want these immigrants here?" one resident asked, as many of the people in the audience raised their hands. Others used their comments and questions to draw sharp distinctions between themselves, their own families and community members, and these undocumented immigrants: "Are *their* students going into *our* system?" one person asked. "How much are *we* spending to educate and give health treatment to these *illegal* immigrants?" another demanded, which was followed by heavy applause. One man commented that the facility should not be spending money on entertaining these "illegals," and that the government should build a better fence around the facility so that they could not even look outside — the holes in the current chain-link fences allowed immigrants to see the surrounding neighbourhoods, and he wanted them to be completely contained and shut away from the community of Artesia. Another mentioned that it "seems like a crime and shame that we are feeding *these people* with *our* money while there are people in New Mexico who need food," while another argued that "at some point a country has to consider *its own people*!"

Of course, these xenophobic sentiments are not simply contained to Artesia, and the topic of immigration reform is a contentious issue across the United States, which both shapes and reflects

[220] They made sure to emphasize that no adult males would be sent to this facility; however, many residents expressed concerns that seventeen-year-old "men" would still be able to stay in the centre.

the sharp and polarizing cultural divide between the left and right.[221] These debates over immigration policy certainly played a significant role in the 2016 US election of Donald Trump. Immigration policy, and specifically, illegal immigration to the United States, was a signature issue of Trump's presidential campaign, and his harsh stance against immigration seemed to resonate with many American voters — enough to secure him the election. The underlying sentiment to Trump's policies bluntly proposes that undocumented Mexican and Latin American immigrants represent a clear threat to American society. These alarmist assessments activate fears over the fragility of the border, as a country that cannot control its borders is seen as a diminished one that has opened its door for increased threats to national security, and Trump's popular appeal indicates the deeply embedded anxieties that many American citizens have about the fragility of their nation's borders. His desire to "put America first," moreover, serves as a rhetorical strategy to build a symbolic border between those who are insiders of the American nation and those who are outsiders, which complements the physical wall that he wishes to erect to mark these sharp and absolute distinctions between "us" and "them."

Through his policies and rhetoric, Trump and his administration, along with his electorate, have worked to render undocumented immigrants as entirely "other" — or *alien*. The use of the term "alien" to refer to noncitizens of the US is deeply enshrined in American politics and extends back for over two centuries; while it once meant "foreign national," amidst the rise of *real* aliens in the United States since at least the 1930s, it has become a pejorative term that discursively renders the

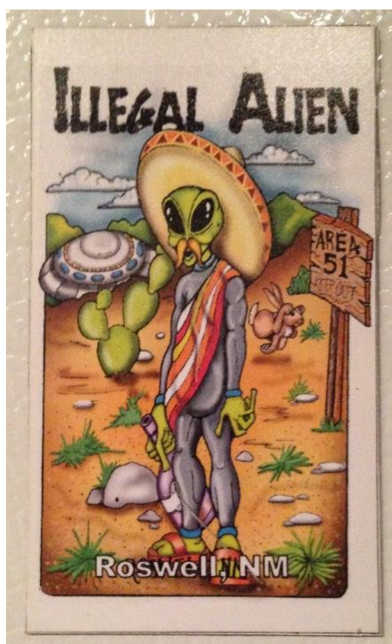
[221] Those on the left typically advocate for pathways to citizenship for undocumented people as well as for a moratorium on deportations of undocumented immigrants who are young adults and have no criminal record. Conversely, the right-wing ideology tends to view undocumented immigrants in an unfavourable light, so Republicans generally argue that there should be no "amnesty" for these immigrants and that a stronger border patrol and fence is needed to help prevent illegal immigration; these views are typically reinforced by a belief that illegal immigration is lowering wages for citizens and documented immigrants.

subject as less than human, and in Roswell, the term "illegal alien" plays on associations between these terrestrial "aliens" and extraterrestrial ones.

While in Roswell, I found it quite remarkable how ideas about illegal and extraterrestrial *aliens* seemed to collide in concrete, tangible spaces, where people live their daily lives grappling with the ramifications of the border.[222] While opinions about the border are strongly held all over the country, they are certainly quite intense in these regions where the ramifications of border security are most apparent and where apprehensions about illegal immigration are markedly pronounced. In Roswell, the popular sentiments about border insecurities and immigration do not just circulate in the expected realm of the political, but they also seem to extend into what are seen as largely playful, non-serious environments, such as the UFO Festival.

Despite being marketed as a pleasurable, and largely apolitical leisure event in the official UFO Festival brochures, the festival is saturated with politics and there are conscious acknowledgements of the contestations over the border, often made in tongue-and-cheek ways. For instance, puns about extraterrestrial and illegal aliens abound, and slogans, such as "UFOs Have No Borders" and "Border crossings of the third kind" gesture to the tensions surrounding the border politics in the region. Further, some of the souvenirs and photo-ops at the events rely on the conscious overlay of the image of the illegal alien onto the extraterrestrial one.

[222] While Roswell remains the most popular example and hosts the biggest UFO Festival in the world, since 2012 a burgeoning UFO Festival circuit has popped up in cities along the Texas-Mexico border, including Laredo, Presidio, Edinburg, and Del Rio. Moreover, while taking a drive through the southern part of New Mexico, it was not uncommon to find souvenir shops dotting the desert with alien figurines on display.



Left: Fridge magnet purchased at a local gift shop in Roswell, N.M.; Right: photo taken at tourist photo op located inside one of the gift shops. Taken 1 July 2013. Personal images.

Two such images are shown above, one that is sold as a poster or magnet souvenir for tourists, and one that has been made into a photo-opportunity for visitors. In the first image, we can see the depictions of an extraterrestrial alien wearing a sombrero, with a heavy moustache, a serape, a bottle of alcohol and sandals, and the words "illegal alien" printed at the top of the poster, playing on the obviously stereotypical image of a Mexican immigrant. The second image is less detailed, but in addition to the bottle of alcohol, the alien holds a shovel, depicting the type of labour usually expected of undocumented immigrants. The images gesture to the mutability of the ET alien body; otherwise androgynous and raceless extraterrestrial figures morph into depictions of highly racialized, "illegal" aliens. Conscious selections were made in the creation of these images, and the linguistic and visual forms depicted were chosen to construct a particular image of the

immigrant — one that is bluntly racist and troubling, but that is also downplayed by the playful image of the extraterrestrial.[223]

These images and ideas about the illegal/extraterrestrial are not neutral — they have very real effects on how people are imagined and treated. On one hand, these depictions of the ET-illegal alien might be interpreted as offering a less fraught representation of the border by presenting what is meant to be a comical image to perhaps neutralize concerns and attract tourism to the region. In a way, they call attention to the contested landscape, only to mock it, so this idea of the alien draws attention to the parallels between illegals and extraterrestrials in a comedic way. On the other hand, the overlapping stereotypes of the "illegal alien" and the extraterrestrial works to dehumanize the immigrant in the process, rendering the undocumented person as *alien*. The ideological import of these images and representations can be easily dismissed because they are not meant to be taken very seriously; nevertheless, it is these comedic and supposedly playful conventions that reinforce common stereotypes and position undocumented immigrants in a negative light.

These images communicate more than just a picture of the stereotyped figures presented. The play on the term "alien" and the conscious overlap of the extraterrestrial and the illegal teases out the resemblances between these two, beyond the visual depictions provided. As I listened to the audience members during the Artesia meeting, and as I kept in mind these stereotypical images that I came across in Roswell, I was reminded of how much the discourse surrounding "illegal aliens" seemed to parallel the prevailing construction of the invasive and penetrating

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[223] These parallels are not lost in popular culture either. For instance, the iconic opening scene from the film *Men in Black* (1997) begins with Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones), an undercover officer whose job is to patrol extraterrestrials on Earth, confronting several "illegal aliens" crossing the US-Mexico border in Arizona. In a line-up, he questions the illegal immigrants in Spanish, and when one of them — a dark, long-haired man dressed in an intricate Mexican poncho – is unable to understand the spoken Spanish, Agent K determines that he is an extraterrestrial hiding inside the body of an illegal alien from Central America. Agent K releases the other immigrants and dismisses the other officers, and he jokingly comments to them: "Keep on protecting us from those dangerous aliens." This scene reminds us that the extraterrestrial is not merely an otherworldly entity, but actually comes to reflect ideas about "others" in America.

extraterrestrial aliens that have become so commonly discussed at the Roswell UFO Festival, and in popular culture more broadly. Watching the town hall meeting unfold became strangely like watching one of the numerous talks about abducting and invasive extraterrestrials at the festival, and it made me wonder how such analogous ideas about these two kinds of aliens come to unexpectedly parallel one another.

For instance, their resemblances can be seen in the way that both immigrants and extraterrestrials are portrayed as silent and hostile invaders who have abandoned their inhospitable homelands and are now accused of violently coming to steal *our* way of life. Popular discourse often portrays immigrants as intruders who overpopulate the nation, and there is an explicit assumption that they are coming into the country to use public resources that they are not entitled to and have not earned. Going back to Orson Welles's radio broadcast — as one of many examples — it becomes possible to see these parallels between the human and otherworldly images of the alien. In "The War of the Worlds," for instance, Welles recounts how hordes of strange Martian beings left their doomed home planet to prey on the rich lands of the Earth, settling on the United States as their prime landing destination and penetrating its borders to destroy and feast upon the bodies of American citizens. His representation is but one of many comparable portrayals of the sinister and invading aliens that have emerged over the last several decades, and this idea of threatening creatures coming from other worlds to invade our planet — and especially the very heart of the American nation — has become a recurring narrative in popular culture, as well as in many conspiracy theories about alien abduction. [224] Similarly, illegal aliens are framed as having to leave behind their homes in Central America and Mexico to come to the United States to take

[224] Of course, this is just one popular portrayal of the alien; other representations paint the alien as friendly, kind, and helpful; however, the image of the invasive extraterrestrial being is certainly a popular one in American society and this image certainly bears many parallels to "illegal aliens."

advantage of better prospects. They are often depicted as interloping intruders who are overpopulating the country and who attempt to prey on honest citizens by stealing jobs, and usurping welfare, education, and healthcare benefits away from American residents.

In alien abduction narratives, moreover, extraterrestrials are accused of penetrating unwitting human bodies and performing invasive reproductive experiments, such as recombining DNA, harvesting fetuses and genomes, and impregnating human beings to produce a human-alien hybrid species that will eventually take over Earth. In a strange yet similar way, these conspiratorial imaginings about using reproductive means to seize the planet parallel the racist stereotype that undocumented immigrant women possess an "unchecked sexuality" and are reproducing so that their so-called "anchor babies" will populate the American nation and permit them access into the country (Cisneros, 2013, 292). As Natalie Cisneros (2013, 291–292) points out, accusations have been made against undocumented immigrants for "multiplying" at alarming rates, and as Leo R. Chavez (2008, ix; 73–114) describes, the framing of immigrant women as possessing an unrestrained sexuality has led to the formulation of a grand conspiracy theory called the *reconquista*, in which immigrants are accused of reproducing to such extremes as to eventually take over the US Southwest. Dorothy Nelkin and Mark Michaels (1988) further identify the pervasive use of biological eugenics metaphors used to portray immigrants as a danger to the "purity" of America, which resembles these concerns about human-alien hybrids.

Another similarity is the way in which both ET aliens and undocumented immigrants are often described as ominous, hidden, and intrusive — they are here without our knowing. The aliens popularly represented in the film *Men in Black* (1997), on the television program *The X-Files* (1993–present), and in many popular alien abduction accounts, for instance, are disguised creatures who have penetrated our borders, and are lurking among us without our knowledge. ET aliens are

often portrayed as oozy and slimy, able to penetrate the borders of Earth, of the nation, and of the human body, and it is their slipperiness and invisibility that allows them to exploit law-abiding Americans. Again, this image is not that far removed from that of the undocumented immigrant — despite physical barriers, checkpoints, and panoptic surveillance methods, millions of illegal immigrants are already living within the United States.[225] As Keith Cunningham-Parameter (2011, 1568—1583) and Otto Santa Ana (2002, 73-77) argue, immigrants are often framed by metaphors of liquidity (like "flooding") and they are seen as seeping through the invisible line of the border that divides the nations, unknown and undetected. Immigrants are therefore often painted as though they are both invisible and everywhere; they are viewed as ominous, hidden, furtive, intrusive, and as mentioned, threatening and dangerous.

While some undocumented people may be able to slip undetected past the borders, once inside, they are rendered aliens. Despite being an arbitrarily defined line of demarcation, the symbolic and invisible line of the border is invested with the almost magical power to performatively transform human being into "illegal aliens," and upon crossing that border, undocumented immigrants are dehumanized and treated simply as threats to be removed, rather than as people worthy of compassion; as they are outsiders, there is no need to extend sympathy to these "illegal aliens," and instead, many Americans want to make sure that they are completely contained and separated away from the community while being processed, and then ejected from the country as soon as possible. While immigration may simply be the natural consequence of a shrinking global society, "illegal aliens" are depicted as an encroaching danger on the established order, and they

[225] As Julia Kristeva (1982) points out, while we attempt to impose boundaries between order and disorder to protect ourselves from the threats of invasion, there is always the looming danger that this boundary can be dissolved, and that which is expelled — or abjected — cannot be excluded once and for all; the subject must continually reassert itself by repeatedly enacting and establishing its borders. Aliens, both terrestrial and extraterrestrial, are seen as threats to our established borders, and they serve as reminders of their instability and artificiality.

are therefore excluded from national membership. These hierarchical understandings of personhood and citizenship have severe implications that are reflected in the social policies and ideological imports of contemporary immigration rhetoric in the United States, and they offer another powerful example of how the American nation has worked to create “aliens.”

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