

Limina

*Varieties and Trajectories of Contemporary
UAP Studies*



The Journal of UAP Studies

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–Table of Contents–

Editorial Board _____	5
Editorial _____	6
The Importance of Phenomenology for UAP Studies Kimberly S. Engels, Ph.D. _____	12
The Mystery of Elusiveness Bertrand Méheust, Ph.D. _____	23
Response to “The Mystery of Elusiveness” by Dr Bertrand Méheust Thibaut Gress, Ph.D. _____	45
Reply to Critical Note Bertrand Méheust, Ph.D. _____	48
Normal, Abnormal, Paranormal: Philosophical Determination of a Ufological Lexicon Thibaut Gress, Ph.D. _____	53
Understanding UAPs: Surveying the Nature Spirits Hypothesis Travis Dumsday, Ph.D. _____	65
The Discovery of OIL (Some Thoughts on Finding Other Intelligent Life) Brenda Denzler, Ph.D. _____	74
One Science for both UFOlogists and Astrobiologists? Ted Peters, Ph.D. _____	93
Expectations about Nonhuman Intelligences: Fermi’s Challenge, Divine Hiddenness, and the White House Lawn Casey A. Knight, Ph.D. _____	101
UAP Indications Analysis 1945-1975 United States Atomic Warfare Complex Sean Grosvenor, Larry J. Hancock and Ian M. Porritt _____	109

How Much Time Do We Have Before Catastrophic Disclosure Occurs?

Matthew Szydakis, Ph.D. _____ 129

James D. Madden, Unidentified Flying Hyperobject: UFOs, Philosophy, and the End of the World (Ontocalypse Press, 2023), 141 pages. ISBN: 9798865867425. Paperback: \$21.73.

Travis Dumsday, Ph.D _____ 138

Review of: Robert Powell, *UFOs: A Scientist Explains What We Know (And Don't Know)* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2024, 209 pages, appendix, footnotes, references, and index. Hardcover, \$32.00.

Thomas Bullard, Ph.D. _____ 148

Review: “Greg Eghigian. *After the Flying Saucers Came: A Global History of the UFO Phenomenon.*” New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. Xi+400 pp. Hardcover, \$29.99.

Matthew Bowman, Ph.D. _____ 151

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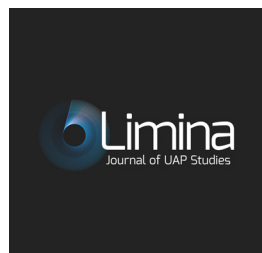
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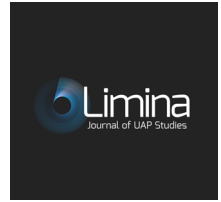
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Editorial

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1. Preliminary Remarks

In my previous Editorial, I articulated the aim of both *Limina* and the learned society that publishes it—the *Society for UAP Studies*. Our goal is to foster the development and stabilization of UAP Studies as a recognizable academic field, alongside other established disciplines in contemporary scholarship. With this second issue, we continue the essential task of publishing work that forms the foundation of the field and furthers its development. As UAP move further into the structured discourse of academic scholarship, they take on more nuanced, subtle, and complex resonances, shaped by their conceptual, phenomenological, and experiential dimensions. These dimensions, as situated within a variety of academically inflected discourses, contribute to the constitution of the field.

As I noted last year, UAP Studies both draws from and departs significantly from the “classical” tradition of ufology.¹ UAP Studies is not ufology. The latter serves as a necessary but preliminary stage of forensic investigation and case compilation; its primary object is the UAP case report, not UAP themselves. While ufology informs the new science of and scholarship on UAP, it does not exhaust it. UAP Studies is broader than both classical ufology and the nascent scientific study of UAP; it constitutes a richer conceptual landscape that is critical, empirical, and interpretive, applying the rigor of academic scholarship to UAP as well as the accounts surrounding them (insofar as today we can increasingly distinguish the two). While UAP are not merely objects of academic interpretation, they are also empirical objects of scientific inquiry²—a mode of inquiry that, while necessary,

will not resolve all aspects of UAP. More than this, UAP Studies recognizes that beyond hermeneutical and empirical frameworks, UAP are also *experiential* objects, tied to subjective encounters³ that, in some cases, rise to philosophical, religious, or existential significance. Such experiences must be approached carefully and with a degree of independence from the strictly empirical question of veridicality. Especially with UAP, we must often “bracket”⁴ the reality question—what precisely is the nature of the object-cause of the experience?—in favor of studying how these phenomena manifest in human consciousness. And that brings us squarely into the domain of a *phenomenological investigation* into the *experience* of UAP⁵, a significant theme of this volume.

Curiously, UAP are allegedly anomalous in a realm of human experience (the mesoscopic, as opposed to either

1 Cf. Knuth *et al.* (2025) where we attempt to make clear what the nature of this key distinction is. See also Gough (2025) for the coverage the paper received in *Phys.org*. It marks a significant departure from typical media coverage of the subject. For an excellent overview of the challenges UAP Studies has had to face from a communications and information sciences perspective, see Stahlman (2024).

2 That this now needs little justification is in itself an important stage of departure from classical ufology.

3 Not all objects of empirical study have this intimately subjective dimension, or least if they do, they are heavily mediated by instrumented observations into realms for which human beings do not have relatable experiences: for example, the life cycle of bacteria, or the flux of elementary particles showering the Earth from cosmic sources (and here we might have need to anthropomorphize to gain some measure of access to these realities).

4 This is a technical term used in philosophical phenomenology, as will be discussed in some articles in this volume.

5 When Hynek (1972) wrote about “the UFO experience” he in effect placed the UFO squarely in the domain of phenomenology. Only now is this clearly being thematized as such.

the micro- or macroscopic) that we might have thought the sciences have (mostly) exhausted with its apparatus of explanation and understanding. If nothing else, UAP may demonstrate the possibility that Nature can still surprise within realms of experience which human beings do not necessarily need a technical apparatus to access.⁶ While much attention of late is given to “experiencers” (of UAP and related phenomena), and the evidentiary significance of their encounters,⁷ we must not forget that it is human experience itself that underpins the sciences and their methodologies. Experience provides the foundation from which scientific concepts and principles emerge. If we are to more objectively characterize the ways in which UAP appear to those who encounter them, and thereby better understand UAP as they present themselves to human subjects, we must suspend our scientific presuppositions and allow UAP to appear as they are. The suspension of presuppositions when studying UAP encounters should be mirrored by a parallel phenomenological gesture in the sciences, freeing both subjects and researchers from assumptions that might prematurely foreclose the inquiry.⁸

This “bracketing” of the question of UAP reality is fundamental to phenomenology and, as we said, a major focus of several essays in this issue. This approach might appear to sidestep the harder problem of UAP origins; however, given the empirical challenges of UAP research, phenomenological inquiry is essential. Before turning to the empirical sciences for an understanding of the facts, we must first engage with the experiential ground from which UAP realities emerge. Only then can we transition to empirical analysis and, ultimately, hypothesis formation. That a residual component of the UAP phenomenon resists easy classification as scientific “fact” is not unique to UAP but reflects a broader challenge within the sciences when dealing with phenomena closely tied to human consciousness and experience.

As I pointed out in my last Editorial, we lack a widely accepted theory of psychophysical relations—we have no

unifying “mind-matter” framework that bridges the physical and the psychical. And so, when the UAP experience crosses into the strange or non-ordinary, we often find ourselves at sea, without theoretical guidance or conceptual guardrails. This is why it is crucial to first bracket our presuppositions about what is and is not possible, allowing the experiences themselves to emerge on their own terms.⁹ From there, we can return to scientific inquiry, possibly with new methodological tools that do not prematurely diminish the complexity of the phenomena. Recognizing the phenomenological origins of the sciences grants us an opportunity to intervene at their foundations, allowing us to expand the sciences to meet the demands of experience, rather than prematurely narrowing experience in order to meet the demands of the sciences.¹⁰

Our second volume of *Limina* is entitled “Varieties and Trajectories of Contemporary UAP Studies”. It is partly the product of the *Society for UAP Studies*’ annual [academic conference of the same name](#), held in August of last year (2024). There, our colleagues organized a series of discipline-specific workshops across the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences.¹¹ These workshops, designed for focused academic exchange, preceded each day’s keynote and plenary talks. Many of the essays in this volume originated from these discussions.

As I compiled the final set of peer-reviewed articles for this volume, it became clear that they presented a cohesive collection of essays that naturally fall into four thematic groupings. In the remainder of this editorial, I’d like to provide a programmatic overview of the contents of this new volume of our journal.

2. The Phenomenological Turn in UAP Studies

As suggested above, one of the major themes running through this issue is the importance of phenomenology as a methodological tool for UAP research. Several articles

6 Here, then, the imaginal and mythical might with the “experiencer” reflect a *desperation to understand*, not a fabrication in an effort to *confound*; indeed, we must wonder what is the role of imagination and myth at the liminal edge of human experience, where (as even Kant recognized) Nature arrests and surprises?

7 As Garry Nolan recently reminded us, in an [excellent lecture](#) at his Sol Foundation’s November 2024 meeting, evidence is *always and already conditioned by a meaningful context of explanation*: evidence is always *evidence for this-or-that hypothesis*—the latter functioning as the context of meaning for the former. This is an absolutely crucial clarification to keep in mind, especially as the new science of UAP crystallizes.

8 The “bracketing” or suspension of presuppositions cuts both ways: for the experiencers and the scientists, both of whose presuppositions perhaps foreclose on the true empirical character of UAP as they show themselves in Nature, complicating our endeavor to understand them.

9 On this point, we should be reminded that Truzzi (1989) references C.S. Peirce, the great American pragmatist philosopher, who, he writes, “required that the first and primary obligation of any philosopher or scientist is to do nothing that would block inquiry”.

10 As philosopher of science Mario Bunge reminded us decades ago, science *is a method*, not a body of beliefs which would indeed serve to stand before experience as gatekeeper (as referenced by Truzzi (1989)—though we should here note that Bunge himself was no fan of UFOs, putting them alongside things like the “magical power of crystals.” See Bunge (1991), p. 271).

11 Though papers in this current volume do not cover it, this conference also had a UAP “citizen science” workshop—a deeply important topic we aim in this journal to highlight in future volumes.

engage with the phenomenological tradition, exploring how it can help us rigorously examine the experience of UAP encounters while suspending prior assumptions. We have foundational investigations into both the phenomenology of the UAP experience and the conceptual lexicon of attempts to *define* UAP as a definite object of study (be it empirical, interpretive, speculative, etc.). Let us not forget that experience is fundamental even for the hardest of the so-called “hard” sciences. Indeed, one of the greatest of the philosophical phenomenologists, the 19th century thinker Edmund Husserl (who is specifically invoked in Dr. Engel’s essay), took it as his purpose to first critique the tendency in the sciences to obscure their (very human) experiential origins, and thereby, through his innovative method of phenomenological investigation, to philosophically unearth the experiential conditions of possibility of the sciences. This, he hoped, would reorient them back towards their essential humanity, and close the gap between mind and the material world that had become increasingly pronounced following the mind/body cleft that opened during the Scientific Revolution (and especially codified, apparently, in the philosophy of Descartes¹²). What fruits would follow from this phenomenological reorientation for the study of UAP?

Dr. Engels’ essay “The Importance of Phenomenology for UAP Studies”, underscores the need to recognize the first-person perspective as a legitimate site of academic inquiry. Similarly, Prof. Gress’ “Normal, Abnormal, Paranormal: Philosophical Determination of a Ufological Lexicon” delves into the conceptual boundaries of perception, normativity, and classification, reflecting on how these shape our understanding of anomalous phenomena.

Building on these discussions, Dr. Bertrand Méheust’s “The Mystery of Elusiveness” addresses the paradox of

UFO (UAP) manifestations—their simultaneous appearance and retreat from scientific scrutiny. Here, phenomenology can provide an essential framework for understanding the limits of empirical observation and the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity in UAP research. His essay is followed by critical remarks provided by one of his reviewers which we found useful for inclusion in this issue; those critical remarks are then responded to by the author himself, and also have been included in this issue. What we see here is a moment of deep dialectical exchange that, perhaps, offers the community of interest a model for what careful, critical, patient and respectful intervention—criticism—looks like in scholarship. We must keep each other’s thinking in check, and dialogical critique is, I believe, the vehicle of decisive intellectual progress.

3. The Challenge of Nonhuman Intelligence and the Limits of Skepticism

Following these more general, even preliminary¹³ investigations, we begin to encroach on the question of just to what extent UAP (even if only in the preliminary data found in the classic unexplained UAP report¹⁴) ought to be thought of in terms of some *intelligence* of unknown origin—and the popular view among many is that UAP are evidence of a (heretofore unknown) *nonhuman* intelligence (NHI). Thus another thematic thread in the current issue concerns the philosophical challenge of NHI.

The particular historical challenge for UAP Studies—as much methodological as it is epistemological (and perhaps ontological¹⁵)—has always been to somehow move from the purely theoretical (and mainstream) discussions of (*distant*)

12 As we have discovered, the radical mind/body split that Descartes seemingly codified in his philosophical texts (e.g., Descartes 1641) belied his deeper embrace of a kind of ontological *equality* of mind and matter—which his subsequent reader and ardent disciple, the radical Enlightenment thinker Baruch Spinoza, was to argue pointed to a profounder ontological *unity*. (I am grateful to the great French philosopher of mind and physics Michel Bitbol for pointing this out to me in conversation over lunch many years ago.) And of course Spinoza famously surpasses in his own work the Cartesian dualism (two metaphysically distinct substances: mind v. matter) in favor of what many scholars call a “monism” (one substance, with infinitely many modulations) but which is probably more accurately described as a radical *unitary pluralism*—recall Deleuze’s (1980) formula: “pluralism = monism”. (Although on this point, compare Frim & Fluss (2018), who argue against Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza as a pluralist.)

13 And ‘preliminary’ here should not be taken to mean something that needs to be quickly gotten over, before we move on to more important matters. Quite the contrary: ‘preliminary’ here means *conceptually necessary for decisive advancement in the field*.

14 And here the reader is encouraged to watch the [most recent Senate Armed Services Committee hearing](#) (19 November 2024) in which the current director of AARO, Dr. Kosloski, presented a number of cases which they consider to be unexplained *despite* the reasonable sufficiency and integrity of the data they received. Cases such as these are similar to those which the official French UAP/UFO investigatory body “GEIPAN” would classify as a “D” case: those for which sufficient data is available *but which nonetheless remains unexplained*. In other words, their “D” cases are those for which they judge there to be reasonably good data, but are so highly unusual as to be unresolvable by known or accepted hypotheses. From a strict methodological standpoint, however, what the community at large awaits is a clear roadmap, governed by generally accepted (and uncontroversial) principles and protocols, that moves us from data to evidence and then conclusions drawn from the evidence—and the conditions under which data of a sufficient sort would warrant *unconventional hypothetical alternatives* for those conclusions. No such generally accepted methodological framework currently exists. It is a methodological (albeit meta-theoretical) imperative of the new science of UAP.

15 Although countenancing a potential nonhuman intelligence does not *in itself* suggest interesting or substantial *ontological* problems (maybe just *existential*). Or at least, it needn’t. There is no reason why NHI can’t be simply like us—but perhaps with radically different (even incompatible) biology. For example, there is talk today of the possibility of off-world “mirror” biologies where chirality is flipped, leading to proteins and organic chemical compounds with spatially reversed—mirrored—geometries (see e.g. the Wikipedia entry on “Mirror Life”: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_life).

NHI (under the acceptable rubric of “extraterrestrial life” as, e.g., we find it in the SETI discourse¹⁶) to a consideration of the possibility that there is evidence of *actual* NHI on or near Earth.¹⁷ As I pointed out above, we simply have no generally accepted framework, no roadmap, that takes us systematically from data and evidence (of a sufficiently scientifically rigorous and legible sort, which we do not yet possess) to a set of non-ordinary or unconventional conclusions or hypotheses based on the data and that evidence. There is no general agreement or clarity on just what the data need to look like that would warrant us in reaching for the unconventional over the conventional—especially if there may never be a “White House Lawn” moment. If we did, then the (not unreasonable) dismissals of the very idea that NHI could be near or on Earth (and that UAP, moreover, are evidence of this) would have to succumb to the most basic axiom of modal logic: *actuality implies possibility*, that if NHI is actually here then there must be some means of getting and remaining here—i.e., the actuality of their presence would imply a physical possibility for which we would potentially have to reassess our understanding of travel through cosmic distances. As yet, however, the data are preliminary to a more systematic, sustained empirical research program that can yield the relevant sorts of data that would settle the matter. So, we must deal piecemeal with the possibility that some UAP could be evidence for NHI.

Two articles—“Expectations About Nonhuman Intelligences: Fermi’s Challenge, Divine Hiddenness, and the White House Lawn” by Dr. Knight and “One Science for Both UFOlogists and Astrobiologists?” by Dr. Peters—critically examine the logic of dismissal surrounding the idea that NHI may already be present on or near Earth. Knight draws an intriguing parallel between UAP skepticism and theological debates on divine hiddenness, suggesting that our expectations about extraterrestrial behavior may be fundamentally flawed. Meanwhile, Peters interrogates the divide between ufology and astrobiology, arguing for a unified approach that reconciles these traditionally separate disciplines.

4. Historical and Strategic Analyses of UAP Activity, and the Implications Thereof

This issue also includes articles engaging with historical and strategic dimensions of UAP activity. “UAP Indications Analysis: 1945–1975 United States Atomic Warfare Complex” presents a comprehensive analysis of UAP encounters near nuclear sites, identifying patterns that suggest an enduring surveillance interest in atomic infrastructure. Such findings raise fundamental questions about the potential strategic implications of UAP and their relation to global security. But then, supposing that UAP can in general be attributable to the operations of a heretofore unknown “NHI”, what then? Prof. Matthew Szydagis’ paper, “How Much Time Do We Have Before Catastrophic Disclosure Occurs?”, applies statistical modeling to estimate the likelihood of an accidental UAP “disclosure.” Using trends in camera technology, crash retrieval claims, and public reporting, Szydagis projects that if non-human intelligence (NHI) is real¹⁸, an uncontrolled “catastrophic disclosure”—occurring outside governmental or institutional control—may be imminent. His analysis provides a quantitative approach to understanding the dynamics of secrecy and the role of technology in potential future UAP revelations, which is surely of relevance as scholars apply the methods of intelligence and security studies to the UAP problem.

5. Expanding the Theoretical Framework: Alternative Models of UAP Origins

Finally, several contributions challenge the traditional extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) by exploring alternative models for understanding UAP. Using the techniques of analytic philosophy, Dr. Travis Dumsday’s “Understanding UAPs: Surveying the Nature Spirits Hypothesis” revisits animist traditions to propose that UAP encounters might be best understood through frameworks drawn from indigenous

16 On these issues, consult the work of historian and philosopher of science Steven Dick—e.g., Dick (1998).

17 The nearness being, curiously enough, inversely proportional to the apparent plausibility of the very idea. On this point, one wonders about the potential psychoanalytic-philosophical reasons for such an inverse relationship, apart from the obvious reply frequently given here in terms of the limits on interstellar travel supposedly imposed by Einstein’s special theory of relativity (no such limits would seem to apply if one considers the issue from the standpoint of the general theory—but that’s quite another matter).

18 And to reiterate: this is a possibility that not without justification remains highly contestable given not only that the widely acknowledged paucity of scientifically acceptable data, but also due to the unavailability of a generally accepted *evidentiary roadmap* from data to conclusions on the one hand, and the complications the UAP experience overall suggests on the other. And the *latter* is further complicated by a lack of agreement on just what evidentiary significance there is, or ought to be, for the human experiences had of UAP when it comes to the science of them—just because that’s an issue *any* science must face when dealing with human experience of *anything*, let alone the non-ordinary or putatively anomalous (such as is claimed for UAP).

and esoteric knowledge systems. A scholar who probed very deeply just such kinds of issues (albeit from the standpoint of religious studies), Dr. Brenda Denzler, returns to the questions in her “The Discovery of O.I.L. [Other Intelligent Life]: Some Thoughts on Finding Other Intelligent Life”. In this article, Dr. Denzler problematizes ETH as the dominant framework for attempts to explain UAP, arguing instead that its assumptions may be too narrow. She rather explores alternative models that consider UAP as manifestations of a nonhuman intelligence (NHI) that may have evolved alongside humanity under conditions we do not yet fully understand. Drawing from evolutionary theory, consciousness studies, and anomalies suggested by UAP activity, Denzler suggests that UAP may represent a form of intelligence indigenous to Earth but operating under principles that challenge conventional scientific paradigms.

6. Conclusion: Toward an Integrated UAP Studies

As the articles in this issue demonstrate, UAP Studies remains a field in the process of definition. The challenges before us are substantial: bridging methodological divides, refining theoretical frameworks, and resisting the pressures of premature conclusions. However, this issue of *Limina* makes clear that progress is being made. By drawing on philosophy, phenomenology, history, and the sciences, we are collectively laying the foundations for a field that is not only academically rigorous but also open to an objective study of the full range of (subjective) human encounters with the unknown. What we see being demonstrated today, and in these pages, is a decisively new modality of engagement with UAP/UFOs that, perhaps unlike treatments of the subject in the “gray”¹⁹ literature of days past, maintains a clear line of demarcation between the scholar’s objective analytical and interpretive treatment of UAP v. whatever subjective engagement they may have with the object of their study. What allows the incipient UAP Studies literature to exit the gray zone of evidentiary and analytical indeterminacy (and unevenness) is its foregrounded commitment to the rigors of methodological, conceptual and logical scrutiny, accepting the reality of human ignorance, while embracing the humility required of patient, systematic study wary of premature acceptance but nevertheless mature enough to challenge the narrowness of those frameworks that have, perhaps, outlived their usefulness or vitality when it comes to the creativity and great expanse

of Nature.

In closing, we recognize that UAP Studies is, at its core, an inquiry into the limits of knowledge itself. As we continue our investigations, we do so with the awareness that what we learn about UAP will also teach us something fundamental about the nature of inquiry, perception, and the human engagement with mystery, and how a mystery might be transitioned to facticity while retaining the essence of what makes it so wondrous (as the sciences are so capable of doing).

4 March 2025

Los Angeles, CA

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19 The term was defined and employed in Watters et al. (2023).



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ABSTRACT

Phenomenology as a research method is rooted in rigorous examination of first-person experiences, and identifying that which is essential to the appearance of the object. Phenomenology offers several important strengths that make it critical to include as a supplemental method to more empirical approaches. Strengths of phenomenology include the restoring of the lived world as the foundation of knowledge, moving beyond the extraterrestrial hypothesis, the exploration of absences, the discrimination between sensory perception and non-ordinary perception, exploring UAP as intersubjective experiences, and drawing similarities between UAP and other anomalous phenomena.

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1. Introduction

As we approach the important task of clarifying and introducing methods for studying UAP, I argue that it is imperative that phenomenological approaches play a critical role. I use “phenomenological approaches” in the plural because phenomenology refers to a diverse field of thinkers who have differences in their methods. However, they all begin with the same process: taking the lived, first-person, conscious experience of the experiencing subject as our only natural access point to reality and thus, the starting point of all inquiry.

As it has struggled to be taken seriously within the academy, the study of UFOs has historically relied on the

physical sciences as its primary methodology. There are several reasons for this. The physical sciences have had immense success in many domains in our society, leading to advancements in medicine and technology. Scientific evidence is now seen as the primary determinant of producing the boundaries of truth and reality in modern western democracies. Thus, in order for the reality of UAP to be taken seriously, evidence that was physical, observable from the third person perspective, and to some extent repeatable under controlled conditions was necessary.

What witnesses report as occurring during UAP encounters, however, often takes us quite far from the limits of what we understand does and does not occur in our world, challenging the boundaries of scientific understanding.

Jacques Vallée has emphasized this since 1969,¹ and while empirical, experimental science is very important, it also has limitations when it comes to studying baffling human experiences with UAP. Thus, a rigorous examination of first-person experience of UAP is also needed, even when what is reported seems incompatible with current scientific understandings.

2. The Method

The philosophical tradition of phenomenology began with Edmund Husserl and progressed in the work of thinkers like Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others. Husserl (1983) argued that the starting point of all inquiry must be the world as it is experienced by an individual conscious subject. He introduced a method of bracketing, in which one suspends the assumptions of the natural attitude, or the everyday practical attitude through which we approach the world. Carefully examining what appears to the witness, a phenomenological analysis identifies the types of *intentionalities* present, or the relationship of consciousness to the objects it experiences.² For example, objects can be experienced through the intentionalities of sensory perception, memory, anticipation, or imagination. Later phenomenologists continued to build on Husserl's method, arguing that ontological distinctions can be made by rigorously examining first person experience and how being discloses itself to the subject. One commonality for all of these thinkers is that being or essence discloses itself through its appearance to the perceiving subject. In other words, how objects appear in experience reveals aspects of how objects are. According to phenomenology, then, how UAP appear to consciousness reveals something about *their essence*.

To apply phenomenology as a research method, we take a step back and suspend our assumptions about how the world is and carefully consider what appears to the witness, a process known as transcendental reduction. Husserl describes the reduction as bracketing the assumptions of the natural attitude, or the everyday attitude through which we experience the world, including the preconceptions of the natural sciences. “We put out of action the general positing

which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude; we parenthesize everything which that positing encompasses with respect to being.”³ The phenomenological researcher examines the report of the witness carefully, articulating what appeared and in what modalities, and how the experiencing subject formed judgments about it. This could include the meaning the experience has for the experiencer. After carefully examining individual accounts, the researcher then performs a process of eidetic reduction, or identifying key characteristics that are common to the experiences. The goal is to identify characteristics that are so *integral* to the experience that if we removed them it would no longer be the kind of experience or object that it is. Identifying patterns that are integral to the experience gives us knowledge about aspects of reality. Thus, through careful examination of the experiences of witnesses of various types of UAP accounts, we identify core aspects of these experiences that make them what they are.

Phenomenological approaches have already been put to use in UAP studies. Even though he never explicitly used the term phenomenology, abduction researcher John Mack (1994) employed a phenomenological approach when working with abductees, suspending judgment on the source or origin of their experiences and looking for commonalities in what appeared in the experiences.⁴ In *The Super Natural*, Jeffrey Kripal (2017) identifies the phenomenological cut between what appears and the thing in itself as an important starting point for the study of all anomalous or paranormal experiences.

The fundamental idea here is to begin any inquiry by taking a set of experiences on their own terms and setting aside, for the time being, the question of their external source, cause, or truth value. The method encourages us to “make a cut” between the appearances themselves and what may or may not lie behind them.⁵

However in his later book *How to Think Impossibly* (2024), Kripal makes an important clarification. While bracketing as a starting point involves suspending the question of the truth

1 Vallée (1969/2014).

2 Husserl (1983), pp. 57-61, 131-143; Sokolowski (2000), p. 50.

3 Husserl (1983), p. 61.

4 For example, Mack explicitly wrote that he did not take an approach of dismissing aspects of abduction encounters that seemed too far “out there” or deviated too far from what we understand to be physically possible. He writes, “My criteria for including or crediting an observation by an abductee is simply whether what has been reported was felt to be real by the experiencer and was communicated sincerely and authentically to me” (Mack 1994, p. 31).

5 Kripal (2017), p. 44.

value or source of the appearance, Husserl's method itself was very much focused on establishing the truth of being.

Husserl's phenomenological method, for example, begins by refusing or "bracketing" (the famous *epoché*) what he called the "naturalist standpoint" of the science and their naïve sense-based positivisms about the "fact-world." He calls this apophatic move the "phenomenological reduction" and considered it the necessary secret of obtaining genuine philosophical truth. One cannot arrive at absolute consciousness until one has let go of *all* sensual and materialist assumptions...⁶

This is an important distinction that often gets lost in the application of phenomenology. While the starting point is to look only at the structure of appearances, Husserl's ultimate aim for the method was to uncover truth. Understanding the structure of conscious experience reveals something about the nature of being itself.

Further application of the phenomenological tradition to UAP studies can be found in both Diana Pasulka's *American Cosmic* (2019)⁷ and James Madden's *Unidentified Flying Hyperobject* (2023).⁸ Engaging the work of phenomenological thinker Martin Heidegger, both focus on Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology," (1977).⁹ Both Pasulka and Madden read Heidegger as considering technological advancement a particular human attitude towards being itself, which determines what aspects of our surrounding environment we are attuned to. In other words, technology serves as a way of being-in-the-world and framing our understanding of the life-world, introducing systemic categorization regarding what is important or unimportant, real or not real. The danger of such an attitude is that we become hyperfocused on the technological lens and miss out on other important ways that being is disclosed to us. This contributes, in Madden's view, to why the conversation about UFOs has been dominated by technological and scientific approaches, at the expense of other aspects of the phenomenon.

The fact that we think of the UFO most naturally in terms of the nuts-and-bolts technology,

even as the phenomenon is clearly more uncanny than all that, is symptomatic that our default conditions for thinking (techno-science) are hampering our understanding of the situation.¹⁰

I am in agreement with Madden and also think that beginning with a Husserlian starting point of reconsidering everything that appears can help correct this imbalance and provide a more holistic understanding of UAP. While there are, of course, weaknesses to relying on phenomenology *alone*, the method also has several important conceptual strengths. Elucidating these strengths will comprise the remainder of the article.

3. The Strengths of Phenomenology

- a. *Phenomenology argues that the world as conceived of and studied by the mathematical sciences is not 'more real' than the lived world of experiences.*

In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl (1970) argued that the modern human desire to turn the world into something that is fundamentally knowable at the mechanical level of cause and effect had led to a modern *ethos* that no longer knows how to deal with fundamental questions of human experience and meaning. The process of reducing the world of experience into something that is observable in the third person and knowable through the measurements of our instruments or in controlled settings, led to the idea that the true, real world, is the world as conceived in terms of individual atoms, protons, neutrons, neurotransmitters, etc. and through the processes of cause and effect. The world of colors, shapes, smells, sounds, etc. that we experience in the first person, the lived world or life-world, is classified as "subjective" and consequently, "less real." Referring back to Madden and Heidegger's essay on technology, knowing the world through technological means has become our default attunement to reality. The problem Husserl identifies is that the "real" world as articulated by the sciences is not a world that we can directly experience. It is ultimately an abstraction from the life-world.

The contrast between the subjectivity of the

6 Kripal (2024), p. 126.

7 Pasulka (2019).

8 Madden (2023).

9 Heidegger (1977).

10 Madden (2023), p. 129.

lifeworld and the “objective,” the “true” world, lies in the fact that the latter is a theoretical-logical substraction, the substraction of something that is in principle not perceivable, in principle not experienceable in its own proper being, whereas the subjective, in the life-world, is distinguished in all respects precisely by its being actually experienceable.¹¹

Husserl argued that the hyperfocus on science as the only way of gaining access to ‘true’ reality had led the dominant modern mindset to forget that the world as conceived scientifically is always fundamentally rooted in the world of first-person experience. It is only through our first-person perspective and direct interaction with the world as it appears to us that we can enter into the scientific attitude and engage in the scientific process. Husserl argues that even mathematical concepts such as perfectly straight lines or perfect circles, that some historical philosophers have claimed are given *a priori*, are actually created through our experience of lines and circles in the life-world. Through the engagement with phenomenologically real, physical lines and circles, we abstract and create the idea of a perfectly straight line or perfect circle, even though we never encounter them experientially.

[O]bjective theory in its logical sense (science as the totality of predicative theory...) is rooted, grounded in the lifeworld, in the original self-evidences belonging to it. Thanks to this rootedness objective science has a constant reference of meaning to the world in which we always live.¹²

Science ultimately makes our understanding of certain aspects of the life-world more precise. However, scientific knowledge only emerges through our experiences in the first-person. When scientists communicate shared judgments and findings, and come to agreements regarding what it means, they enter into a new and more refined understanding of our experience.

The knowledge of the objective-scientific worlds is “grounded” in the self-evidence of the lifeworld. That latter is pre-given to the scientific worker, or the working community, as ground; yet as they build upon this, what is built is something new, something different.¹³

The world as understood through the precision of the mathematical sciences is ultimately something removed from the life-world, from the world as we experience it. We do not encounter individual protons and neutrons or electrons in our everyday experience of the world; they are not phenomena that are presented experientially. While the world as understood through the lens of the physical sciences is *different* from the life-world, it is not *more real or more true*. The study of the abstract version of the world (the data collected by science and its instruments) is a study of the *enabling conditions for human experience*. The suggestion that this version of the world is more real is to confuse these enabling conditions for that which they enable (first person experience of the world).¹⁴

For example, in close encounters of the fourth kind, or abduction encounters, the majority of the verification is presented in the first-person point of view only, in the world as it is experienced and lived by human beings. John Mack acknowledged that much of the evidence left in the aftermath of abduction encounters would not convince a western scientist of its validity. Experiencers of abduction accounts often have small scars and scoop marks on their bodies or find that electronic equipment now malfunctions in their presence. Many wake up with their pajamas on backwards or inside out. Mack reports two subjects who were returned to the wrong cars. They also experience ongoing nosebleeds and sometimes remove solid objects from their bodies.¹⁵ Further, witnesses often experience external validation through the shared experience of other witnesses, for example, a multi-witness report of a UAP in the area while they are having their abduction experience.¹⁶ Or, in the abduction case of Amy Rylance, she was witnessed as she was being levitated into the UAP.¹⁷ The evidence of such encounters is given in the lived world only, in the conscious life of individuals.¹⁸

11 Husserl (1970), p. 127.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

14 Thank you to philosopher Dr. Michael E. Zimmerman for pointing out this distinction to me in feedback on a different version of this essay.

15 Mack (1994), pp. 41-43.

16 *Ibid.*, 36.

17 For a discussion of the Amy Rylance abduction, see Masters (2022), “Case Study 14: Amy Rylance.”

18 I acknowledge it is possible that physical evidence, such as non-human craft or biologics, could emerge that verifies these encounters in ways desired by the sciences. At the moment, we do not have access to such evidence.

Or consider encounters that *do* leave some kind of physical evidence, such as the Rendlesham Forest Incident, which included landing indentations, scrape marks on trees, and odd radiation levels at the landing sight.¹⁹ This physical evidence only becomes relevant and persuasive *in light of the lived witness testimony*, most notably, Jim Penniston's description of seeing and touching a landed craft, as well as Charles Halt's audiotape in which he describes the UAP as it appears to him and other military personnel in real time. Halt is heard on the recording describing the object, "Directly north, we've got two strange objects, ah, half-moon shape, dancing about, with colored lights on em... The half-moons have now turned into full circles as though there was an...eclipse." And later, "Now we're observing what appears to be a beam coming down to the ground!"²⁰ It is the combination of the physical evidence left behind with the descriptions of lived experience that makes Rendlesham such an important and compelling encounter. Through the combination of what appeared and what was detectable when officials on site entered into the scientific attitude and obtained measurements and readings, a coherent account of the incident emerges.

b. The phenomenological method liberates us from the constrictions of the extraterrestrial hypothesis and better allows us to consider all that appears.

It is in suspending the assumptions of the ETH that we can perhaps most clearly see the benefits of phenomenological reduction. The idea that UAP must be piloted by extraterrestrials is very much a product of the cultural and historical moment in which UFOs first emerged into modern consciousness. UFOs surged into popular culture in 1947 following the Second World War, at a historical moment in which human beings were undergoing considerable technological advancement and considering very seriously the possibility of sending human beings into space. Thus, the appearance of unidentified technological objects in our own skies was naturally interpreted through this lens, and the idea that they were piloted by travelers from another planet who had succeeded at the endeavor we ourselves were attempting was a natural assumption. It was however, still an assumption, and one which Husserl's phenomenological reduction prompts us to suspend. Consider this passage from Husserl (1983) regarding the phenomenological process:

In the first place, it is immediately understandable that, with the exclusion of the natural world, the physical and the psychophysical world, all individual objectivities which become constituted by axiological and practical functionings of consciousness are excluded, all the sorts of cultural formations, all works of the technical and fine arts, of sciences (in so far as they come into question as cultural facts rather than as accepted unities), aesthetic and practical values of every form. Likewise, naturally, such actualities as state, custom, law, religion. Consequently all natural sciences and cultural sciences, with their total stock of cognition, undergo exclusion precisely as sciences which require the natural attitude.²¹

Consequently, in applying the phenomenological attitude to UAP encounters, we must suspend all cultural assumptions and values. This includes even the assumptions of the natural sciences, which for UAP, have often led to the dismissal of experiences and appearances that appear to violate the understood laws of physics.

To illustrate this point further, the idea that UFO= extraterrestrial is so deeply embedded in cultural consciousness that it is the go-to explanation for UAP once traditional explanations have been eliminated. Often this leads to the cultural discourse on UAP getting bogged down in questions of how "they" get "here", how ETs would ever find us, and why ETs would care about us. I am not ruling out the possibility that we could find answers to these questions, but the bigger conceptual problem is that using the extraterrestrial hypothesis as the default framework of interpretation often leads to the dismissal of characteristics of UAP experiences that *do not fit* the extraterrestrial hypothesis.

For example, in *Passport to Magonia*, Jacques Vallée (1969/2014) describes the Eagle River, Wisconsin incident of 1961, in which farmer Joe Simonton was confronted with a strange silvery saucer-shaped object in his yard. Inside the craft were three men who appeared to "resemble Italians." In an encounter lasting only about five minutes, the occupants of the object signaled to Simonton that they needed water by holding up a jug, which he filled for them. The occupants were frying something inside the craft, resembling pancakes, which they shared with Simonton. The occupants then closed

19 Pope (2014), pp. 27-29.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

21 Husserl (1983), pp. 131-132.

the craft hatch, and the object hovered and departed. When the pancakes were later analyzed in a lab, they were found to be of terrestrial origin.²² Nothing about this encounter reflects what we would expect from advanced lifeforms coming from another planet. Why would they resemble human beings, need a jug of water after traveling all the way across the galaxy, or feed their confused witness terrestrial foods?

Visitors from the stars would not be human or humanoid. They would not dare come here without receiving a polite invitation from our powerful radio-telescopes. For centuries, we would exchange highly scientific information through exquisite circuitry and elaborate codes... But perforated, cardboard-tasting, pancake-shaped buckwheat cakes? How terribly rural, Mr. Simonton!²³

Additionally, Anne Strieber observed that many of the letters sent to Whitley Strieber in the aftermath of publishing *Communion* included sightings of the human dead alongside the alleged ‘alien’ visitors. “One reason that I doubt that aliens have flown here from someplace like Zeta Reticuli to study us is that the contact experience includes two seemingly disparate aspects: encounters with the dead, and encounters with non-human beings.”²⁴ Strikingly, the night he had his infamous abduction encounter that he details in the book, Strieber also witnessed the appearance of a college acquaintance in his room. It was only after the encounter was over and he attempted to contact him that he learned this person had died several months before.²⁵ This is especially interesting considering the appearance of this individual could not be written off as “wishful thinking” on Whitley’s part or his brain misinterpreting an ET as his deceased friend—he did not *know* that this person was deceased at the time. Traditional ufology has struggled to include these observations when studying the content of eyewitness accounts, as it makes no sense to the rationalist mind why apparitions of the dead would appear alongside ETs from outer space. And yet, such witness accounts persist.²⁶

When we apply the phenomenological reduction, we bracket out any particular cultural or theoretical interpretation about its source or origin. This means that

we must examine *all that appears* and *only what appears*; strange encounters with human-like beings who serve pancakes and Whitley’s sighting of his deceased friend alongside the NHIs in his room are integral parts of the phenomenon that cannot be dismissed or ignored. Moreover, the fact that such witness observations are common in the letters that the Striebers received, *even though he left the sighting of the dead friend out of his original book*, lends credibility to the idea that apparitions of the deceased are an integral part of UAP encounters that a satisfactory theory must be able to explain.

When we include abduction accounts, a plethora of high strangeness emerges. The phenomenology of eyewitness accounts includes occupants who very often resemble human beings, speak our languages, play tricks on us, have sex with us, and – most provocatively—procreate with us, absolutely none of which bodes well for the idea that UAP are alien spacecrafts occupied by advanced extraterrestrials. As phenomenology must look at everything that appears to a conscious subject, we are liberated from the need to dismiss accounts that do not support the extraterrestrial hypothesis. It allows us to be fully open to all possibilities regarding what we may be interacting with—ultraterrestrial, extratemporal, interdimensional, or something else entirely. Taking the full scope of what appears to witnesses into consideration is vital for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of different proposals.

c. *The phenomenological method acknowledges that objects continue to be experienced by consciousness in their absence.*

One of Husserl’s, and future phenomenologists like Sartre’s, key insights was that objects can be present to consciousness even when we are not physically experiencing them. For example, if I am in my office ruminating over an argument I had with my co-worker, my co-worker and her words are present for me as the object of my intention, that toward which my consciousness is directed. Sartre (2018) explained how our expectations create presences and absences for us. For example, if I am expecting to see my friend Pierre at the café, if he is not there when I arrive, his *absence* will be experienced as a type of presence. Pierre’s *not-being* in the café is the object of my experience.²⁷ Anyone who has ever

22 Vallée (1969/2014), pp. 35-36.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 41.

24 Strieber (2017), p. 37.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

26 Rice University Archives of the Impossible (2023).

27 Sartre (2018), pp. 41-42.

been stood up for a date understands the particular sense of presence that a person's absence can have when we are expecting to see them.

UAP are rarely physically present in front of us. Most encounters last only a few minutes or sometimes only a few seconds, but the UAP becomes an object of conscious experience long after the original encounter. First, the UAP gives itself in incompleteness and vagueness, and the experiencer must fill in the parts of the UAP that are absent, as well as fill in the unknowns surrounding its presence. But the effects of UAP encounters often linger long after the initial sighting. The UAP continues to present itself in the experiencer's consciousness. They may obsess for weeks or months over what they may have seen, reliving the experience and bringing it back to life in memory. Additionally, experiencers often have strange dreams and visions about the UAP in the aftermath of the encounter. Experiencers often start to experience strange synchronicities, the malfunctioning of electronic equipment, and strange psychic phenomena such as telepathic communication or the receipt of vast downloads of information.²⁸ While it is difficult from the viewpoint of the physical sciences to definitively prove that such phenomena are directly caused by the UAP encounter, the individual experiencer rarely has trouble seeing the connection. In their conscious experience, the events flow together to form a coherent understanding of what has occurred; they are states of affairs that connect logically in their experience.

In phenomenology, "evidencing" is the bringing about of the truth, or the bringing forth of a presence. It is the articulation of a state of affairs, how objects are manifested and disclosed to consciousness. The individual subject (Husserl's Ego, Heidegger's Dasein, or Sartre's For-itself) is the one to whom things appear. The individual subject is capable of interpreting a state of affairs, formulating judgments about it, and integrating it into an understanding of the world. This is an active process; we bring things into being by our articulation of them. When experiencers bear witness to a UAP, and the events in their aftermath, they make these experiences and happenings intelligible, they bring them into the realm of discussion and intersubjectivity; they manifest as part of the lived world.²⁹ While we understand that once we

enter the scientific attitude the "rules of the game" shift, so to speak, phenomenology recognizes that not all experiences are verifiable in these terms.

Similarly, phenomenology provides us a framework to take seriously the vast changes in identity, worldview, and values that occur in the aftermath of UAP encounters. Both John E. Mack (1994) and Kenneth Ring (1992) found that profound changes in individual values and worldview are common in the aftermath of UAP experiences.³⁰ I found similar results in my 2023 human subjects study on experiencer worldviews and values.³¹ The experiencers directly credit their UAP encounters as leading to their changes in worldview, articulating that the impossible quality of the events they witnessed led them to reconceptualize the world as they previously understood it. If phenomenological research identifies this as a pattern in individual experience, then this reveals something about the essence of UAP. The UAP continue to be present in the individual's lived conscious experience as they formulate a new understanding of the life-world.

The relationship between the individual's expectations and the UAP becomes especially important when examining Close Encounters of the Fifth Kind, referred to colloquially as CE-5s. In a CE-5 event, the individuals put out a direct conscious intention in meditation *asking for or welcoming contact*. This is allegedly followed by the appearance of orbs or flashing lights in the sky.³² The interpretation of these orbs and flashing lights as contact with extraterrestrials or non-human others cannot be divorced from the individual's expectations and hopes of making contact. Carefully examining what actually appears to consciousness, the judgments formed about it, and how it confirms or thwarts the individual's expectations is a vital step in establishing the relationship between CE-5 events and other types of close encounters.

d. The phenomenological method allows us to distinguish different modalities for encountering UAP, including the receipt of information through means other than the five senses.

When we examine the content of UAP eyewitness reports, Vallée documented as early as 1975 that aspects of these

28 Vallée (1975/1977) documents examples of cases in which witnesses report a psychical component either during or in the aftermath of a UAP encounter.

29 Sokolowski (2000), pp. 159-161.

30 See Mack (1994), pp. 46-50 and Ring (1992) pp. 173-193.

31 This study is currently under peer review for pending publication.

32 Descriptions of these events remain colloquial and informal, as rigorous empirical research on CE-5s has not yet been conducted.

encounters include psychic phenomena, both during the encounter and in the aftermath.³³ In phenomenology it is extremely important to differentiate *how* objects interact with consciousness. For example, one of the most important distinctions in phenomenology is the differentiation between real and ideal objects. Real objects are physical, like a book, table or desk. We have direct experience of them and process them through the senses. Objects like the concept of beauty or justice, a perfect circle, or the value of pi are not given in sensory experience; they are part of our conscious experience only, built on our experience of the life-world, but never directly encountered. UAP encounters include phenomena that are not ideal objects, but also are not given directly in sensory experience. Many experiencers report non-local receipt of information, such as seeing in their “mind’s eye,” telepathic communication from UAP occupants, or vast telepathic “downloads” or images that flash through their minds during or after the encounter. Additionally, experiencers report aspects of experiences that appear to be taking place in an altered sense of reality, or experience leaving their bodies during the encounter.

Fleshing out different intentionalities or modalities of how something is experienced is critical for a phenomenological analysis. Traditional phenomenologists did not focus much on psychic phenomena or non-ordinary states of consciousness, however Husserl was not oblivious to their possibility. For example, in his lectures on the lived experience of time (1964), he explicitly refers to a “prophetic consciousness” as “conceivable” although it’s unclear if this is referring to experiential instances of precognition.³⁴ Hedwig Conrad-Martius (1957), another early phenomenologist of the 20th century explicitly incorporated psychic phenomena into her work, although her writings are still not translated and widely available in English.³⁵ While the focus of much, but not all, of traditional phenomenological work did not center psychic phenomena, a contemporary phenomenology of UAP encounters must take up the task of differentiating between different types of non-ordinary forms of perception, as such perception is integral to the experience of UAP.

In doing so, there are at least four things to consider: a) the receipt of information from sources other than the five senses, b) experiences that seem to be taking place in an

altered or non-ordinary sense of reality, sometimes referred to as the “imaginal” realm, c) experiences that take place out of body, where the witness feels themselves leaving their body and can see their body below them, and d) experiences that take place in vivid dream states. If we are going to study how UAP manifest within the life-world, it is crucial we address these presentations of the phenomenon. They disclose something about the essence of what UAP are.

At the same time, we must carefully differentiate witness testimony that involves psychic phenomena from experiences that happen through the five senses only. The blending of the modalities of sensory perception with non-ordinary or psychic perception is an integral component of the UAP experience, and research and hypotheses will be stronger if a) they carefully differentiate what is received through the senses and what is received through non-traditional means, and b) they can account for the psychic or non-ordinary dimensions of UAP experiences in a meaningful way. Omitting the psychic aspects of these experiences is a failure to consider all that appears, and relegating these aspects to a category like “hallucination” fails to account for the consistency, prevalence, and meaning of non-ordinary consciousness in the lived experience of UAP.

e. The phenomenological method introduces the realm of intersubjectivity, which is crucial to examining our experience with another conscious intelligence.

Various accounts of intersubjectivity and our encounter with the Other have emerged from phenomenological thinkers, but they all share some general premises. First, when we encounter another subjectivity, an Other, we recognize that we share an experiential field with them, and that they can see things from their vantage point that we cannot see from ours. Thus, they have a view that transcends ours, and we realize the situatedness and relativity of our own perspective.³⁶ We also recognize that while the Other is a perceptual object that appears for us, we too are perceptual objects that they can perceive. We thus become aware of our physical bodies and how we appear in the presence of another human consciousness. Third, we recognize that the experiential field is not just there for us and our goals, but for the ends and

33 Vallée (1975/1979), pp. 25-47.

34 “But as a matter of principle, a prophetic consciousness (a consciousness that passes itself off as prophetic) is conceivable; that is, a consciousness for which every characteristic belonging to the expectation of what is coming to be lies within view” (Husserl 1964, p. 58).

35 See for example Conrad-Martius (1957).

36 For example, Husserl says, “If, with my understanding of someone else, I penetrate more deeply into him, into his horizon of ownness, I shall soon run into the fact that, just as his animate bodily organism lies in my field of perception, so my animate organism lies in his field of perception and that, in general, he experiences me forthwith as an Other for him, just as I experience him as my Other” (Husserl 1982, pp. 129-130).

goals of the Other as well. Thus we understand a field of shared intentions and practical possibilities. Last, through interaction with the Other, we are able to engage in shared exploring of the world we inhabit, communicating judgments and conclusions, and come to shared understandings regarding the life-world.³⁷

Husserl (1982) thought that intersubjective experience was essentially empathetic experience, that is to say, when we encounter another subjectivity we assume that they experience the world in a similar way that we do and are capable of putting ourselves into their shoes. We assume that the Other experiences the world through similar intentional acts as we do. Additionally, we assume the Other will behave similarly to us in similar circumstances.

It is quite comprehensible that...an “empathizing” of definite contents belonging to the “higher psychic sphere” arises. Such contents too are indicated somatically and in the conduct of the organism toward the outside world for example: as the outward conduct of someone who is angry or cheerful, which I easily understand from my own conduct under similar circumstances.³⁸

Husserl also thought that the more we empathize and understand another person’s inner psychic world, the more we learn about ourselves and our own processes of understanding. Through understanding the motives, values, beliefs, and thought processes of others, we highlight and reflect on our own inner conscious life.

Higher psychic occurrences, diverse as they are and familiar as they have become, have furthermore their style of synthetic interconnexions and take their course in forms of their own, which I can understand associatively on the basis of my empirical familiarity with the style of my own life, as exemplifying roughly differentiated typical forms. In this sphere, moreover, every successful understanding of what occurs in others has the effect of opening up new associations and new possibilities of understanding; and conversely, since every pairing association is reciprocal, every such understanding uncovers my

own psychic life in its similarity and difference and, by bringing new features into prominence, makes it fruitful for new associations.³⁹

Husserl is referring here, of course, to our ability to empathize and relate to another human consciousness.

As many UAP appear to be under intelligent control, we can understand UAP not only as a scientific study of a physical object, but as an experience with another conscious subject. One key difference of course, is that while we have a general understanding of how human consciousness encounters the world, and thus as Husserl argues, have a general sense of empathy and expectation regarding how they will perceive and respond, we do not know how the UAP intelligence or intelligences encounter the world or what kind of sensory capabilities or perspectives they have. Indeed, when we examine witness accounts, it becomes apparent how little we can anticipate about the potential NHI viewpoint and behavior. The NHIs reportedly appear in physical and non-physical ways and communicate through non-local methods (methods not involving the traditional exchange of information through physical space) subverting the conditions of intersubjectivity as we generally experience them. Experiencers who report sightings of entities are subject to the gaze of a non-human Other, experiencing themselves as both seen and controlled by them.⁴⁰

At the same time, this intersubjective process refers us back to ourselves and can reveal things about our own subjectivity and perspective. Many experiencers report not only that the entities associated with the craft have the ability to present in physical or non-physical ways and communicate non-locally, but that *they too* experience temporarily being out of body or receiving information non-locally. Thus the intersubjective experience with the UAP intelligence reveals something about our own capabilities and that of which our own bodies and cognition are potentially capable. Through the experience of a radically different intelligence, we are able to explore new aspects of our own inner conscious life and rethink the boundaries of our conscious viewpoint.

f. Phenomenology allows us to identify commonalities between the lived experience of UAP encounters and the experience of other anomalous phenomena.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

40 This is explored in depth by Zimmerman (2003), in which he analyzes the effects of the ‘alien gaze’ on abductees, including the feelings of helplessness and loss of control that occur when abductees are forced to gaze directly into the big black eyes of the NHIs.

One of Vallée's (1975/1979) more important analyses of UAP events was his overview of the miracles at Fatima, and his careful attention to detail regarding *what the witnesses described*. Even though apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary are traditionally interpreted as having nothing to do with UAP encounters, Vallée's investigation revealed that when we examine exactly what appeared to witnesses, the events at Fatima become almost indistinguishable from UAP encounters. For example, on July 13th, 1917, Fatima witnesses reported "a buzzing or humming sound" and "an explosion." A month later, on August 13th, they reported "falling flower petals that melt away" and "a luminous globe spinning through the clouds." During the primary "miracle" at Fatima on October 13th, witnesses reported "a weird disk that turns rapidly," "a flat disk [that] plunges in a zig zag fashion" and that "the clothes of the witnesses were dry in spite of the rain."⁴¹

Despite the fact that the Fatima miracle was never understood in popular consciousness as having anything to do with UAP, Vallée shows that it is undeniable that the descriptions from the witnesses resemble the phenomenology of UAP accounts. Vallée refers to several cases in his Magonia investigation in which witnesses reported objects producing a humming or buzzing sound. He compares the "flowers with petals that melt away" to the angel hair fibers often reported as falling in the aftermath of UAP encounters. In Magonia case 321, the witness stated that "a disk three times as large as the sun, red and purple, spinning rapidly, was seen descending swiftly towards the ground."⁴² And in Magonia case 292, a similar experience of the ground being dry in spite of the rain was recorded. "When the object left, a cloud of dense smoke was forming under the rain. The witness found the trees, grass, and ground perfectly dry."⁴³ Vallée thinks the similarities in the phenomenological structure of these reports is simply too strong to deny.

The final 'miracle' had come at the culmination of a precise series of apparitions combined with contacts and messages that place it very clearly, in my opinion, in the perspective of the UFO phenomenon. Not only was a flying disk or globe consistently involved, but its motion, its falling-leaf trajectory, its light effects, the thunderclaps, the buzzing sounds, the strange fragrance, the fall of

"angel hair" that dissolves upon reaching the ground, the heat wave associated with the close approach of the disk, *all of these are constant parameters of UFO sightings everywhere.*⁴⁴

Vallée's discussion doesn't end at Fatima, and he examines several other encounters with the Blessed Virgin that have commonalities with what witnesses describe as appearing during their experience of UAP. Importantly, this does not mean that a) religious events were really just "aliens" all along, or b) UAP are of divine origin. Both of these conclusions interpret what appears in light of an existing worldview or assumed conclusion, which phenomenology prompts us to suspend. Phenomenologically, what we can conclude is that the patterns of phenomena observed by witnesses in UAP encounters are extremely similar to patterns of phenomena observed in religious miracles such as the Miracle of the Sun at Fatima, and that these phenomena may have a shared identity. This allows us to potentially include a wider range of lived experiences in UAP studies. A phenomenon does not have to be interpreted by witnesses as a "UFO" or "aliens" in order to be included in the formal study of UAP, and religiously interpreted experiences in particular should be rigorously examined for similarities.

4. Conclusion

This paper serves only as an introduction into what phenomenology as a tradition has to offer UAP studies. I emphasize that I am not arguing that phenomenology should replace the work being done in the natural sciences, but that with a phenomenon as elusive, evasive, and mysterious as UAP, we must include the lived perspective of the witness as revealing an integral piece of the puzzle. As neuroscientist Charles Yokoyama recently stated to me in conversation, in phenomenology, human beings serve as the "sensors" or "instruments" through which we collect data. While human beings do not serve as perfect sensors, and we must carefully bracket out assumptions the witness may be making about their experience in our analysis, it adds something useful to our understanding of UAP.

Understanding the lived world as the foundation for the world as articulated by the sciences, moving beyond the extraterrestrial hypothesis, examining the modalities of

41 Vallée (1975/1979), p. 183.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*, p. 154. Vallée's emphasis.

perception and receipt of information, understanding the intersubjective dimensions of the encounter, and including the lived experience of other anomalous events are vital to generating a robust understanding of UAP.

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The Mystery of Elusiveness¹

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ABSTRACT

Elusiveness is the most striking feature of UAP manifestations. I define it in my text as the permanent coupling and adjustment, case by case, of two contradictory dimensions, ostentation and evasion. And it is this that I take as the object of my reflection.

For the sceptics, this characteristic is enough to close the debate: the case is empty, we are dealing only with a gigantic collective illusion. For those ufologists who wish to keep the solution to the enigma open, elusiveness remains the major obstacle, because it prevents the collection of tangible data that would enable them to carry out their research.

In this article, I propose to open up another avenue of reflection, by making elusiveness the signature of a new and original phenomenon. Elusiveness has two conceivable levels, a weak level and a strong level. The weak level inevitably leads to the sceptics' solution. The strong level, on the other hand, leads to the discovery of a new and original phenomenon, with disturbing implications. This is the concept that I seek to define and construct in this article. At the end of my reflection, I come up with a strange paradox: certainly, the process of elusive monstration prevents us from gathering reliable and conclusive data on UAPs. And yet at the same time it is the most reliable and meaningful thing we know about this perplexing issue. In fact, the elusive monstration—the fact that the UAP only shows itself to better evade detection—exhibits the perfect structure of an oxymoron. The oxymoron is one of the most sophisticated tools of human thought, in that it allows the simultaneous expression of two contradictory thoughts. It follows from this observation that we are not dealing with natural phenomena but with the intentional manifestation of a psyche. But if we accept my conclusions, the nature of this psyche, as things stand, remains undetermined.

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“If there were beings somewhere who knew the laws of matter and force well enough to act millions of leagues away in space, we would realize this in relation to certain facts that escape ordinary explanations and are intentional in character.”

Ernest Renan, *Dialogues et Fragments philosophiques* (1885)

1. A few preliminary remarks

1.1 Conflicting paradigms

This research project requires me to distance myself, as far as possible, from the available models of thought. What I am looking for is an overhanging posture capable of assuming and retaining the positive aspects of the various paradigms on offer, and it is with the examination of this difficulty that I am going to begin my presentation. Two main models dominate the marketplace of ideas on this issue: the engineer’s paradigm and the skeptic’s paradigm. These two models presuppose totally different, even radically opposed, orientations of the mind. The first, the most powerful, is exploratory; it is what has guided the first scientific research on this question to date. To develop my reasoning, I am going to look for a balance between the two, based on what seems to me to be the best evidence.

When examined within the framework of the “engineer’s paradigm”, UAPs are apprehended as material objects tracing trajectories in space, and the only boldness permitted when examining their behavior is to identify their anomalies in relation to the laws of physics: lightning accelerations, sharp turns, instantaneous translations, etc.

Similarly, the analysis of eyewitness accounts and the psychology of witnesses often remains dependent on an “engineer’s psychology”, and on a conception of perception centered on the study of its distortions, which tries to stick as closely as possible to this physicalist approach, and which remains basically, as a result, under the domination of physics. This is, one might say, a simplified psychology, “cleansed” of all the dimensions of the psyche revealed by depth psychologies, and by the psychic sciences, which emerge above all in close-encounters cases and abductions.

Finally, extending its trajectory, the “engineer’s

paradigm” leads to that of the astronomer, to the question of life in space, to the possibility of interstellar travel. In short, for mainstream science—whether to reject or accept them, it must be stressed—there is *for the moment no other way of thinking about UAPS*.

Clearly this paradigm fails to accommodate the strangest forms of the phenomenon, such as those observed in close encounters and abductions, which the engineer’s paradigm mutilates or (more often than not) simply ignores. At first sight, at least. I shall come back to this point later, in connection with Arthur Clarke’s famous paradox.

However, I do not think that the engineer’s paradigm should be (totally) rejected, and it is this point of balance that I need to clarify before I begin my presentation.

As its name suggests, this approach of UAPs is inhabited by the technician’s vision of the world, and seeks to think their intrusion through it: experience shows that it is often among engineers, pilots, technicians, military personnel and, more generally, minds trained in advanced technology, that we will find the strongest supporters of the factual, first-degree reality of UAPs.² This paradigm imposes itself on minds through the invasive power of its realizations. Those who think through it will naturally focus on the aberrant physics of UAPs, and draw the conclusion that they are the manifestation of a transcendent technology. But in return, they will often disdain or ignore the parapsychic aspects I am going to examine in this article.

Yet the engineer’s model is justified, at least in part, by the fact that, thanks to contemporary military technology, the aberrant physics of UAPs is certainly now their best (or least poorly) attested manifestation. But in my opinion, the paradigm in question goes beyond what can be said with certainty and does not allow us to rule on the profound nature of the alleged phenomena. It doesn’t allow us to decide *what lies behind the curtain of appearances*. Above all, it ignores the possible parapsychic aspects of the UAPs cases. And yet, if it remains reductive in my eyes, it is much less so than its skeptical competitor.

The skeptical project is subject to the same analysis. If we take the term in the sense it had in antiquity, it invites us to search for the truth. But in today’s sense, pushed to its limits, it often becomes a defensive posture and tends to reduce UAPs to a planetary illusion, that is, to our dominant world

2 In France, Claude Poher, an aerospace engineer who headed GEPAN, the CNES group responsible for studying UAPs, after investigating several French close encounter cases in 1977 and 1978, came to the conclusion that these phenomena were machine-like objects of unknown origin. This study was never published, probably because the CNES headquarters considered its conclusion premature. (J.-P. Rospars, personal communication).

view. But, when they play their role with discernment and moderation, skeptics can become a counter-power to control the illusions of belief, and therefore also plays an essential part in the psychic ecosystem that is developing today around the question of UAPs.

These two paradigms have in common their internal contradiction. Pushed to the limit, the skeptical paradigm, when applied to UAPs, ends up destroying its object. Similarly, the engineer's paradigm leads to Arthur Clarke's famous paradox (for us, highly advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic), a paradox that allows minds shaped by technology to reintroduce magical phenomena by making them compatible with their worldview.

I can therefore embrace the skeptic's trajectory when he intends to control the illusions of belief, but I reject it when it leads to the total negation of the problem. A measured alliance is therefore possible for me with the engineer and the good-natured skeptic, but difficult or impossible with the dogmatist.

What is at stake in this debate is nothing less than the question of knowing whether, and to what extent, it is possible to pronounce on the profound nature of UAPs. When the pilots of the Nimitz in 2004 observed the famous "tictac" and its aberrant zigzags, no technological power on the planet was capable at the time (and still is, in my opinion, today) of performing such prodigies.

This simple fact opens an abyss. But in my opinion, this abyss is not yet fathomable. In fact, even if the data we have are reliable, we cannot know whether the technological prodigies I have just mentioned are the result of an internal necessity of the phenomena we are witnessing, or whether they are the forms that an unknown X takes to give itself to us, to penetrate our mental universe. What may lie behind the curtain of appearances may well be completely out of our reach. This point will be explored in greater depth in the following paragraph, when we examine the link with science fiction.

Nevertheless, I am not trying here to refute these paradigms. Strictly speaking, neither an exploratory model such as the engineer's paradigm nor a defensive dogma such as the skeptic's paradigm can be refuted.

But above all, my primary aim in this text is not to refute these paradigms, but to probe the mystery of elusiveness

and attempt to construct this concept for thinking about UAPs, and that, as a result, the deconstruction of the aforementioned paradigms, should it prove to be well-founded—which I cannot prejudge—can only be a secondary effect. In fact, in this article, my aim is not so much to criticize the aforementioned paradigms, as to draw from them the logical figures with which I will construct my reasoning. Obviously, as we shall see, if the concept of elusiveness proved to hold water, the skeptics would have something to worry about. But we're not there yet.

1.2 A "phenomenological like" approach

When I embarked on this quest in 1975, I was still a student and, I must confess, had no clear idea of what phenomenology is, of its methodological requirements, or of the abysses it could lead to. Like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who unknowingly wrote prose, I was unwittingly and instinctively developing a "phenomenological like" approach, instructed too by Aimé Michel, the great instructor of French ufologists³, who had managed to convince me, through endless discussions, that the quest we were embarking on was a dangerous undertaking, and even, to use his exact words, "the most dangerous of all." To avoid losing our way, we had to, in his words, "consider everything and believe nothing."

Phenomenology, as I saw it at the time, was Descartes' quest to avoid falling into the traps of the Evil Genius, and I imagined, with the ardor of youth, the mystery of UAPs (but we were still talking about flying saucers or UAPs at the time) as a kind of Evil Genius, taken out of philosophy books and given to us in our collective experience, with whom we had to measure ourselves.

Today, after a long detour into the history and challenges of the psychic sciences, I am trying to return to the intuitions of my youth. To make progress in my examination of the subject and to continue developing my intuition, I propose to undertake a "phenomenological like" approach of the UAPs.

There are at least four reasons for this cautious formulation and low profile.

The first is the embryonic nature of my thinking on this subject.

The second is the extreme difficulty and indeterminacy of our subject: are we working on a new chapter in collective

³ Aimé Michel, who died in 1992, is considered by those who have meditated on his thinking to be one of the most original and fertile thinkers of the 20th century. In a period marked in France by Freudo-Marxist confinement, he opened people's minds, half a century ahead of his time, to cosmic thought. His great inspiration was Blaise Pascal. If UAPs and their scientific and philosophical implications were one of his major preoccupations, he also meditated on animal thought, quantum physics, the ecological crisis, the return of religion ... in short, on the major themes that preoccupy us today. An old-fashioned thinker, he corresponded epistolary with scholars and scientists, all over the world. Those who knew him were deeply influenced by him.

illusion, or on the contrary, opening up a new path for science and philosophy? We all have our ideas on this question, but no one has the answer.

The third difficulty is due to the limits of the phenomenological approach itself, which, as the history of philosophy shows, always ends up reintroducing, at one point or another, the presuppositions it set out to bracket.

The fourth reason is that, even if UAPs are indeed a consistent object and not a collective illusion, as I am going to propose in this article, we are still only in the early groping stages of this approach. But, in my opinion, we should not regret this situation, but rather rejoice in it. In the sciences, and in discovery in general, what is fascinating are the early stages, the moment when the mind begins to bite into reality, naked, without tools, just through observation, the five senses, reasoning and intuition. I am thinking, for example, of the reasoning that enabled Buffon to tear himself away from biblical chronology and be the first to glimpse cosmic duration.⁴ Then, once a science has been established, once a language, methods and tools have been created, it becomes a matter for technicians. UAPs are one of the few areas where we can still enjoy the exceptional situation of the early days. But, at the same time, they remain a hopelessly confused and elusive object. And this is why it seems to me that UAP reflection must necessarily pass through a phase of phenomenological allure to clarify its object and its approach

So, to summarize, with this reference to phenomenology, I was at the beginning simply referring to an approach that intends on sticking to what is shown in order to describe it, bracketing all conceivable presuppositions. But—and I come back to this point at the end of this article—the development of my reflection led me to consider the idea that the question of elusiveness could open onto a “phenomenology of the inapparent”, to use the formula proposed by Heidegger at the end of his life. This is why I have taken the risk of using this term to maintain the fragile link with the phenomenological approach that I outlined at the start of my enquiry.

1.3 The beginnings of an (improvised) phenomenologist

I don't want to waste the time allotted to me telling you about my background, but I must tell you enough so that you understand how and in what context the ideas I am about to present came to me. Between the ages of 18 and 28, while studying literature and philosophy, I was carried away by two passions: science fiction and flying saucers. I was active in both areas, building relationships with researchers and authors, some of whom became friends.

After the events of May 68, which had a profound impact on French society,⁵ new ideas and practices flourished. It was the beginning of sexual liberation and of ecological protest. In the wake of this movement, new interests emerged in society. Science fiction literature enjoyed a new lease of life, as did the question of paranormal phenomena. But these movements attracted new conflicts, as a powerful Freudo-Marxist movement developed, intent on combating this return of the irrational.

In the middle of the seventies, the status of science fiction had changed, it was now considered avant-garde literature. The American writer Philip K. Dick, the Polish Stanisław Lem or the French Michel Jeury were celebrated, and the old science fiction—that which had blossomed on the covers of American pulps in the thirties and the forties which I was going to summon up in my first book on UAPs—was relegated to the infancy of the genre. And the beliefs in flying saucers and paranormal phenomena were stigmatized as “alienated” beliefs, attracting sarcasm and disdain. On its side, the ufologist milieu, dominated by the stature of Aimé Michel, perceived mainstream Freudo-Marxist thinking as cut off from cosmic reality and thus incapable of addressing the issues raised by UAPs. As a result, the two circles ignored and despised each other.

As far as I was concerned, having had the intuition since my final year of high school, after reading Aimé Michel, that there might be something very important behind the UAP dossier, I did not share this disdain at all. Having a foot

⁴ Buffon's hypothesis was that the Earth was a piece of molten sun that had been ejected and cooled, and he sought to estimate how long this cooling would have taken. As he had forges in Burgundy, he had a series of 10 iron spheres of varying diameters made and fired until they were almost molten, then waited until their surface was barely warm. He was thus able to show that the cooling time was proportional to the diameter of the sphere. All that remained was to make a rule of three, starting from the Earth's diameter. The calculation gave the Earth an age of 100,000 years. Almost everything in his thought experiment was wrong, because he was missing a lot of data, and the reality was much more fantastic. But biblical chronology was shattered...

Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, better known simply as Buffon, born in Montbard on September 7, 1707 and died in Paris on April 15, 1788, was a French naturalist, mathematician, biologist, cosmologist, philosopher and writer. Both a science academician and a French academician, he participated in the spirit of the Enlightenment. His theories influenced two generations of naturalists, in particular Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck and Charles Darwin.

⁵ Under the rule of General de Gaulle, the great political and cultural protest movement of 1968, which originated in the USA, took in France on an unprecedented dimension in May and June. The country was paralyzed by a general strike for a month, and an immense collective debate took place in which the old patriarchal power was called into question.

in both circles, I was a kind of “double agent” at the time, which put me in the position of establishing new connections between two files separated by prejudice. My first book, *Science Fiction and Flying Saucers*, published in 1978, was a double transgression from this point of view, which partly explains its unexpected success, but also the misunderstandings it sometimes provoked.

These points are important for understanding the context in which the ideas I try to develop in this text came to me. I am not recalling the overheated and polemical intellectual climate in which these ideas came to me, to prolong a polemic that is tending now to weaken, but to recall an undeniable *sociological fact*: it is a fact that in France, interest in UAPs and related issues has long been suppressed by mainstream thinking as alienated thought.⁶

1.4 The science fiction connection

My investigation into UAPs was born of the more or less successful fusion of two intuitions that came to me in the spring of 1975: the precession of SF on flying saucers, and the elusiveness that commands their manifestation. It is this idea of the precession that came to me first, and I start with it. It is a strange and counter-intuitive fact, since it implies that fiction seems to have preceded reality. Quite simply, it is the fact that spaceships and their occupants were abundantly described by science fiction writers and illustrators in the first decades of the century before appearing in reality in 1947.

I am not here just referring to the general themes, in this case the irruption of extraterrestrial crafts into the skies above our planet. I am also referring, above all, to the *visual forms* that this irruption would take from 1947 onwards for human witnesses, whether they be spaceships or their occupants. And that’s why illustrators, artists like Frank R. Paul, have played a decisive role in creating this imaginary world.

It is as if the UAPs, in order to manifest themselves to us, had slipped into the technological dream spread across the planet by pre-Arnoldian science fiction. As if the imaginary materials that would be arranged after 1947 in the future UAPs story had been put in place since the end of the 19th century by science fiction writers and illustrators, mostly English, French and American.⁷

But there is more to it than that. The imaginary world of science fiction did not only prefigure the visual appearance of future UAPs, and the subsequent representation of their supposed manifestations in UAPs magazines. Above all, it cleared and sometimes anticipated the phantasmagoria of close-up cases and abductions, which in my view constitutes the richest, most mysterious and most interesting form of UAP manifestation. The theme of abductions, whether perpetrated by mad scientists or extraterrestrials, runs obsessively through this popular literature. This coincidence goes a long way, since in American science fiction stories of the thirties and forties, extraterrestrials go so far as to insert implants into the bodies of their human guinea pigs in order to control them.⁸ The importance of this theme in today’s abduction narrative is well known. That is why it is so important to know that in the decades before UAPs came on the scene, this imagery was already featured on the covers of American pulps.

This precession of fiction from observation has an essential consequence for our purpose: the forms and events that emerge from 1947 onwards in the grand UAP narrative are *too culturally typified and dated to be taken at face value*. Two hypotheses then emerge: either we are “simply” dealing with a phantasmagoria fed by contemporary culture; or, if observations stand up to scrutiny—which is still the case—we have to turn to the second-degree hypothesis. This is the hypothesis that will underlie my examination of elusiveness in this text. It is to this hypothesis that I will refer when I insist

6 The 1200-page sociology thesis I defended at the Sorbonne in 1997 and published in 1999 on the history of mesmerism focused on this conflictual dimension (Méheust 1999).

7 All Western cultures have contributed to the development of this imaginary world, but initially it was mainly English, French and American writers who forged it, with nuances that I can’t go into in detail. Let me give you just one example. Initially, in French stories, it was more often the mad scientist’s phantom plane that abducted the hero. In the United States, in the twenties and thirties, this somewhat old-fashioned theme was soon supplanted by extraterrestrial vessels, ovoid, cubic, lenticular, etc., emitting powerful beams of light.

8 On this subject, see the fine investigation by ethno-folklorist Michel Meurger (Meurger 1995). This book is written in French and for a French readership. With this English title, the author wanted to emphasize that the focus of the abduction epidemic, though foreshadowed by French and English writers, is indeed American. Meurger criticized me at the time for not having sufficiently probed the American source. He was right, but I plead partly not guilty, because at the time I was writing my first book, available sources were scarce and difficult to consult due to the poor quality of pulp covers, which often turned to dust. This was the case with the Pierre Versins collection, with which I worked in 1976: I had the collections more or less complete, but very often I couldn’t open them. It may come as a surprise that it was French people who discovered the solution [the author here writes: “découvrir le pot aux roses” – Ed.], but it’s a natural and universal mechanism: we are often blind to our own culture. In another far more serious field, it was an American historian, Robert Paxton, who opened the eyes of the French to the extent of the Vichy regime’s collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.

Since I alluded to Pierre Versins, I can’t fail to mention the figure of this extraordinary man. A young man with a passion for science fiction and utopias, and an early entry into the Resistance, he found himself in Auschwitz-Birkenau, in his own words “the victim of a utopian”. Having survived the ordeal, he subsequently devoted himself to his monumental Encyclopedia (Versins 1977), which made him one of Europe’s leading experts in the field. This book, and the author’s advice, helped me a great deal in the writing of my first book.

on the theatricality of close-up cases, on their ostentatious dimension, especially in close encounters and abductions. Here we have the link between the two intuitions. It is this old pre-Arnoldian science fiction that has provided the cultural material with which an unknown “director” seems to have built his show.

1.5 The elusiveness mystery

In the spring of 1975 this idea of the precession of science fiction was already clear in my mind, but another intuition was beginning to nag at me, which I was trying to combine with the first, and it is this idea that intend now to describe to you.

One side of me wanted to believe in the material reality of the stories that circulated in the magazines, but another was already beginning to be wary of this slippery slope, as the discovery of the science fiction connection encouraged me not to take these stories at face value. Already aware of the evanescent nature of UAP manifestations, I decided to suspend my judgement of their nature and origin, retaining only what I could legitimately hold to be certain. I did not know whether they were fantasies or material realities, whether their origin was human (taken in the broadest sense, implying, if need be, the Jungian idea of a collective unconscious) or extra-human, whether or not they were collections of misunderstandings or hoaxes, whether they belonged to the social sciences, meteorology, folklore or atmospheric physics, and so on. On the other hand, I was totally certain of the reality of the reports, and I set about analyzing them, looking both for regularities and singularities.

It is above all in this restricted sense that my first approach rubs shoulders with the phenomenological approach.

As I was constantly immersed in case stories, I already had hundreds of accounts in my head, and the elusive nature of the alleged phenomena did not escape me. But I had not yet meditated on all the consequences of this

strange property. Then the idea suddenly occurred to me to consider it as the central phenomenon. For several months, I tried to find cases in which it could be avoided, but this task soon seemed futile: I might as well spend my time dropping objects to see if, by chance, one of them could escape gravity! It seemed to me, moreover, that elusiveness affected every aspect of the manifestation: the places where UAPs appear, their size, the duration of sightings, the number of witnesses, the alleged adventures, the behavior of humanoids in close encounters and abductions, and so on. All in all, it’s as if a “restraint” prevents the manifestations from exceeding a certain threshold. So I decided to look at UAPs in reverse, and ask myself what would happen if this “restraint” ceased and the manifestations were allowed to go to extremes. In this way, I tried to specify and imagine the forms that UAPs never take, *and above all, cannot take*. In a way, *I was trying to sketch their hollow mold*.

An example. In the 1970s, a new and particularly revealing scenario emerged: a UAP breaks down, and people witness the repair of the craft, which eventually manages to take off.

One of the most spectacular “breakdowns”, a true textbook case, occurred near New Berlin, New York State, on the night of November 25, 1964, and lasted over four hours. Two women—a young wife and her mother in law, according to Ted Bloecher’s investigation—were able to observe through a pair of binoculars the crew’s efforts to save their craft. The stricken saucer finally took off after four hours.⁹

In everyday reality, such an extraordinary event could not take place for long without attracting a crowd of curious onlookers, who would soon phone the authorities, with all the cascading consequences that would follow. We would then cross the fatal threshold I call the “threshold of passage to science-fiction” and enter another world. But in the reality of the case, this threshold is never crossed. In the stories of breakdowns, the repair process, if we are to believe the testimonies, may sometimes have lasted long enough, but never long enough for the foreseeable human reaction to

9 Ted Bloecher’s investigation appeared in French in *Phénomènes spatiaux* (Bloecher 1977). This issue contains a number of accounts of UAP failures. The case is also commented on by Professor Berthold Schwartz in the *Flying Saucer Review* (Schwartz 1973).

So, this is no confused rumor from the depths of Brazil, but a remarkably well-documented American case. The investigation was carried out by Ted Bloecher, the veteran investigator responsible for the most thorough report on the 1947 summer wave in the USA. The sighting was made by two women, Mary Merryweather, then aged twenty and recently married, and her mother-in-law, and their testimony was taken by Bloecher nine years later, in 1973. At around midnight on November 25, 1964, these two women saw two very bright objects land on a hill opposite their home, at a distance of 1,200 meters. Both objects emitted a continuous buzzing sound that terrified the family’s Brittany spaniel. The two women had a pair of binoculars at their disposal, which they fetched to observe the scene. The phenomenon seen from a distance thus became a close-up case, a unique occurrence to my knowledge. As the landing site was illuminated by the bright light of the objects, the two witnesses could see a group of human-like figures taking out a sort of “toolbox”, then busying themselves with an activity they interpreted as repair work. The show went on until 4:55. After a while, Mary Merryweather considered calling the police, but decided not to, as she didn’t want to miss anything of the sighting. Suddenly, the two objects rose silently into the sky and vanished at fantastic speed. The paradox of this testimony is that it relates one of the best-documented close encounters, and at the same time confronts us with an absurd fact before which reason recoils.

such an extraordinary event to give it an irreversible factual significance.

Of course, one might object that these accounts of breakdowns are suspect, and that, if not fiction, they “simply” relate over-interpreted encounters of the third kind. But since, for the determined skeptic, a close encounter is more often than not already an over-interpretation of a banal event, we run the risk of getting lost in the sands. So, it seems more prudent to take this kind of stories as an extreme figure of elusive *monstration*.

In any case, even if we are dealing with over-interpreted landings, the lesson of these stories does not call into question the thesis of elusiveness. Indeed, there is not a single case that could have lasted long enough (if we take into account only the duration of the observation) or that would have presented itself in such a way (if we take into account the multiple contingencies that inevitably surround any observation), for a witness to go and find other observers and, above all, for someone to come back with a camera. There is no escaping the fact that, despite thousands of alleged close encounters all over the world, there is not a single credible photo of a close encounter. And so, again, either, as skeptics claim, there have never been any UAP landings; or some unknown factor prevents photos from being taken; or finally, the UAP show has an “absolute overflight” that infallibly points to “holes of impunity.”

Generalizing these thoughts, I examined the file from every angle, only to discover the same logic everywhere: if the alleged events are what they seem to be, there was no, there could be no exception. This assertion could not tolerate the slightest exception. *Because if this exception had arisen, we would no longer be in the same world and it would not be possible to ignore it.*

I thus had, if not a “law”, at least an absolute regularity, which made it possible to predict not what the phenomenon would do, *but what it would not do, the forms it would never take, the adventures into which it would never venture.*

At the end of this text, in the section entitled “The threshold to science fiction”, I’ll come back to this assertion, which I consider essential, to support it further.

In June 75, I condensed these ideas into a twenty-five-page text which I sent to a few ufologist friends of mine, without much response. Then I mislaid the text (of which, of course, I had not kept a copy). But the idea of elusiveness was to remain with me, since in *Science Fiction and Flying Saucers* I tried (though I think to day I did not succeed completely) to combine it with the theme of the Science fiction factor.

Recently a friend of mine, the ufologist Pierre Lagrange,

found this text through a combination of circumstances that could only be described as synchronicity. So, caught up in my past, I decided to go back to my original intuition and try to explore it further.

2. A brief journey to the heart of elusiveness

To make things clearer, before developing my reasoning on the mystery of elusiveness, I want to specify again what motivates it, its aims, but also its possible (and probable) limits. The reasons for this stem firstly from the elusive behavior of UAPs. Their elusiveness, which is their main characteristic, seems to limit or render impossible any more precise knowledge of their manifestations. The fact is so obvious that, on this point, the most hardened skeptics will inevitably agree with me, unless they saw off the branch on which they are sitting. But, of course, they will not understand elusiveness in the same way; they will conclude that there are simply no UAPs, whereas I am going to try to show that by meditating on this theme we can perhaps come up with a deep anomaly.

The limits of my argument are precisely that, because of the very fact of elusiveness, but also because of the cultural ban that has paralyzed and delayed any serious approach to the phenomenon for decades, the empirical material available to us—the material I would need to support my argument—is fragile, scattered all over the planet, and often of poor quality.

It is obviously the potential richness of what is at stake that makes me take the risk, without excessive illusions, of the reasonings that follows. I am going to try to unfold them to the end to see where they might lead us, in the expectation of the reactions, negative and/or positive, that they might raise, no longer to make elusiveness the obstacle that hides the nature of UAPs from us, but what, at the deepest level, could, if not reveal it to us, at least bring us closer to a solution. One of the reasons that motivate and support this examination is the reality of poltergeists, which is now established beyond any reasonable doubt by most investigators and historians of the psychic sciences; I will return to this important point at the end of the presentation.

Before unfolding my argument, I still have to answer a predictable objection. In the pages that follow, I am going to apply the concept of elusiveness to all facets of the UAP dossier, from “things seen in the sky”, to use Jung’s expression, to close encounters and abductions. But the idea that we are dealing with facets of a single phenomenon is not self-evident. Nothing proves that when we speak of the

“UAP phenomenon”, we are not amalgamating different realities into a fictitious entity. This is obviously an important objection. But, strictly speaking, there is no evidence to the contrary. And since close encounters and well-documented abductions have the central characteristic, in my eyes, of recapitulating all the facets of the phenomena observed since 1947, *while exhibiting the same elusiveness as celestial objects*, I have decided to include them in my meditation on elusiveness. Elusive objects are so rare in observable nature that it does not seem outrageous to include them provisionally in the same category, even if it means broadening and relaxing it later. Following this line of reasoning, at the end of my presentation I’m going to bring in another category of elusive objects, poltergeists.

2.1 The theatrical coupling of ostentation and dodge

Let us get straight to the point. What the UAP dossier shows is *a seamless, case-by-case coupling of ostentation and dodge*. What I have called elusiveness—inventing (without knowing it) a word that did not exist in French¹⁰ (*élusivité*)—is not just the final evasion, but this strange coupling, which involves all manifestations of the phenomenon, and which concerns as much (and without possible exception, for the reasons I have just given) the close cases of high strangeness as well as the objects seen at a distance in the sky (and sometimes filmed, if recent U.S. Navy revelations are to be believed). For almost 80 years, a mass of data has been collected on UAP sightings, and all of it converges on this diagnosis. Always, everywhere, the phenomenon shows itself only to better evade itself, and it evades, or erases itself, at the critical moment when it will have to assume the fatal consequences of its display, leaving the indisputable proof, which would suddenly tip humanity into another age. The spontaneous theatricality characteristic of close encounters—particularly striking in abductions reports, with the powerful and spectacular luminous manifestations with which they inaugurate and underline their intrusion—will inexorably abolish itself in their absolute opposite, in the night of dodge. In the early eighties, I exchanged views on this subject with an American researcher, Martin Kottmeyer, who had reacted to my first book, and who was fascinated by this elusive theatricality. I am going

to try and show that we are dealing here with a fundamental psychic knot, which provides the signature of UAPs.

This theatricality can also be approached through two metaphors: Dress and Restraint. (More explicit in French: *la Tenue* et *la Retenue*.) The *Tenue* is already a *carefully crafted form of appearance*, displayed to demonstrate status and function. And among Freemasons, it goes even further: a ‘Tenue’ is a kind of private ritual through which Masonry manifests to itself. As for *Retenue* (Retention), it is the opposite force that pushes towards erasure and disappearance.

This “intention of display” is clearly revealed when old close encounter cases are brought together and compared in order to study them in detail. For example, French researcher Éric Zurcher’s¹¹ book on close encounters, the fine result of forty years of investigation, clearly shows that this display, this *spontaneous theatricality*, which draws its material from the imagery of pre-Arnoldian science fiction, and more particularly from the covers of pre-war American *pulps*, is a constant feature of most reports, right from the beginnings of the phenomenon in the early 1950s. What occurs most frequently is what I called in 1978 in *Science Fiction and Flying Saucers* “l’effet vitrine”, in English the “shop windows effect”, or the “showcase effect”: a kind of *private show*, given to a witness, or to a group of witnesses—because, contrary to what is often imagined, Zurcher also shows that a percentage of these “private shows”, of the order of 30% I believe, have 2 or 3 witnesses. This is repeated in dozens of unrelated cases, at least in the early years. It must be stressed that before the French wave of 1954, the investigation of close encounters was still in limbo, and publications were very rare. These cases have sometimes been unearthed by an “archaeological” investigation: they were totally confidential at the time, and remained so for a long time, as there was no Internet to connect everyone permanently, as there is today. This argument would be unusable for recent cases, but it still works for the early fifties, with the caveat, of course, that only a near-miracle could bring us to the pure case where this “monstration”¹² would give itself to us without having passed through the prior filter of retroactive interpretation. How could all these witnesses, without having been able to consult each other, have fantasized (or invented, if we want them to be deliberate lies) these scenes based on the specific imaginary

10 It is no doubt a revealing fact that this term didn’t exist in Descartes’ language when I coined it. And today, apparently, ‘*élusivité*’ is still not recognized as a French word by my computer.

11 Zurcher, 2023.

12 This is an obsolete word in English which has the meaning the author wishes to convey; a definition would be: “a public performance similar to a demonstration but intended as creative performance art, often parodying a serious demonstration” (see Wikipedia entry). [Editor:]

“Monstration” is also an old French term used by phenomenologists like Jean-Luc Marion to designate the fundamental fact of donation, the famous “Es gibt” of German. [Comment added by the author.]

of staging, ostentation and “*Noli me tangere*” (“look, but don’t come near, don’t touch”)? How is it that the first abductions stories appeared spontaneously, without any link between their witnesses, since the investigators, frightened by the bizarre nature of these stories, kept them and only published them later?

In view of these facts, it seems reasonable to me to hypothesize that this theatricality is not, as skeptics would have it, the result of a projection by the observers or, more profoundly, a secondary projective elaboration produced by the investigative procedure (in French: *le dispositif de l’enquête*) but that it is *inherent to the phenomenon itself*—in short, that it constitutes its *signature*.

An example from parapsychology will make the point clearer. Skeptics have long tried to reduce the stigmata of saints to projections of belief. But today, we know for certain that they are real, and that they emanate from internal processes that are still incomprehensible, as the late Dr. Chertok proved in his 1999 book.¹³

I’m going to apply a similar line of reasoning to the question of UAPs.

2.2 Weak elusiveness and strong elusiveness

When we examine the issue from this angle, we are led to distinguish two levels of elusiveness, corresponding to its two possible interpretations:

2.2.1 Weak (or false, or indirect) elusiveness is that conceived by skeptics

The UAP dossier, in their eyes, is nothing more than a collection of phantasmagorias. In other words, there are simply no UAPs, and the UAPs phenomenon is nothing more than an immense collective illusion. In this case, the elusiveness of UAPs would be *projective*: we would be attributing to an imaginary phenomenon an *intention* to evade us, whereas it would simply be born of our constant and inevitable failure to grasp the ghosts we imagine.

Here we come up against the thesis that necessarily springs to mind, namely that the myth of elusiveness is a *spontaneous creation of the fabulist function*: a mirage that mankind cultivates in order to enjoy the mystery while

managing not to deflower it. In many tales of fantastic folklore, we sense this dramatic spring at work, and the question is whether it is only this spring that is at work in UAP cases.

There is inevitably some truth in this thesis, and we could even add to it by arguing that skeptics, through their systematic denial, contribute to elusiveness, and that these two levels can work together.

It is worth noting, since we have taken the dream as an example, that this skeptical stance, however far we push it, *cannot abolish the reality of the dream as an original psychic process*. What we are primarily interested in here is establishing the irrefutable reality of the “UAP dream”, welcoming its singularity and exploring its implications.

The dream analogy can indeed be transposed to UAP manifestations, but with caution, for while the latter are as elusive as the dream *stricto sensu*, they also present a host of differences with the latter that preclude such assimilation. In close encounters, and all the more so in abductions, the “UAP dream”, if we decide to call it that, cannot be assimilated to the *stricto sensu* dream for a number of reasons, the most obvious being that the dream manifests itself during nocturnal sleep. We could, as I suggested in my second book *Soucoupes volantes et folklore*¹⁴, propose the hypothesis of spontaneous trance states that have not yet been catalogued and that manifest themselves by breaking into the vigilant consciousness, but this hypothesis would run up against the same objection as the dream, i.e. the abnormal restraint of the manifestations.

2.2.2 The second level of elusiveness would be strong (or true) elusiveness

This is the concept I am trying to define and construct here, and which I am attempting to hypothesize. True elusiveness would not be projective, but would belong to the phenomenon under consideration, as a revelation of its profound nature. From a negative characteristic, it would become for the analyst a *positive property*, the signature of a real and original phenomenon.

We get closer to this idea when, by dint of scrutinizing the reports, we come to realize that such perfect avoidance can hardly be the product of the fabulist function, whose

13 Chertok (1999). Born in Lida on October 31, 1911, and died in Deauville on July 6, 1991, Dr. Chertok was a psychiatrist of Lithuanian origin. Today, he is considered one of the pioneers of the new psychosomatic medicine. He came to France a few years before the Second World War to study medicine, and then distinguished himself in the Resistance, creating a network to hide and protect Jewish children. His fighting temperament led him to dissent from the psychoanalytical vulgate then dominant in France. His unstoppable demonstration of the reality of hypnotic vesications created a breach in this vulgate and opened up a debate that can never be closed again.

14 Méheust (1985).

unrestrained deployment naturally leads to profusion and saturation. Let's take the example of UAP breakdowns. The spontaneous fabulist function is obviously perfectly capable of inventing these kinds of events. We can even postulate deep structures of the mind which maintain over time this dramatic spring. But the fabulist function, as we know it, cannot control itself, it cannot foresee the "holes of impunity" that will enable it to insert itself seamlessly into the fabric of human events—unless we lend it the power of self-surveillance and control. Let me come back to this essential idea.

It will be objected that cases of UAP breakdowns are too rare to draw any general conclusions from them. It is a fact, and so, to answer this objection, we can rely on the repetitive structure of the classic "road incident": a motorist sees a luminous object descend from the sky, into which she or he is about to be abducted. It is a fact, however, that many abductees are astonished that at the moment of their abduction, the road, usually congested at this hour, was deserted. Everything seems to be happening as if the intruder had "taken advantage" of a bubble of tranquility, in short, as if he knew in advance the "holes of impunity".

This is a fantastic theme too that has left its mark on literature. *The Master and Margarita*, Mikhail Bulgakov's masterpiece¹⁵, begins with an encounter with the devil on a Moscow avenue. Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz is drinking a beer with a friend, near a kiosk, when a disquieting spindly figure appears to him, who soon faints, leaving him with an impression of terror and a sharp pain in his heart. *The narrator is astonished by the fact that at the time of the fateful encounter the main avenue was empty, whereas at that time of day it should have been packed with people.* Clearly the devil knew all about "holes of impunity." By blending humor and fantasy, the author touches a deep well of the psyche. Is it not this fantastic theme that structures the saucer equivalent? We'll have to discuss this point further.

2.3 Supporting the true elusiveness hypothesis

What supports this paradoxical idea of "true elusiveness", what leads us to doubt that the elusive manifestation of UAPs can be explained simply by the unbridled functioning of the fabulist function, or if we prefer of the natural psyche, is, among other factors, *the fine-tuning of saucer testimonies to time, place and circumstances*, an adjustment that is statistically observable. We are not even talking about UAP cases here,

but about *UAP stories*, the reality of which is indisputable. It is a proven fact that UAP stories do not exhibit certain shapes, sizes or events, except within certain limits and under certain circumstances, and that this fact doesn't fit well with current psychological explanations. If these cases were only hoaxes, fantasies or delusions in the usual sense of the word, we would have to observe a flowering of representations that would exceed the constraints of confidentiality demanded by elusiveness and end up saturating all possibilities, in the manner of science fiction narratives.

For example, we would be hard-pressed to find a well-documented story describing the landing of a gigantic spaceship in a peri-urban area teeming with potential witnesses. From the point of view of elusiveness, however, the gap is perfectly predictable: the close encounter case needs discretion, it needs a suitable setting—a clearing, for example—where a pocket-sized craft can land. If we were dealing with delusions, it is hard to see why we would observe this statistically perceptible restriction on a global scale. Unless we assume that every witness is potentially an unconscious collaborator of elusiveness and works unknowingly to adjust his fantasy and narrative to the required pattern of time and place, as if some kind of internal program were urging him to do so. But could it be that an internalized and implicit constraint achieves this collective result? This is not an insignificant hypothesis, and if we push it, it can go far beyond reductive skepticism.

Skeptics will not fail to object that this saturating flowering of cases exists, but that it is eliminated by the investigative procedure, and that the answer lies in the dustbin of ufologists. I do not think it is there, or not enough of it, because if it were, the skeptics would have exhibited and commented on it long ago.

This perfect—too perfect—fit leads me to consider the research that would be needed to back it up. For example, if we were to build up a bank of UAP dreams (dreams in the *strict sense of the word*), we would find that a good proportion of these dreams *could not be UAP cases*, because they would go beyond the strict bounds of elusiveness. The "threshold of passage to SF"—an essential notion, in my view, on which I shall conclude my paper—would be crossed. The only UAP dream I can remember (and I am still amazed that I have only dreamt about UAPs once!) involved an immense armada of multiform objects slowly descending towards the ground in the rising sun. It was a typical SF scene, like the

15 Bulgakov (2020), pp. 21-23.

majestic arrival of the Aliens in Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End*.¹⁶ However, to my knowledge, no credible case of this kind has ever been reported. For trained observers, most of the UAP dreams cited by Jung in *A Modern Myth* could not possibly be "real" UAPs.

In the reductionist hypothesis, what could be the psychosocial device that would frame UAP manifestations, imposing such a constraint on representations? And even if it were only a psycho-social mechanism, wouldn't it be interesting to exhibit and investigate?

Here is a well-documented case in which we can observe the precision of this adjustment, which we owe to the patient work of investigators from the Belgian COBEPS, one of Europe's leading research groups:

At the beginning of 2012, a young woman was driving through the shopping district of a small town near Liège; night had fallen, and the area was deserted. Then she spies a brightly lit triangular structure, seemingly motionless, just above a warehouse, illuminated by three powerful spotlights. Her route passes the edge of the warehouse. Seen up close, the object exceeds the dimensions of the building above which it floats. The motorist hurriedly stops just below the triangle, at the edge of the warehouse, and tries to photograph it with her cell phone. But in her haste, she forgets to roll down the window, so that the flash is reflected on the glass. Realizing her mistake, she lowers the car window. At that precise moment, the headlights begin to dim and fade, and the triangular object disappears in a matter of seconds, taking evasive maneuvers to avoid hitting the nearby power line. Frightened, the witness calls her husband on his mobile, which provides the exact time of the incident. The traces left by her car on the soft ground also enabled the investigators, who arrived at the scene as soon as possible, to pinpoint the exact location where she had parked. According to her account, the luminous triangle that she saw leaving was floating just above her. The Belgian investigators then realized that the surveillance camera in the shopping area may have captured the scene on film. They managed to get their hands on the data. Unluckily, the triangular object was parked precisely ... *in the camera's privacy cache*. In this case, if we play the skeptical scenario, we can assume that the motorist first thought she saw the luminous triangle, and that the rest of her story is the unconscious cinema she played to herself in order to persist in her initial illusion. But then, she was very lucky, because if the alleged UAP had not been in the blind

spot of the camera, the film might have shown ... that there was nothing to see.

2.4 The "showcase effect" as an archetype of elusiveness

Let's take this idea a step further: when we immerse ourselves in the phenomenology of UAPs, we come to realize that what UAP display "seeks to stage", in fact, *the process of display itself*. This is what we can deduce from the close-up cases from the early 50s studied by Éric Zurcher: in an isolated location, an entity presumed to be extraterrestrial (I mean: conforming to the representation of the extraterrestrial disseminated by pre-Arnoldian science fiction) exhibits itself in a luminous, transparent object, usually spherical or ovoid, for one (or more) fascinated witnesses. Coming from another world and embedded in our own, so close to the witness that he or she could touch it, and yet inaccessible, it condenses all the motifs of future flying saucers, starting with their appearance, which is hard to distinguish from the illustrations of close encounters that flourished on the covers of ufology magazines in the 1970s. All in all, it's as if this "effet vitrine" had been designed as the optimum encapsulation of elusiveness. To support this idea, I would like to suggest a thought experiment. Parapsychologists use judges to assess the accuracy of clairvoyants' descriptions of masked targets presented to them. I think that if judges were presented with a collection of drawings from pulps published between 1920 and May 1947 and asked to choose the best visual summary of elusiveness, they would unhesitatingly elect the icon of the "effet vitrine."

2.5 Showing off while hiding: the oxymoron as a signature of UAPs

If my intuition is correct, we are faced with a paradox without equal, since the reasons why we can know almost nothing about the manifestation of UAPs *are precisely the most certain and important things we can know about them*. At first sight, then, this is a negative certainty. But a negative certainty that can turn into a positive one when we consider the abnormal perfection demonstrated by saucer elusiveness, a perfection that tears it away from known natural phenomena and elevates it to the rank of a fertile anomaly.

Until now, elusiveness has been thought of as the obstacle

16 French translation entitled *Children of Icarus*. [Editor.]

that prevents us from making progress in our knowledge of UAPs, whereas its inflexible rigor is the short-circuit that reveals to us the essential part of what we can know about them, namely the process of elusive display.

To clarify my thought, I am going to use now a term full of meaning: the saucer manifestation exhibits the perfect structure of an *oxymoron*. As we know, the oxymoron, a tool of poets, allows the simultaneous expression of opposing or contradictory thoughts. As such, it is one of the most sophisticated “tools” of human thought. Today, faced with the increasing mechanization of mental functions, philosophers like Castoriadis have no hesitation in seeing poetry as the highest and most intractable manifestation of the human spirit.¹⁷ It is therefore astonishing to discover the perfect structure of the oxymoron in the manifestations of a phenomenon which, for almost 80 years, has been relegated. At first sight, the enigma becomes even thicker, but at the same time the outline of a reading of the problem is perhaps emerging.

Indeed, everything becomes clearer when we take this idea and use it to shed light on our problem. The coupling of display and evasion presupposes an initial opening and the permanent adjustment of two contradictory processes: without display, it could not bring its evasion into play, and without evasion, we would no longer be talking about the “mystery” of UAPs, the question would have entered the register of “normal” natural science. As in the meditation of Heraclitus, the grandfather of philosophers, we are faced with a war of opposites that simultaneously call to and repel each other, mask each other and bring each other to light.

We are therefore facing a manifestation of great complexity, dealing either with a projective phenomenon of purely human origin whose mechanisms we have not managed to unravel, or with the manifestation of a psyche of unknown nature and origin.

2.6 Intentionality and elusiveness

With this strange question, we are approaching a debate that has been going on in philosophy for over a century, and which concerns the central characteristic of mental states, *intentionality*. For philosophers, intentionality is often presented as what makes it possible to distinguish a thinking presence

from the blind phenomena of nature.¹⁸

But how can we think about the relationship between elusiveness and this difficult question of intentionality? All I can do here is summarize the state of an embryonic line of thought. If my intuition is correct, elusiveness must be understood as a *higher form of intentionality*. To account for the regulated coupling of elusive display, we have to postulate internal operations of dizzying complexity. Intentional phenomena are not necessarily elusive, whereas such elusive phenomena are necessarily intentional, since they display in their manifestation a dual intention: to show and to evade.

So, to stay with our question, if the actions of exposing oneself and at the same time hiding oneself are already, taken separately, intentional operations characteristic of thinking beings, and even, more generally, of living and psychic beings¹⁹, in the broadest sense of the term, then all the more so when they are combined in such a regulated way!

If these views were to be accepted, there would be an important consequence. The interminable empirical quest undertaken since Kenneth Arnold’s observation runs the risk of getting lost in the sands if it is not conducted by a guiding idea. If my intuition is right, then elusiveness provides us with the one thing we lack, the “signature” that distinguishes it from all phenomena given in the observation of nature — with the significant exception, as we will see, of so-called paranormal manifestations.

Through the infallible and regulated interplay of ostentation and dodge, the UAP tears itself away from the blind processes of nature, demonstrating that it belongs to the realm of the *psyche*, taken here in an indeterminate, all-encompassing sense. *It does not say much more about its nature, but it does at least say that*. This “admission” is veiled, condensed and implicit, because it has to be made to speak, like an oracle. But in my view, it is of immense importance for our research.

People will object that this notion of the psyche is vague. I must therefore try again to clarify my thinking on this point, if possible. To begin with, it is not so much a question of specifying what UAPs are *as what they are not*. The oxymoron argument seems to me to meet this first requirement, since it allows us to posit that we are not dealing with natural-physical phenomena, but with manifestations of “a psyche” whose nature and origin we do not know. Assuming, then, that

17 This is a central thesis of Cornelius Castoriadis (Castoriadis 1975).

18 This is what Valérie Aucouturier (2011) writes: “When intentionality is made a specificity of thought, it is often to indicate a characteristic that distinguishes thought from the natural phenomena that science studies” (p. 23).

19 The science of animal behavior can provide instructive comparisons. The partridge that “pretends” to be wounded and hops away to keep the fox away from its brood—the fact is proven—isn’t it already playing out, at the humble level of animal thought, the elusive monstration scenario we see unfolding in UAP stories?

my conclusion is accepted, or at least considered worthy of discussion, we still have to specify the nature and origin of this psychic manifestation, that seems to emerge from nothingness, or from the void in space, and this is the most difficult step.

When we try to think about this problem, our reasoning unfolds according to the status we give to the idea of elusiveness. If we hold that it is a chimera, the solution is obvious: the psyche in question can only be projective and can therefore only have as its source the human mind, both individual and collective. If, on the other hand, we think that the idea of “true elusiveness” is worth exploring to the end, then, I repeat, given the state of the question, the origin of this psyche cannot be clearly specified and related to a known support. This is obviously a major difficulty. But it is not unique to UAP research; parapsychologists have been grappling with it for a long time, albeit to a lesser degree. I’ll come back to this point in the next section, where I show that this difficulty is already apparent to parapsychologists when they try to study poltergeists *in situ*.

2.7 Renan’s great thought

At the end of the nineteenth century, Ernest Renan was probably one of the first to consider intentionality from this angle when pondering the question of thinking life in the cosmos, which led him to make this prophetic statement: “If there were beings somewhere who knew the laws of matter and force well enough to act millions of leagues away in space, *we would realize this in relation to certain facts that escape ordinary explanations and are intentional in character.*”²⁰

The historian philosopher—a major figure in French thought at the end of the 19th century—was a convinced rationalist. So, in this text, he immediately closed the window he had just opened to affirm his conviction of the absolute cosmic solitude of *genus homo*: of course, nothing of the kind had ever been observed and never would be. There is, he concluded superbly, “no free being superior to man, to whom we can attribute an appreciable share in the moral conduct, no more than in the material conduct of the universe.”

This is a turning point in contemporary thought, and I feel I must make my argument clearer. Renan was obviously not the first to envisage the hypothesis of extraterrestrial thought overhanging the human condition; science fiction writers did not wait for him to develop this theme in their

own way. But around 1880, he was certainly one of the first historians of religion to consider it in the way he did. Indeed, on this theme, he assumed a strange duality. There were in fact two Renan, a rationalist Renan and a romantic Renan.

The first—the official Renan, the thinker of the Third Republic—rejected, in the name of confirmed science, any possibility of extra-human intervention in human affairs, and made the cosmic solitude of the human being the intangible principle of modern ethics, without which his freedom could not unfold; on the other hand, the second Renan, the Breton and Romantic Renan, liked to suggest in other texts, again in the name of science, but the science of the future, that future thought might have to rethink the question of cosmic hierarchies, hitherto entrusted to theology.²¹ Some commentators have noted that Renan’s approach to these borderline problems was to abandon the language of theology with which he was familiar. That is why I was struck by his use of the notion of intentionality as a possible signature of extraterrestrial manifestation. Renan wrote the text quoted above in 1885. A few decades later, this concept was to make a comeback in philosophical thought and become one of the driving forces behind twentieth-century philosophy.

Renan’s question remains a great thought, and nothing prevents us from developing it in another direction. Given the state of the problem, the question we have explored does not allow us to provide an answer, but it does allow us to reopen this question.

2.8 Elusiveness, laws of nature and “absolute overview”

If we summarize what has been said about elusiveness, this hypothetical property has two main features. Through its theatrical, historical and cultural dimension, through the imagery of science fiction that it “stages”, it seems to signal that it belongs to the domain of culture, and therefore of thought, or at least of the psyche. But with its ability to dodge in all circumstances, it also seems to possess a flawless regularity and efficiency that makes it similar to the laws of the physical world. Yet it is clear that these two traits seem contradictory. At first sight, if we accept my hypothesis of “true” or “strong” elusiveness, the systematically elusive nature of UAPs suggests that we are dealing with a law of nature like gravity. Gravity, it should be remembered, was

²⁰ Renan (1885), p. 60 (emphasis added). (In French: *qui présenteraient un caractère intentionnel.*)

²¹ Far from fearing this contradiction, he even made it a principle of method: his *Examen de conscience philosophique* (Renan 1889, p. 3) begins with this extraordinary assertion: “The first duty of the sincere man is not to influence his own opinions, but to let reality reflect back at him like the photographer’s darkroom, and to witness as a spectator the inner battles waged by ideas in the depths of his conscience.”

first thought of as an *intention of nature*, a law that never fails. Water, with absolute certainty, always finds its way to the sea, as if moved by an obscure prescience. An analogy then seems to be emerging: the elusiveness of UAPs would be to the collective psyche what gravity is to the material world, and their final evasion would be as predictable as the effects of gravity. But this analogy is deceptive: the law of gravity may be “hard”, as Brassens sings, but it remains sober and silent. It is only revealed through observation, it does not manifest itself in symbolic processes, whereas the manifestation of UAPs, especially in close encounters and abductions, is often ostentatious and theatrical. The laws of physical nature are not emphatic or symbolic, *they simply are*. On the other hand, theatricality is a feature of close-up UAPs manifestations, which in close encounters cases and abductions, before being erased, are exhibited and “staged.”

If, then, we are dealing with a system for regulating the psyche, as Jacques Vallée has surmised, with his “control system” formula,²² it is of a different nature to a law of physics; it displays something more, because it seems to preserve in the immaterial domain of the psyche, and therefore of meaning, a power of unflinching regulation of natural laws implying an “absolute overview”²³ of events.

An idea of this kind, of course, seems to bring us back to magic. But before we get too scandalized by this recourse to dark forces, it might be a good idea to remember that contemporary economic thinking still refers to a magical axiom of this kind when it lends “the divine hand of the Market” the infallible power to regulate human affairs. The difference is that the absolute overview that has been attributed to the hidden intelligence of the Market is very far from infallible, whereas the one that the UAPs seem to be staging has never yet been caught at fault.

2.9 The opening is that the phenomenon cannot be totally erased

However, at this stage of the investigation the inevitable objection arises: how can we *prove* the reality of something

that, by its very nature, can erase itself, and always tends to erase itself? Is there not an abysmal logical contradiction in this attempt? Bergson had shown that if we stuck to logic, it should be impossible to learn to swim, because to do so you would have to be able to lie on the water, and therefore already know how to swim. And he concluded that it is only action that “breaks the circle.”²⁴ To overcome this logical trap, we must follow his advice and submit to the facts. And the facts, on this very point, teach us something very important: in reality, the phenomenon *does not totally erase itself*, otherwise it would also erase the memory traces in the minds of the witnesses, and we would not even be able to evoke its intrusion, or even be aware of the problem. Why this is so rather than otherwise we cannot say, but we must accept it as a fact. A phenomenon that has long been known—telephone calls made by the deceased to their loved ones—may now be taking on a new dimension, thanks to modern technology. According to a recent survey conducted in France by researcher Laurent Kasprovicz,²⁵ some calls from the deceased have been sometimes abnormally erased from the memory of telephone. In these cases, if the facts are real, the erasure was only partial.

In fact, the UAP phenomenon sometimes leaves material traces, often ambiguous and indirect, which may offer a foothold for investigation. For example, we can (cautiously) assume that the radar echoes and films recently unveiled by the U.S. NAVY are real, and that these facts offer us something to hold on to. A fragile hold, to be sure, as one sometimes gets the impression that the U.S. military itself is participating in the game of ostentation and evasion. But at last, a foothold. The pomp has to be primed, a minimum of monstration is needed. We shall see later that the same conclusion, but a more solid one, can be drawn from the facts studied by the psychic sciences.

I regularly discuss these issues with researcher Jean-Pierre Rospars, who is also an expert with the *Groupe d'études et d'informations sur les phénomènes aérospatiaux non identifiés* (GEIPAN). He insists that, against the skeptics, meta-analyses *should be able to test the hypothesis that something is showing*

22 Vallée (1975), chap. 9.

23 The concept of “absolute overview” is not an invention of mine, but a creation of the philosopher Raymond Ruyer, who dominated the philosophy of life and biology in France in the second half of the 20th century. An assertive panpsychist, Ruyer distinguished two levels of reality, “first consciousness” and “second consciousness”, and “absolute overview” was for him the fundamental property of first consciousness, the source of consciousness and life. In the introduction to his latest book, written with Félix Guattari, Deleuze, who was stingy with his compliments, wrote that this concept was “the greatest invention of contemporary philosophy” (Deleuze & Guattari 1991). I use it here for its suggestive value, without claiming to connect it directly to our problem. Such an operation would not be impossible, given Ruyer’s philosophical axioms, but it is totally beyond the scope of our present purpose. This idea of the “absolute overview” runs through all Ruyer’s books, but the philosopher examines it particularly in his *Paradoxes de la conscience* (Ruyer 1986.)

24 Bergson (2010).

25 Kasprovicz (2023).

up. This is the decisive point, which I shall now attempt to argue and develop, using the poltergeist case as a starting point.

3.0 Another connection for situating UAPs: the poltergeist issue

3.1 The poltergeist issue and its implications for UAP research

Continuing my project to detach myself from the engineer's paradigm, I will now relate the UAP dossier to that of paranormal phenomena, and more specifically to the significant phenomenon of poltergeists.

Parapsychologists use this term to describe a series of manifestations generally (but not always) linked to the presence of a person, most often a disturbed teenager. In the home where it occurs, a poltergeist can affect objects, transforming them into projectiles, ransacking them, removing them and sometimes *making them reappear in a hermetically sealed room*. It can bend metals, cause fires, stain walls with insulting inscriptions, make an oracular voice heard without any visible human source, and sometimes even cause an unbearable racket, as the German origin of its name, the verb *poltern*, to make noise, reminds us. In short, it seems to be the incomprehensible physical externalization of psychic tensions. But its ability to evade investigation is as surprising as its physical inscription and tends in part to erase it. Those involved in its manifestations can sometimes see them unfold before their very eyes, especially in the initial phase of surprise. But if an “armed” observer—in other words, a prepared mind—intends on catching them in the act, the phenomena will weaken and stop, only to resume as soon as the observer's back is turned, or his attention slackens. This goes so far that it is almost impossible to film the manifestations of a poltergeist: it is as if an “intelligent force” is ensuring that they don't happen in broad daylight. An automatic device will rarely succeed in trapping them. The seemingly insoluble logical problem mentioned above (how can one provide proof of something which, by its very nature, evades detection?)—this problem has, however, found the beginnings of a solution with poltergeists: their manifestations are known for certain by most researchers,

albeit indirectly, through the damage they leave behind, which in some cases has been documented by the gendarmerie.²⁶ (In France, as public order disturbances, they may come under the jurisdiction of the gendarmerie.)

Of course, the gendarmes do not use the terminology of the psychic sciences, nor do they intend to prove, disprove or verify the theses of parapsychologists: their approach remains neutral, as it should be, but they observe the effects they see, when they are sometimes called upon.

It must be stressed again that these are well-documented facts, based on a vast dossier, on which most of parapsychologists agree. Ufologists, alas, can show no such thing.

I just wrote: the majority of parapsychologists. On this point, given the importance I attach to the question of poltergeists in my reasoning, a parenthesis is in order. While many parapsychologists today accept these phenomena, the scientific branch of their discipline still rejects them, on the grounds that they cannot be reproduced and studied within the purified framework of the laboratory, and do not at all accord with the image of the world promoted by experimental physics. The main obstacle here is the spontaneous, non-reproducible nature of poltergeists. To study such phenomena, we must first accept the “possibility of their impossibility”—to borrow a famous Heidegger's phrase—suspend all presuppositions about their nature, and attempt to adapt to their mode of manifestation. This is what metapsychologists have been doing, or at least trying to do, for the past century: while keeping the control apparatus under wraps, they strive to approach phenomena in their spontaneous ecology. When a poltergeist manifests itself, it can sometimes last for weeks, leaving plenty of time for observation. Of course, those who insist on persisting in doubt will always be able to postulate an “X trick” that will bring them into line with scientific orthodoxy and save their academic respectability.

The reason for this partial rejection, then, is the epistemological conflict that has plagued the psychic sciences since their foundation, dating back to the Marquis de Puysegur at the time of the French Revolution.

The conclusion to be drawn from these observations is that the material accumulated on poltergeists over the last century and a half by researchers in the psychic sciences, and

²⁶ In a recent French case in Amnéville (Moselle), well documented by the gendarmerie, an apartment was found completely ransacked, and in the strangest of ways. Poltergeist manifestations were observed by several people, including the gendarmes called to the scene. Compared with these abundant data, the traces left by UAPs are rare and uncertain. See Renaud Evrard's article on this case (Evrard 2019).

since antiquity by chroniclers, philosophers and historians,²⁷ whatever its weaknesses, is in my opinion superior, in quantity and quality, to what ufologists can show. Added to this is the fact that in the age of the psychic sciences, their penetration of the academic world, which began at the time of the French Revolution, was far superior to that of the recent and incipient ufology. Thus, one will not find in the references of ufologists an effort to base elusiveness on physical laws as far-reaching as that proposed by the German physicist Von Lucadou, whom I shall comment on in the following lines. Jacques Vallée's intuition of the "control system" is the closest he has come to this idea, but he has not yet taken his theorization to its logical conclusion.

What may eventually give the impression of a theoretical effervescence in ufology is above all the noise made by the US Army revelations, and their repercussions in cultural life, multiplied by the Internet and smartphones.

And yet, of course, the materials used to study spontaneous and elusive phenomena will always be of a lower quality than those required by the constraints of the laboratory. That is the way it is, and we have no choice: in all these cases, researchers are confronted with levels of reality to which they must adapt.

To conclude this discussion on the scientificity that should be accorded to parapsychology, suffice it to say that if the criteria of laboratory parapsychology were applied to the materials on which ufologists rely, almost nothing would stand up.

3.2 Let's get back to poltergeists

The ability to preempt and evade investigation has struck parapsychologists, who have sought to theorize it. The German physicist Walter von Lucadou did just that, in a text that left a lasting impression.²⁸ His central thesis, drawn from information theory, is that poltergeist manifestations are part of a self-regulating system of the individual and collective psyche. Where popular consciousness once imagined the external intervention of spirits or demons, the German physicist postulates an immanent property of the human psyche, revealed by the physical effects of psi. The originality of his solution is that, while preserving the materiality of facts, it shifts them from transcendence to immanence. In

so doing, it is part of the movement of modern thought. The title of his book, *Geister sind auch nur Menschen. Was steckt hinter okkulten Erlebnissen* ("Ghosts are also humans: the hidden meaning of occult experiences"), reflects this shift. The intentionality expressed in a poltergeist would be the expression of the actors' repressed desires, and the poltergeist with its special effects would be the observable expression of invisible psychic processes.

While the material dimension of UAPs is still under discussion, that of poltergeists, attested by testimonies dating back to antiquity and more than a century and a half of meticulous investigation, for most psychic researchers, is now established, as is their *modus operandi*, their way of manifesting themselves. *We can therefore affirm that their elusiveness is not projective.* This reinforces the idea that the same could be true of UAPs. It is even in this paper one of my more important proposals.

The commonality of register between the two manifestations is essentially due to the fact that they are animated (with nuances and even important differences that we'll comment on later) by that oxymoronic logic of ostentation and evasion that seems to sign their intentionality and allow us to distinguish them from the blind processes of the physical world. We are indeed dealing with the *same mode of donation*.

It therefore seems legitimate to draw on the best-established manifestation to shed light on the most elusive, as long as there are common features inviting us to do so. As we shall see, these common features are sufficiently numerous to justify the parallel and provide food for thought. This is not to say that I equate the former with the latter, but that I am proposing the hypothesis of a *family of phenomena* with common traits, of which UAPs would be a contemporary modulation (or emergence), and which would all be governed, to varying degrees, by the logic of elusive *monstration*. It being understood, moreover, that the degree of kinship between the phenomena in question cannot be specified in our present state of knowledge and reflection.

In supporting this hypothesis, I am leaving behind the absolutely certain. Here we enter the realm of speculation. But the gain in intelligibility it affords seems to me to justify this risk.

27 I must also emphasize the historical dimension of poltergeist attestation. When you read these old chronicles, you are struck by the stability of these phenomena. In my opinion, this is another strong argument in favor of their reality. On this theme, I recommend reading *Paranormale antiquité, la mort et ses démons en Grèce et à Rome*, a compilation of texts from Greco-Roman antiquity, presented by Catherine Schneider (Schneider 2011). The book includes descriptions of poltergeists that might have been recorded recently.

28 von Lucadou (1997).

3.3 Levels of psyche, levels of elusiveness

I am going to take this analogy between the manifestation of UAPs and poltergeists a step further, in order to sketch out a differential diagnosis that will lead me to examine it from several angles.

3.3.1 The levels of psyche involved

While the manifestations of poltergeists can be described as “psychic”, in the sense we have just described, they bring into play very different *levels of psyche*, which it is important to distinguish from those involved in UAPs. Poltergeists, in their interference with concrete things, express instinctive dynamisms characteristic of what Freud called “primary processes”: bending, ransacking, derailing, provoking, frightening, setting fire to, defiling, and so on. Very rarely do they go beyond this primitive individual level. There are, however, exceptions: in the famous case of the Macon demon,²⁹ the poltergeist, which attracted a large number of observers, rose to the level of culture, becoming a kind of sounding board for the heavy collective religious tensions of the time, marked by outbursts from the void, which greatly impressed the English philosopher and mathematician Boyle, who came to witness the phenomenon.

On the other hand, in the case of close encounters or abductions, UAP manifestations regularly rise to the level of culture and feature collective representations, largely drawn from the SF canon, which can, in my reading, be interpreted as “quotations.”

3.3.2 The spontaneity of manifestations

Like poltergeists, UAP sightings are spontaneous. Exceptions, if there are any, are extremely rare. Some French researchers, such as Pierre Viéroudy,³⁰ made an effort in the early 1980s to induce their apparitions, but without any convincing results, in my opinion. Adorcism does not work with UAPs or poltergeists. You cannot summon them, you cannot force them to appear.

29 This poltergeist occurred in France during the Wars of Religion. The phenomenon took place in 1612 for three months in the town of Macon, in the home of a Huguenot family. It lasted long enough for many witnesses to come and see the phenomena. One of these witnesses was the English philosopher and mathematician Boyle, who, on his return to England, reported to the learned world what he had seen. On the Macon demon, see the remarkable study by ethno-folklorist Michel Meurger, published in the *Revue métapsychique* (Meurger 1981).

30 Viéroudy (1978).

31 On these mediums (and many others) you can find references and information in my books: *Somnambulisme et médiumnité* (Méheust 1999) and *Jésus Thaumatourge* (Méheust 2016).

3.3.3 Reproducibility, semi-reproducibility and non-reproducibility

From what has just been said, it follows that poltergeists and UAPs cannot be *reproduced* and observed under prepared experimental conditions.

On the other hand, the great physical-effect mediums such as Franek Kluski, Eusapia Palladino, Uri Geller, Daniel D. Home, Ted Serios, etc., have demonstrated their ability to produce telekinetic phenomena under prepared and controlled conditions.³¹ But their power, while very real and duly noted, does not always work, which is enough to fuel the refusal of touchy determinists. What is more, when they do produce phenomena, they are not necessarily those they have been asked to produce, and they never reproduce them identically: there remains something erratic, uncontrollable (and often *ironic*) in the manifestations of their power. It should be added that these great mediums are regularly affected by poltergeists that develop spontaneously in their presence, and seem to follow them wherever they may be on the planet. This was the case, for example, with Home, Kluski and Geller. This seems to indicate that they are only able to “tame” part of the force that flows from them (or connects with them).

Moreover, there is a notable difference between the manifestations of material psi and those of intellectual psi. The former can be reproduced, but they are rarer, erratic and difficult to control, whereas the latter (telepathy, precognition and clairvoyance), while equally capricious, can be reproduced on demand more regularly and under better-controlled conditions. With a Stefan Ossowiecki or an Alexis Didier, an experimenter had every chance of seeing something interesting happen at almost every session. He could therefore prepare his tests. It is these differences that largely explain the considerable lead that parapsychology and metapsychology have taken over ufology.

3.3.4 The possible involvement of conscious and unconscious actors

In classic poltergeists, the physical phenomena observed seem most often to be linked to the presence of a person, *who is*

generally unaware of being the source, or of collaborating with this source, at least at the start of the manifestations. But this is not always the case, and when several people are involved, and can therefore be suspected, attribution of the source remains uncertain.

In experiments conducted with mediums, these phenomena are also linked to the presence of a person, *but who, on the contrary, intensely desires to produce them.* In the case of UAPs, on the other hand, this involvement seems more often than not to be absent. At first sight, close encounters and abductions are completely free of this link. It may be suspected in certain rare cases of close encounters and especially in repeated abductions, but it is not observed in cases observed from a distance, and even in most close encounters.

3.3.5 Levels of elusiveness

It follows from what has just been said that while the elusiveness of UAPs is (almost) absolute, that of psi phenomena is somewhat less so. Whether it is a matter of imperfection or “intention” on nature’s part, the control device that regulates these processes loosens a little, it “leaks.” In mediumistic experiments, these “leaks” allow the development of a scientific approach based on *semi-repeatability* — a state of affairs rich in consequences, but which determinism is reluctant to confront, and whose full implications have not yet been explored.

3.3.6 Places of manifestation

Another major difference between psi phenomena and UAP cases simply concerns the *places where they manifest themselves.* I am going to dwell a little more on this aspect, because it is never or rarely discussed, and it seems essential to me.

One day when I was discussing this issue with Aimé Michel, he asked me to read a letter by the Hellenist Dodds, author of *The Greeks and the Irrational*, which raised this very problem. The essential difference between UAPs and psi phenomena, according to the British historian, is quite simply that the former manifest themselves preferably *outdoors*, and the latter *indoors*. It could not be more concise, and the simplicity of this remark masks its depth. Indeed, UAPs present themselves as coming from the sky and “prefer” to

give their close-up representations in the sparsely populated spaces of nature, while psi manifestations (and particularly poltergeists) are confined almost exclusively to the *private sphere*. Today, with the abduction cases, *the bedroom visitors* are somewhat disrupting this dichotomy, as they sometimes (but to my knowledge, for the moment, only in the USA) operate at night in big cities. But the fact remains that, historically, the two issues have been built on this opposition: the poltergeist trickster *remains a domestic demon*, in the Latin sense of *domus*, while UAPs, which significantly emerged just after the Second World War, are the first (almost) totally delocalized manifestation, that gives itself as coming from the outer space.

3.3.7 “Wild psi” and “tamed psi”

The opposition between the private sphere and outer space points to another opposition, which to my knowledge has never yet been explored, yet which could prove very fruitful, and even essential: that which could be established between the “wild psi” and the “tamed psi.”

Paranormal manifestations can indeed be ordered through this intuition. Let’s use a metaphor: UAPs would be a modern extension of the psi that *has remained totally wild*, and the phenomena that parapsychologists deal with would be a *more or less tamed* manifestation of the psi, it being understood that, as things stand, there is no such thing as a *perfectly domesticated psi*, obeying the wishes of experimenters to the fingertips. In the first case, elusiveness would be almost total, while in the second it would be attenuated and would open up a limited possibility of experimentation or at least observation that enables parapsychology to progress when ufology stalls.

This metaphor is thought-provoking, for it likens psi to a living force with which human beings can try to establish a relationship, which they can tame to a certain extent and make work for them. When a medium with physical effects tries to act on an object at a distance, to make it move, to bend it, or, in psychometry experiments, to make it talk, to extract its secrets, he picks it up, flatters it, cajoles it, or even gives it orders, *as if it were a living being he were trying to tame.* The famous somnambulist Alexis Didier, for example, never produced physical phenomena, but perhaps that is because he was not asked to. For he had this curious intuition that objects are alive and can be tamed.³²

If we accept this openness to psi and its consequences,

32 Sleepwalkers who fail the blindfold test, Alexis comments, do not place themselves in the right relationship with opaque bodies. As a result, the latter refuse to collaborate with them; “they lack good will and refuse to help them.” For him, the somnambulist must “take care to preserve his will in order to force them to become transparent and allow themselves to be penetrated.” (Didier 1857, p.23.)

we end up with the hypothesis that UAPs are *manifestations of a psychic nature, but devoid of any assignable “support.”* This is already the case, albeit to a lesser degree, with poltergeists, where the relationship between certain people present and psycho-physical manifestations can be postulated but not clearly specified. In the case of UAPs, delocalization would be (almost) total.

3.3.8 The historical depth of the alleged phenomena

This is the last point left for me to examine, and perhaps the most difficult. This historical depth, in fact, is also very different depending on whether we consider paranormal phenomena or UAPs. That of paranormal phenomena is much older, and particularly, as I have shown, that of poltergeists, which goes back to antiquity, and we could also cite Greek divination and many other examples.³³ UAPs, for their part, as we now know, did not wait until June 1947 to manifest themselves. Numerous testimonies suggest that celestial phenomena similar to those we observe today were recorded from the end of the 19th century onwards; and this observation also applies, to a lesser degree, to abductions. French researcher Claude Maugé, working to reconstruct the history of these phenomena, has discovered accounts dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, which it is tempting to compare with contemporary accounts of abductions, with all the risks of retroactive interpretation that this kind of undertaking obviously entails, but seasoned researchers are now fully aware of this risk.

One overall fact seems to have been established: while celestial phenomena have been observed since antiquity, their connection with those we record today under the UAP label remains very difficult to establish, for the obvious reason that we observe them from our own culture, with other presuppositions and above all with new technological requirements and means. Numerous books have been devoted to these precedents, most recently by Jacques Vallée.³⁴ From these works, a growing certainty is gradually emerging: the starting point of these celestial manifestations does not date back to June 1947; they began haunting the skies at least as early as the end of the 19th century. And above all, the phenomenology of close calls and abductions seems to have begun to take shape in the shadows before flying saucers

appeared in American skies in June ‘47. If UAPs are less recent than previously thought, they remain a modern and contemporary emergence.

3.4 The threshold of the transition to SF

This brings me to an essential point. As soon as we admit the reality of so-called paranormal phenomena (in the general sense that I am using here, which includes UAPs), we are obliged to set limits for them (in our minds), to postulate constraints that will prevent them from exceeding a certain level. Thus, if generalized, the now-proven power of fragmentary and veiled knowledge of the future would make human life as we know it impossible.

If there were clairvoyants capable of blowing up the casino bank on a regular basis, this would be it. If clairvoyance regularly produced such effects, human society as we know it could not function. If the U.S. military kept frozen humanoid bodies in a secret base, the truth would have come out, the secrecy would have exploded, and human history would have begun to turn on July 10, 1947. It is this critical point that I called in *Science Fiction and Flying Saucers* the “threshold of passage to SF”, i.e. the threshold at which the untimely irruption of psi would destructure social life: the landing in front of the White House for UAPs, the complete vision of the future for clairvoyance, and for theology a miracle of the resurrected Jesus in front of the Sanhedrin gathered on the Temple square. Renan, the skeptic of skeptics,³⁵ demanded in his book on Jesus, that the proponents of the resurrection provide him with this ultimate proof, which he clearly felt could not be provided. These are the events that are never attested, because they cannot have happened.

But classic pre-Arnoldian science fiction, the kind that nourished UAP stories, never ceased to cross this threshold: indeed, this was its essential dramatic springboard, for it is this transgression that ensures the temporal compression of events and the dramatic intensity of the stories. This is why, while it produced the imagery that would resurface in UAPs, *it did not anticipate their elusiveness*. It was not until decades later that elusiveness was reintroduced as the backdrop by certain authors. This was explicitly done by two science fiction writers of my acquaintance, Frenchman Michel Jeury in *Les Yeux*

³³ Dodds (1951).

³⁴ Vallée & Aubeck (2010).

³⁵ At least the official Renan, since the other Renan, as we have seen, ventured assertions to the contrary.

*géants*³⁶ and Englishman Ian Watson in *Miracle Visitors*³⁷, after reading my first book.

For me, this argument has a predictive value, and I am taking the risk of rejecting *a priori* all the UAP crash mythology that has cluttered ufology since the early 1980s, and which is currently making a comeback in American revelations.

It may be objected that this very assertion seems to be called into question by these revelations. Indeed, they seem to give substance to the rumors that began to circulate at the end of the 1970s, about frozen humanoids being kept in the greatest secrecy by the US army since 1947. Potentially refutable, my elusiveness hypothesis therefore has the status of a scientific hypothesis. I therefore maintain it until proven otherwise. In my opinion (but it is only my opinion), we can wait a long time. But I would be delighted if it were to be disproved, because that would be science's greatest day. While we wait for this historic day, I venture to refine my prediction, specifying what we can expect to discover if we take into account the constraints of elusiveness. At best, in this context, we cannot expect to discover the frozen bodies foretold by the Roswell legend,³⁸ as they would transgress the fatal threshold, but, at most, organic residues whose difficult interpretation will only provide an ambiguous answer that will not allow us to settle the debate.

The argument of the casino and the White House and all that it implies is compelling. It is the only argument the skeptics have that really holds water. Most of their objections to the protocols, to the possibility of faking, to the non-repeatability, etc., are mere sophistry, even delaying tactics, but this argument is dominant and demands a response. And it's easy to see why certain minds prefer to deny UAPs and psi altogether, rather than have to face up to the consequences that their manifestations logically entail on a sociological, scientific and philosophical level, as soon as they are granted a certain reality. Indeed, as soon as we put our hand into the psi gears, we are led to postulate a "control X" that imprisons human life within a glass ceiling, in order to make it possible. In this case, there can be no other solution.

The history of the psychic sciences validates the X-control axiom. When we look at the data, we see that the emergence of psi adjusts to a society's means of recording and its verification procedures, and we understand that it cannot exceed certain thresholds without threatening its structure. So, in my opinion, elusiveness is less about the non-reproducibility of psi, than about the thresholds of intensity it can reach in a given time and place without threatening society. It allows us to *retro-predict* what did not happen and to predict what will possibly happen. It also makes it possible to analyze the historical variability of psi as a function of this parameter: it may have been more spectacular in the past, when means of control were weak or non-existent, and it will tend to weaken as they become more sophisticated. The archives confirm these predictions. Saint Joseph of Copertino was able to levitate in front of hundreds of people³⁹ in a world where photography did not yet exist. Today, with smartphones, this is no longer possible. And so, either, as the skeptics claim, there has never been any levitation or UAPs, despite what the archives suggest, or we must join the parapsychologists in postulating X-control. And the logical conclusion is that, with the rise of technological means and the obsession with control that characterizes our society, psi is destined to weaken and gradually die out, leaving mankind locked in its rationalist certainties, without the otherworldliness that it still externalizes through psi, which challenges and stimulates it. This is the prediction of Jule Eisenbud, one of the world's leading specialists in the psychic sciences, the investigator who, with his team, brought to light the powers of Ted Serios, one of the greatest physical-effect medium of the 20th century⁴⁰: the excess of protocols and precautions will ultimately kill the signal.⁴¹

4. To open a window on the unknown

In conclusion, I come back to the allusion I made to Heraclitus, which leads us to Heidegger. You would not expect to connect Heidegger with the UAP question: in the geography of thought, in France at least, these are the

36 Michel Jeury (1980).

37 Watson (1980).

38 Lagrange (1996).

39 On this subject see Herbert Thurston (2020), Aimé Michel (1973), and Michael Grosso (2015).

40 The case of Ted Serios strikes me as remarkable for four reasons: (1) By the quality of the experimenters: the team led by Jule Eisenbud, a great name in American psychiatry and parapsychology, took every precaution to exclude any possibility of fraud; (2) By the nature of the device which delivered the medium's psychographs: a Polaroid which made any attempt at fraud difficult, for reasons which are detailed by the experimenters; (3) By the quantity and quality of the "psychographs"—around 800—that the medium left us; (4) By the nature of the phenomena produced, which combine extrasensory knowledge and the action of the mind on matter in a single phenomenon. On this point, I recommend reading the book by Professor Thomas Rabeyron of the University of Lyon, which devotes a chapter to Ted Serios (Rabeyron 2023). Thomas Rabeyron and I are currently working on a book about Ted Serios.

41 Eisenbud (1968).

two most distant points imaginable. When I was studying philosophy—this was before the *Cahiers noirs*⁴²—Heidegger’s thought was considered by the elite of philosophers the deepest and most refined form of philosophical questioning, while saucerism (*le soucoupisme*) was scorned as the most vulgar alienated belief. And yet, when we consider the question of elusiveness, it is hard not to link the thoughts it inspires to a central theme in the German philosopher’s thought: is this manifestation, which addresses us while masking itself, not the best concrete illustration available of Heidegger’s great thought?⁴³

It now occurs to me that when I wrote my 1975 text, I was preparing my philosophy degree, and I was taking a course on Heidegger. I don’t remember making a conscious connection at the time between the content of this course and my UAP preoccupations. Today, I realize that this idea must have been working on me unconsciously. This is undoubtedly a striking example of one of the resonance phenomena revealed and analyzed by Hartmut Rosa: a resonance between one of the major philosophers of our time, and a strange phenomenon that has marked the collective consciousness since 1947, and which, it seems, is destined to mark it more and more. This resonance needs to be made to speak for itself.

I won’t undertake this task at the end of this article, preferring to stay on the edge of my intuition. At most, I can risk drawing a few threads, following Pierre Hadot’s teaching.

Pierre Hadot has analyzed the successive interpretations given over the centuries to Heraclitus’ famous aphorism: “nature likes to hide.” Heidegger’s aphorism (“Being reveals itself by veiling itself”) comes at the end of a long series of interpretations. Hadot concludes from his study that history is a “series of creative counter-meanings.”⁴⁴ In fact, the philosopher’s thought refers above all to our modernity. Once again, we are returned to the theme of resonance.

Intrigued by this parallel, I did a few surveys to find out if any philosophers had glimpsed it and taken it on board. So far, I have found no such thing. On the other hand, I have discovered that certain authors keep circling around these ideas. This is particularly striking in Jean-Luc Marion’s book *Le visible et le révélé*, which sometimes appears to be an effort to transcribe the central problems of psychical

research into the scholarly language of phenomenology. For example: “Assuming that a phenomenon is without cause or reason, it would nevertheless not rhyme with nothing, since at the very least it would be given to consciousness; and, as given, it would be. By lifting the ban on sufficient reason, phenomenology liberates possibility, and thus opens the field to phenomena that may be marked by impossibility.”⁴⁵

Today, the “phenomenology of the inapparent” is developing in French phenomenology. Instead of focusing on abstractions that are difficult to grasp, certain philosophers prefer to concentrate on concrete phenomena central to human experience, such as *birth*. This new approach should therefore be able to accommodate the phenomena I have presented, and think of them in a higher sense. An enterprise whose very name is an oxymoron should logically be able to flourish in the study of oxymoronic manifestations of elusiveness. As far as I am concerned, that is the kind of research I’m planning from now on.

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42 The author here makes reference to the now infamous “Black Notebooks” of Heidegger, which conclusively attests to the philosopher’s unapologetic antisemitism and Nazi convictions. [Editor.]

43 As Jean-Marie Vaysse (2000) writes: “Being (Seyn) can be considered as a mode of the ‘Ereignis’, which is not a simple event, but the advent of the giving of a presence that shows itself only by concealing itself.”

44 Hadot (2004), p. 316.

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Response to “The Mystery of Elusiveness” by Dr Bertrand Méheust

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One of the strengths of his analysis is his rejection of what he very aptly calls the “engineer’s paradigm” in ufological reflection. Such a paradigm is misleading, the author shows: it rests on a *petitio principii* because it *assumes as given what should rather be demonstrated*. More concretely, the “engineer’s paradigm” presupposes without ever justifying that the UFO phenomenon must be analyzed from a technical perspective precisely because it involves *vehicles* whose movement and flight performance need to be understood. In other words, the engineer’s paradigm presupposes both the *perspective* from which it is appropriate to study UFOs, and moreover the *nature* of these phenomena: they can only be vehicles whose intriguing movement can

Bertrand Méheust is one of the most relevant and stimulating authors in French ufology. He coined in French the concept of “élusivité” [*elusiveness*] in 1975 to characterize UFO¹ phenomena, a concept that has had considerable legacy, particularly with Eric Zürcher who makes it the almost universal property of all UFO phenomena.² In his article, B. Méheust details the development of this concept and the evolution of its use. He also helped to make the connection between the witnesses’ accounts and science fiction works evident, as if the latter had provided a narrative framework, or even a perceptual one, for the testimonies.

A fine connoisseur of parapsychic phenomena to which he dedicated his Doctoral thesis and from which he derived two volumes of great erudition³, Méheust seeks to establish links between the ufological question *stricto sensu* and his knowledge in the field of parapsychics. Thus, he is led to “test” the concept of elusiveness in the analysis of poltergeists, many aspects of which can be shared with the phenomenology of UFOs.

only be explained by the possession of superior technology. Such a paradigm confines the reflection to the sole “technological” perspective and considers the question only from the angle of a “super performance” that could only be explained by technology possessed by advanced civilizations. B. Méheust is correct to show how this paradigm is based on prejudices and false certainties: it transposes a technical mindset as the only method of approaching a complex phenomenon.

Another strong point of his reflection is, thanks to the concept of elusiveness, to make a mode of appearance into *content*: the UFO does not merely appear elusively, but its appearance itself is the content of elusiveness. In other

1 The author reminds in his article of the distinction between UFO and UAP. However, it does not seem to play a particular role in his argument, and he does not seem to specifically adopt the new term UAP. On the contrary, he often refers to what he calls “the UFO question,” so I will speak of UFOs here for the sake of simplicity.

2 Cf. Eric Zürcher, *Révélation ufologiques. L’énigme de la huitième clé dévoilée* [UFO revelations. *The riddle of the eighth key revealed*], Agnières, JMG Editions, 2023.

3 Cf. Bertrand Méheust, *Somnambulisme et médiumnité* [Sleepwalking and Mediumship], deux volumes, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2003.

words, there is an *intentionality* of the UFO that *theatrically determines the content of its demonstration*, so that the author converts a characteristic of the mode of appearance into an explicit content of demonstration. The UFO is, in short, characterizable in a paradoxical or oxymoronic way as “that which shows itself as not showing itself”. In other words, with UFO phenomena, *negation* enters into the very *positivity* of a manifestation: the UFO presents its manifestation as *not* showing itself.

Finally, in ongoing discussion with the skeptical paradigm that only accepts elusiveness in a weak sense, B. Méheust shows why such a paradigm does not account for the testimonies or the objective facts that ufology has gradually developed.

Overall, B. Méheust is a key author because he allows us to perceive the flaws in two paradigms, those of the engineer and the skeptic, and he provides us with efficient concepts to think about ufology. However, several reservations can be made regarding such an approach. The first concerns the *delimitation* of the field of ufology. If the latter wants to establish itself as a rigorous, even scientific, approach, it must imperatively *circumscribe the type of phenomena it needs to study*. More precisely, it must define its field and determine the type of objects it should focus on. However, the elusiveness approach generates a double problem in this regard: first, instead of determining a specific type of objects and precisely defining a field, it considerably extends this field by introducing parapsychic phenomena such as poltergeists. One could say that Jacques Vallée, for several decades, has paved the way for such an opening⁴, but one is entitled to wonder whether this does not make it impossible to delineate what should be studied, and does not prevent ufology from establishing itself as a rigorous science. Let’s clarify this point. The entire point of B. Méheust is to make elusiveness a universal characteristic of UFO phenomena, a characteristic associated with a certain “theatricality”; but *this characteristic is not exclusive* since it is found in other phenomena, particularly in poltergeists, mentioned in the article. More generally, this allows the author to show that the general characteristics of UFO phenomena are the same as those of parapsychological phenomena. But this is methodologically unsatisfactory because if elusiveness is made the determining trait of UFO phenomena, one renounces determining their specificity and only *relates* them to a series of broader phenomena. In other words, despite appearances, *the author does not provide*

a specific characterization of UFO phenomena; rather, he offers a means to relate them to a broader range of phenomena—parapsychological phenomena. Therefore, the rigorous determination of the domain that ufology deals with—and which other areas of parapsychology do not deal with—is not delineated.

This problem is compounded with the mention of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). At the end of his analyses, B. Méheust indeed makes a connection between elusiveness and an aspect of the thought of the author of *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*] (1927), namely the question of withdrawal. By this means, the author seeks to show that parapsychic phenomena, through the elusiveness that characterizes them, could be better understood—or better described—from the Heideggerian idea of a withdrawal of Being [*Sein*]. But this rapprochement, once again, does not allow for specifying what is being talked about because, for Heidegger, *all phenomena, whatever they may be, can be characterized by the withdrawal and elusiveness* of what he calls in German the *Abgrund*; more precisely, *every being* [*Seiende*] *manifests at the cost of a withdrawal of Being* [*Sein*]. Thus, the *Contributions to Philosophy* [*Beiträge zur Philosophie*], developed in the 1940s, clearly show that every being is a result of a withdrawal of Being, and that in this regard, *every phenomenon* can only be a phenomenon by virtue of the withdrawal of Being through which phenomenality is made possible. Consequently, the invocation of Heidegger exacerbates the confusion of the argument: not only does one not understand what the *specificity* of ufology is within parapsychological phenomena, but with Heidegger, one no longer understands at all what the specificity of parapsychological phenomena is since the withdrawal of being, that is to say, elusiveness, is for Heidegger the universal and necessary mark of every phenomenon. Thus, Heidegger’s invocation dissolves the specificity of the field to be studied, instead of circumscribing it.

This brings us to a second reservation: many philosophical terms are used, but very few are clearly defined, so that, *philosophically speaking*, many passages are confusing. I would like to illustrate this using the notion of “phenomenology”, a term that B. Méheust uses repeatedly. But he uses it in a non-philosophical sense since it is a synonym for “description”; indeed, not wanting to adopt the perspective of the engineer’s paradigm, he is led to *describe* what the witnesses see instead of analyzing technical data. But in this case, why use the philosophical

4 Cf. Jacques Vallée, *Passport to Magonia*, Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1969.

term “phenomenology” instead of “description”? It is also necessary to understand the difference between description in the common sense and description in the phenomenological sense of the term. In the common sense, description refers to facts and presence; through language, therefore, present, factual realities are described, with the description having no other claim than to say “what is happening.” In contrast, *phenomenology, in a structural manner, does not describe facts; it describes essences*. In technical terms, phenomenology describes what are called “material *a priori*”, which refer to what makes the described thing meaningful to a consciousness. But what does Bertrand Méheust do then? Does he describe *facts* or does he describe *essences*? If he describes essences, that is, “material *a priori*”, the term “phenomenology” is justified; but if he only describes facts, the term “description” is more than sufficient. Now, insofar as essences allow for the delineation of the specificity of a described phenomenon, it seems to us that the author should abandon the term “phenomenology” since, in my view, he does not capture the specificity of the phenomena he studies.

In addition, the term “phenomenon” is never defined by the author, and all the usual lexicon of phenomenology is left unaddressed. In short, in phenomenology, “*the appearing*” is not the same as the *phenomenon*, a distinction that compels one to think about the difference between “manifestation” and “the phenomenon” as such. In technical terms, the *epoché* (suspension of judgment) specific to phenomenology aims to *reveal the appearing itself*, and not just the phenomenon; however, this crucial distinction of all phenomenology is absent from Méheust’s discourse. Consequently, one does not understand what pertains to the appearing and what pertains to the phenomenon in the criteria he analyzes.

Finally, in the absence of a strict definition of phenomenology, the author means by “phenomenon” two very different things: first, it refers to the *content of a perception*, thus a description of *what is perceived*, which amounts to describing the objective content of a perception. One can accept here the idea of “phenomenon” in the phenomenological sense, as it indeed refers to a content of consciousness, the meaning of which can be described by the latter. But with the introduction of the parapsychic, the fact is that one shifts towards a description of the witnesses’ *reactions*, thus towards a description that is less thought out from its content than by the *subjective attitudes* that result from it. Does this still count as part of the “phenomenon”? Only

a much stricter definition of what the author means by “phenomenology” would allow for a conclusion.

Finally, and this is my last reservation, it seems to us that the relationship with the laws of nature (laws of physics) is excessively tied to the engineer’s paradigm; however, *independently of the engineer’s paradigm*, sudden accelerations or a release from gravity appear abnormal: it is not necessary to adopt the engineer’s paradigm to see anomalies that are simultaneously possibilities since they occur. But conversely, when a witness sees a UFO phenomenon, it is still necessary that they are not a victim of a perceptual illusion or an interpretative error. Only a rigorously physical approach can dispel a number of perceptual errors, so much so that the author’s argument seems to commit two inversions: on the one hand, it is not necessary to refer to the engineer’s paradigm to consider that certain phenomena seem to violate the laws of nature. And on the other hand, only a physical and technical approach can distinguish what falls under a perceptual error from what falls under an abnormal phenomenon.

Overall, B. Méheust’s analyses are very stimulating and thought-provoking; they are rich with several decades of reflection and enrich the reader’s mind. If intelligence is the art of making connections, B. Méheust develops a great intelligence of the UFO phenomenon and makes a major contribution to it. Despite the reservations I have expressed, I express my gratitude for such analyses which, in essence, serve less to characterize ufology than to think about a *general ontology*; perhaps the ufological phenomena tell us that *every phenomenon refers to something unseen, that every manifestation only occurs from what does not show itself*, in short, that phenomena must be rethought based on what the great French philosopher Levinas (1905-1995) called the Nocturnal Events⁵, which Raoul Moati has recently highlighted very well.

5 Cf. Raoul Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being. A Guide to Totality and Infinity*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017, p. 12-18.



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Reply to Critical Note¹

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Dear sir, Dr. Cifone forwarded your Critical Note to me. I would like to thank you for this review, which gives a very accurate and sympathetic account of my thinking, and opens it up to new perspectives. You have found the words to say it. For example, I applaud you when you express what the engineer paradigm implies, when applied to UAPs. Or when you characterize UFO manifestation as follows: “In other words, with UFO phenomena, negation enters into the very positivity of a manifestation: the UFO presents its manifestation as not showing itself.” I could not have summed it up better. Your reservations about my occasional use of certain phenomenological concepts also seem justified. My philosophical culture, in the field of phenomenology, is not always equal to my intuitions, and this is undoubtedly the major flaw in my undertaking.

So, you criticize me for the weak or approximate use I have made of certain basic notions, and for sticking to a simple description of phenomena. I cannot try to hide my shortcomings here, but I can at least try to justify this incomplete approach. If I have sought above all to describe the manifestation of UAPs, it is also to put in brackets the contemporary presuppositions that it seems to solicit and encourage: it is not because UAPs give themselves as machines that they are necessarily machines produced by a transcendent technology. In short, as far as I have understood the phenomenological approach, what I retained most from the beginning of my investigation was the suspension of judgment. Subsequent exposure to the psychic sciences has convinced me that the evidence of our culture is sometimes almost invincible, with the result that phenomenologists have sometimes made assertions about the human mind that are considered apodictic, but which do not hold water if we accept the reality of intellectual psi. Educated by

these difficulties, I told myself that if I could describe the manifestations of UAPs by putting the prejudices of our culture in brackets, I would already have fulfilled at least the first part of the program.

Staying on the subject of description, I have to confess that I did not fully understand the reasoning you drew from the fact that, in your eyes, poltergeists are not “specifically visual.” As far as I know, the visual component of these phenomena is sometimes very strong. In many cases, witnesses see objects flying, twisting and moving. But, and this may go in your direction, they don't see them go, rarely is their movement seen as a whole, as a normal movement. Witnesses and experimenters seem to agree on this point. In the famous case of the Arcachon clinic, for example, the stones came from who knows where... But this can be drawn in the direction of your analysis: this impossible or incomplete movement is at the same time referred to as a non-movement.

¹ We here reproduce the English and French versions of Dr. Méheust's reply to the “Critical Note”. Dr. Méheust has supplied *Limina* with both. [Editor.]

Aware of my limitations, I almost gave up on phenomenological references, (*j'ai failli abandonner*, is that right?) for the reason you rightly stated, feeling that I had not mastered the subject enough. But in the end, a “thought from behind” pushed me to take the risk of keeping them. I wanted to maintain the fragile thread that leads me to Heidegger and to the “phenomenology of the inapparent,” a branch of thought that is flourishing in France, but which I discovered late, pushed towards these perspectives by my thinking on UAPs. So, this allusions to Heidegger are not the conclusions of a mastered and documented research, but the still intuitive apprehension of a new field of exploration. This is why I have refrained from saying more in my conclusion.

I would like to add an argument drawn from my personal experience, which may not sound very scientific, but as you know, not everything in scientific research is rational: when my intuition tells me to dig in such and such a place, I generally find something there - but more and something else than I had originally imagined. This is what happened, for example, at the start of my research with the precession of science fiction, which surpassed, in its scope and implications, what I had first sensed. I am betting that this is what could happen with this new meditation theme, but I am prepared to give up the idea if it proves to be ill-founded.

With regard to Heidegger's thought on the withdrawal of Being, you are right to point out that, by designating the general structure—the fact that every being manifests itself at the cost of the withdrawal of Being—it can be applied to all phenomena and therefore, why not, to UAPs, thus losing all definition. But, and this is my central argument, “normal” phenomena, if we may put it this way, are content to be what they are, whereas UAPs stand out against the background of “normal” phenomena by the ostentatious and oxymoronic nature of their display. For me, this is an essential fact (to which I'll return later in an attempt to respond to one of your objections) that enables me to define my object.

That is why, in venturing this parallel with Heidegger, I have refrained from specifying my diagnosis, staying on the edge of my intuition, and contenting myself with pointing out an enigma to be dug out. I am not at all trying there to think elusiveness through Heidegger. What astonished me at first, and what continues to astonish me, is the resonance between a strange phenomenon emerging from the depths of our collective experience, and one of the great thinkers of our time, who, as you know, is highly contested today. It is this resonance that I have first identified, and which I would

like to try to fathom and make speak, drawing in particular on the perspectives developed by Pierre Hadot in *Le voile d'Isis* (The Veil of Isis). Heidegger's critics have accused him of forcing ancient Greek texts to fit his views, and Hadot has shown that his interpretation of the famous formula “nature loves to hide” is the latest in a long series of “creative counter-meanings.” In the final analysis, then, we are being sent not so much to antiquity as to twentieth century thought.

Spotting resonances, attempting to analyze them and make them speak has been my personal trademark for half a century. It just so happens—but perhaps by chance—that Heidegger's thinking on the withdrawal of Being preceded the manifestation of UAPs by two decades, just as the descriptions of science fiction authors, reinforced by pulp illustrations, preceded the first manifestations of UAPs by a few decades.

You have also raised an essential problem, which concerns the delimitation of my object, and the difficulties it raises. Sensing the problem, I added a passage on this theme to my article. I don't know if you've read it, so I'll give it to you again.

“Before unfolding my argument, I still have to answer a predictable objection. In the pages that follow, I am going to apply the concept of elusiveness to all facets of the UAP dossier, from ‘things seen in the sky,’ to use Jung's expression, to close encounters and abductions. But the idea that we are dealing with facets of a single phenomenon is not self-evident. Nothing proves that when we speak of the ‘UAP phenomenon,’ we are not amalgamating different realities into a fictitious entity. This is obviously an important objection. But, strictly speaking, there is no evidence to the contrary. And since close encounters and well-documented abductions have the central characteristic, in my eyes, of recapitulating all the facets of the phenomena observed since 1947, while exhibiting the same elusiveness as celestial objects, I have decided to include them in my meditation on elusiveness. Elusive objects are so rare in observable nature that it does not seem outrageous to include them provisionally in the same category, even if it means broadening and relaxing it later. Following this line of reasoning, at the end of my presentation I am going to bring in another category of elusive objects, poltergeists.”

To this text, I must add a few clarifications. As I wrote in my article, elusiveness can be conceived in two ways: as “strong” and therefore “true,” or as “weak” and therefore projective. Dogmatic skeptics, relying on the perception of reality that dominates our culture, ask us to sign a blank

cheque and postulate that in all possible cases we will eventually find a trivial explanation of this kind. Yet, taken in their purity, these two theses remain unprovable. In the present state of the problem, we must therefore assume that the UAP file is a chemically impure mixture of cases in which “true elusiveness” has manifested itself, and cases in which “projective elusiveness” has yet to be unmasked. All investigators, myself included, have dealt with cases that seemed solid, and which found a trivial explanation. The conceivable triggers are very numerous and constitute a veritable *inventaire de Prévert* (“Prévert inventory”²). But in the skeptical hypothesis, this multiplicity is of little importance. What is at stake is always the human psyche *as we think we know it*, which, fed by the representations of our culture, would be activated by these triggers.

However, in my article, I have sought, through data analysis—suggesting statistical research to be carried out, such as the creation of a UFO dream bank—to show that to explain the core of well-documented cases, we need to postulate a psyche of unknown nature that would reveal itself as such through the inexplicable restraint that affects all facets of its manifestations, a restraint that appears, in my view, when we consider the case on a global scale.

There remains one important point on which I disagree with you. You object that, with elusiveness, the scope of our research widens to such an extent that the object becomes difficult to pin down. Rightly or wrongly, I still think the opposite on this point: it is precisely in order to restrict the scope of my investigation that I have turned to UFOs and poltergeists, as these are, to my knowledge, *the only two known elusive objects in the observable universe*. (I am talking here only about spontaneous elusive phenomena: phenomena produced by mediums, whether physical psi or intellectual psi, also bear the mark of elusiveness, but to a lesser degree, since experiments can be prepared to elicit them, which is not the case with UAPs or poltergeists. And I am also leaving aside the behavior of certain quantum objects, which is beyond my competence). So, in my opinion, elusiveness would make it possible to narrow the field of research, and thus to define the object. The object of my reflection is the elusiveness of UAPs, insofar as it constitutes their signature. If I were to take this line of reasoning to the limit, elusiveness would be a kind of “index sui”: the rare and singular behavior of elusive objects would make it possible to define the field of my research. We

are here in a kind of circle, and I hope it's not a vicious one.

Thank you again for your review,
Bertrand Méheust

Cher monsieur, Dr. Cifone m’a fait suivre votre Critical Note. Je tiens à vous remercier pour cette recension, qui rend compte de ma réflexion avec beaucoup de précision et de sympathie, et qui l’ouvre sur de nouvelles perspectives. Vous avez su trouver les mots pour le dire et je trouve parfois votre formulation supérieure à la mienne. Par exemple j’applaudis quand vous exprimez ce qu’implique le paradigme de l’ingénieur, quand on l’applique aux PANs. Ou bien encore quand vous caractérisez de la sorte la manifestation des ovnis: « In other words, with PAN phenomena, negation enters into the very positivity of a manifestation: the PAN presents its manifestation as not showing itself. » On ne pouvait mieux résumer ce que j’ai voulu dire.

Vos réserves concernant l’usage que je fais parfois de certains concepts de la phénoménologie me semblent également justifiées. Ma culture philosophique, dans le domaine de la phénoménologie, n’est pas toujours à la hauteur de mes intuitions, c’est là sans doute le défaut majeur de mon entreprise.

Ainsi vous me reprochez l’usage faible ou approximatif que j’ai fait de certaines notions de base, et de m’en tenir à une simple description des phénomènes. Je ne peux ici chercher à masquer mes lacunes, mais je peux au moins tenter de justifier cette démarche incomplète. Si j’ai cherché à décrire la manifestation des PAN, c’est aussi pour mettre entre parenthèses les présupposés contemporains qu’elle semble solliciter et encourager: ce n’est pas parce que les PANs se donnent comme des machines qu’ils sont nécessairement des machines produites par une technologie transcendante. Bref, de la démarche de la phénoménologie, pour autant que je l’ai comprise, j’ai surtout retenu au début de mon enquête la suspension du jugement. La fréquentation des sciences psychiques m’a convaincu par la suite que les

2 It seems to me that I owe English-speaking readers an explanation here. “L’inventaire à la Prévert” is a French expression that refers to the poetic value of absurd enumerations. Surrealist poets have, in their own way, used the inventory as a poetic form. The best-known inventory is that of Jacques Prévert, who deliberately mixes objects with no apparent relationship to each other.

évidences de notre culture sont parfois presque invincibles, ce qui fait que des phénoménologues ont parfois tenu sur l'esprit humain des assertions jugées apodictiques qui pourtant ne tiennent pas la route si l'on admet la réalité du psi intellectuel. Instruit par ces difficultés, je me suis dit que si je parvenais à décrire les manifestations des PANs en mettant entre parenthèses les préjugés de notre culture, je remplirais déjà au moins la première partie du programme.

Pour rester sur ce thème de la description, j'avoue ne pas avoir compris complètement le raisonnement que vous tirez de l'aspect à vos yeux faiblement visuel des poltergeists. Pour autant que je sache, la composante visuelle de ces phénomènes est parfois très forte. Dans beaucoup de cas les témoins voient les objets voler, se tordre, se déplacer. Mais, et cela peut aller dans votre sens, ils ne les voient pas partir, rarement leur mouvement est vu dans son ensemble, comme un mouvement normal: ils ne voient presque jamais le mouvement complet. Il semble y avoir chez les témoins et les expérimentateurs un accord sur ce point. Ainsi, dans le cas célèbre de la clinique d'Arcachon, les pierres venaient d'on ne sait où... Mais cela peut se tirer dans le sens de votre analyse: ce mouvement impossible ou incomplet se désigne en même temps comme un non mouvement, on retrouve le schéma général.

Conscient de mes limites, j'ai failli renoncer aux références phénoménologiques, pour la raison que vous avez justement énoncée, estimant ne pas maîtriser assez le sujet. Mais finalement une « pensée de derrière » m'a poussé à prendre le risque de les conserver. J'ai voulu maintenir le fil fragile qui me conduit à Heidegger et à la « phénoménologie de l'inapparent », une branche de la philosophie en plein essor en France, mais que j'ai découverte récemment, poussé vers ces perspectives par ma réflexion sur les PANs.³ Il ne s'agit donc pas sur ce point des conclusions d'une recherche maîtrisée et documentée, mais de l'appréhension encore intuitive d'un champ d'exploration nouveau. C'est d'ailleurs la raison pour laquelle je me suis abstenu d'en dire plus dans ma conclusion.

J'ajouterai un argument tiré de mon expérience personnelle qui ne sonnera peut être pas très scientifique, mais comme vous le savez tout n'est pas rationnel dans la recherche scientifique: lorsque mon intuition me dit de creuser à tel endroit, je trouve en général quelque chose à l'endroit en question—mais plus et autre chose que ce que j'imaginai

au départ. C'est par exemple ce qui s'est produit au début de ma recherche avec la précession de la science-fiction, qui a dépassé par son ampleur et ses implications, ce que j'avais d'abord pressenti. Je fais le pari que c'est ce qui pourrait se produire avec ce nouveau thème de méditation, mais je suis prêt à renoncer à l'idée si elle s'avère mal fondée.

S'agissant de la pensée de Heidegger sur le retrait de l'Être, vous avez raison de souligner que, désignant la structure générale - le fait que chaque étant se manifeste au prix du retrait de l'Être - elle peut s'appliquer à tous les phénomènes et donc, pourquoi pas aux PANs, perdant ainsi toute définition. Mais, et c'est là mon argument central, les phénomènes « normaux », si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, se contentent d'être ce qu'ils sont, tandis que les PANs se découpent sur le fond des phénomènes « normaux » par la nature ostentatoire et oxymoresque de leur exhibition. C'est pour moi un fait essentiel (sur lequel je reviendrai plus loin pour tenter de répondre à une de vos objections) qui me permet de cerner mon objet.

C'est pourquoi, en risquant ce parallèle avec Heidegger, je me suis abstenu de préciser mon diagnostic, en restant au bord de mon intuition, et en me contentant de pointer une énigme à creuser. Je ne cherche pas du tout à penser l'élusivité à travers Heidegger. Ce qui m'a d'abord étonné, ce qui continue de m'étonner, c'est cette *résonance* entre un phénomène étrange sorti des profondeurs de notre expérience collective, et une des grandes pensées de notre temps, par ailleurs très contestée aujourd'hui, comme vous le savez. C'est cette résonance que j'ai d'abord repérée et que je voudrais tenter de sonder et de faire parler, en prenant notamment appui sur les perspectives développées par Pierre Hadot dans *Le voile d'Isis*. Heidegger est accusé par ses critiques d'avoir forcé les textes antiques pour les faire entrer dans ses vues, et Hadot a montré que son interprétation de la formule fameuse: « la nature aime à se cacher » est la dernière en date d'une longue série de « contresens créateurs ». C'est donc finalement moins à l'antiquité que nous sommes envoyés, qu'à la pensée du XX^e siècle.

Repérer les résonances, tenter de les analyser et de les faire parler, c'est depuis un demi siècle, ma marque personnelle. Il se trouve—mais c'est peut être un hasard—que la pensée de Heidegger sur le retrait de l'être a précédé de deux décennies la manifestation des PANs, comme les descriptions des auteurs de science-fiction, renforcées

3 Quand j'ai commencé mes études de philosophie, je me passionnais pour Jung. Puis j'ai découvert les travaux de Gilbert Durand sur l'Imaginal. Ma thèse sur le mesmérisme a été aiguillonnée au départ par Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, un disciple de Durand qui enseignait alors à l'Université de Dijon. Je ne me retourne vers la phénoménologie que depuis quelques années, poussé par l'idée de sonder le concept d'élusivité. Mais j'ai beaucoup de lectures en retard en ce domaine, et je vous remercie pour les références que vous me conseillez.

par les illustrations des pulps, ont précédé à la même époque de quelques décennies les premières manifestations des PANs.

Vous avez également soulevé un problème essentiel, qui concerne la délimitation de mon objet, et des difficultés qu'elle soulève. Pressentant le problème, j'ai ajouté sur ce thème un passage à mon article. Ne sachant pas si vous l'avez lu, je vous le redonne.

“Before unfolding my argument, I still have to answer a predictable objection. In the pages that follow, I am going to apply the concept of elusiveness to all facets of the UAP dossier, from ‘things seen in the sky’, to use Jung's expression, to close encounters and abductions. But the idea that we are dealing with facets of a single phenomenon is not self-evident. Nothing proves that when we speak of the ‘UAP phenomenon’, we are not amalgamating different realities into a fictitious entity. This is obviously an important objection. But, strictly speaking, there is no evidence to the contrary. And since close encounters and well-documented abductions have the central characteristic, in my eyes, of recapitulating all the facets of the phenomena observed since 1947, *while exhibiting the same elusiveness as celestial objects*, I have decided to include them in my meditation on elusiveness. Elusive objects are so rare in observable nature that it does not seem outrageous to include them provisionally in the same category, even if it means broadening and relaxing it later. Following this line of reasoning, at the end of my presentation I am going to bring in another category of elusive objects, poltergeists.”

A ce texte, je dois ajouter quelques précisions. Comme je l'ai écrit dans mon article, l'élusivité peut se concevoir de deux manières, comme « forte » et donc « vraie », ou comme « faible » et donc « projective ». Les sceptiques dogmatiques, en s'appuyant sur la perception du réel qui domine notre culture, nous demandent de signer un chèque en blanc et de postuler que dans tous les cas possibles on finira par trouver une explication triviale de ce genre. Or, considérées dans leur pureté, ces deux thèses restent indémonstrables. Dans l'état actuel du problème nous devons donc poser que le « dossier des PANs » est un mélange chimiquement impur entre des cas où se serait manifestée une « élusivité vraie » et des cas qui relèveraient encore d'une « élusivité projective » encore non démasquée. Tous les enquêteurs, moi y compris, ont eu affaire à des cas qui semblaient solides, et qui ont trouvé une explication triviale. Les déclencheurs concevables sont très

nombreux, ils constituent même un véritable « inventaire à la Prévert ».⁴ Mais dans l'hypothèse sceptique, cette multiplicité importe peu, ce qui est en jeu, c'est toujours le psychisme humain tel qu'on croit le connaître, qui, alimenté par les représentations de notre culture, serait activé par ces déclencheurs.

Or, dans mon article, j'ai cherché, par l'analyse des données—en suggérant des recherches statistiques à conduire, par exemple la création d'une banque des rêves d'ovnis—à montrer que pour expliquer le noyau des cas bien documentés, il faut postuler un psychisme de nature inconnue qui se dévoilerait comme tel par la retenue inexplicable qui affecte toutes les facettes de ses manifestations, retenue qui apparaît selon moi quand on envisage le dossier à l'échelle globale.

Il subsiste un point important sur lequel je reste en désaccord avec vous. Vous objectez qu'avec l'élusivité le champ de notre recherche s'élargit de façon telle que l'objet devient difficile à cerner. A tort ou à raison, je pense toujours sur ce point le contraire: c'est justement pour restreindre le champ de mon enquête que j'ai fait appel aux ovnis et aux poltergeists, car ce sont là, à ma connaissance, dans l'univers observable, les *deux seuls objets élusifs connus*. (Je ne parle ici que des phénomènes élusifs *spontanés* : les phénomènes produits par les médiums, qu'il s'agisse du psi physique ou du psi intellectuel, portent également la marque de l'élusivité, mais à un degré moindre, puisqu'on peut préparer des expériences pour les susciter, ce qui n'est le cas ni avec les PANs ni avec les poltergeists. Et je mets également de côté le comportement de certains objets quantiques qui échappe à ma compétence). De ce fait, l'élusivité permettrait selon moi de resserrer le champ de la recherche, et donc de cerner l'objet. L'objet de ma réflexion, c'est l'élusivité des UAPs, en tant qu'elle constituerait leur signature. Si je pousse le raisonnement à la limite, l'élusivité serait en quelque sorte « index sui » : ce qui permet de cerner le champ de ma recherche, ce serait le comportement rare et singulier des objets élusifs. Nous sommes dans une sorte de cercle, j'espère qu'il n'est pas vicieux.

En vous remerciant encore pour votre recension,
Bertrand Méheust

4 Il me semble que je dois ici une explications aux tecteurs de langue anglaise. « L'inventaire à la Prévert » est une expression française qui désigne la valeur poétique des énumérations absurdes. Les poètes surréalistes ont, à leur manière, utilisé l'inventaire comme forme poétique. L'inventaire le plus connu est celui de Jacques Prévert qui mêle délibérément des objets sans rapport apparent les uns avec les autres.



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Normal, Abnormal, Paranormal: Philosophical Determination of a Ufological Lexicon

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to reflect on ufological questions based on the concept of “normality” and abnormality. Aiming to delineate the field of ufology, it seeks to distinguish what is abnormal from what is impossible, while questioning the criteria by which a phenomenon can be deemed “abnormal.” Introducing etymology of many terms and the notion of “perception,” the article shows that human perception has its own norms, which are therefore relative to it; but these norms are not absolute in the sense that they can be violated, which invites us not to confuse the normative structure of human perception with impossibilities in themselves. Moreover, the reflection on perception is combined with the scientific norms conveyed by the “laws of Nature.” If the UAPs exhibit deviations from the laws of nature, it is necessary to characterize these deviations and determine whether they are “abnormal” or “anomalous”; Leibniz’s conceptual framework is then invoked to clarify what a deviation from the laws of nature means, and what the possibility of such a deviation entails.

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1. Introduction

What can philosophy bring to UFO research? This is a question whose answer is not self-evident because, on the surface, very few aspects of ufological phenomena intersect with philosophical concerns. The latter does not concern itself with what are traditionally called “UFOs” nor, even

less, with abnormal phenomena, and if it can occasionally mention humanoids or extraterrestrial entities, it can only be within the framework of heuristic¹ thought experiments, and not in the context of a precise study of the reality of the latter.

However, upon closer examination, several avenues offered by philosophy can be identified. The first, of a historical nature, consists of accounting for the speculations

¹ A good overview of what the call to the fiction of the extraterrestrial hypothesis might mean can be found in Boudou (2006), pp. 199-220.

that, for 2500 years, have been dedicated to non-human, albeit corporeal², intelligences, and presenting the very varied arguments that have advocated for the existence of such intelligences throughout the history of thought. This is what Paul Mirault and I, following Steven J. Dick³, attempted to establish in a book titled *Philosophy at the Risk of Extraterrestrial Intelligence*.⁴ But such an approach remains partly external to the ufological phenomenon, in that it investigates less the phenomena themselves reported by UFO witnesses than the intellectual possibility of conceiving other forms of intelligence within the framework of intellectual speculation.

That is why I propose to present below a number of other elements, intrinsically linked to ufological phenomena, which philosophy could seize upon and on which its discourse could be fruitful. These elements seem to us to number three:

1. A normative reflection on what the abnormality of a phenomenon means.
2. A cognitive reflection on what perception is in general, and an abnormal perception in particular.
3. An epistemological reflection on what laws in physics are and what an anomaly means in relation to a law.

Such an approach allows for circumventing the usual problem of ufology because it modifies the stakes: *it is not about determining the nature of the object in question*, but about questioning an *oddity* in a *differential* manner. More precisely, it is a matter of starting from the principle that any testimony about UFOs is based on a sense of strangeness that can be formalized from the notion of deviation; however, any deviation only makes sense in relation to a situation deemed normal. That is why I propose to conceptually specify the different forms that these deviations can take, which requires, for each case, conceptually determining what a normal situation means.

It follows from this perspective that the approach proposed in this article is not metaphysical, except for the part dedicated to the laws of nature; on the contrary, it aims to probe what experience shows and to account for the reasons *why an observation is interpreted as strange*, starting from the principle that *nothing is strange in itself*, with strangeness only appearing *relative to a perceptual or cognitive expectation that has been thwarted*. Without determining these perceptual or cognitive expectations that are challenged by UFO phenomena, that

is, without determining the structural norms of perception and knowledge, it is impossible to establish the meaning of the manifest strangeness of UFO phenomena. Therefore, this article does not aim to state *a priori* what phenomena should be to be considered as UFOs, but rather to determine *a priori* different modalities of strangeness, made manifest by deviations from perceptual or cognitive expectations.

2. Naming ufological phenomena: *homalos, norma, nomos*

2.1 Quick review of institutional acronyms

For anyone interested in UFO phenomena, the basis of the documentation remains founded on both civilian and military testimonies, to which are added detections carried out by radars sometimes accompanied by a number of physical effects on the witnesses themselves—hypersomnia, pain, etc.—or on the environment where the phenomena were observed. The first question to ask, since nothing can be conducted outside of testimonies, is therefore the *reason* why an individual deems it appropriate to provide one to the competent authorities, that is, the *reason* why what they observe seems sufficiently *abnormal* to be reported. However, the problems begin when one tries to understand *in relation to what an observation can be deemed abnormal*, and when one attempts to account for both the perceptual norms of the civilian witness and those governing scientific life, scientific norms which one can easily imagine do not coincide with those of ordinary perception.

If we examine the so-called “institutional” designations of UFO phenomena, we find that a recent evolution has manifested, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon domain. Let us recall a few well-established facts in this regard. On December 16th, 2017, the existence of an American program aimed at analyzing potential unknown aerospace threats was made public. Thanks to this announcement, everyone discovered that, from 2007 to at least 2012, there had existed an organization named AATIP, an acronym for *Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program*, which seems to have been succeeded by the UAP Task Force, with UAP being the acronym for *Unidentified Aerial Phenomena*, corresponding to what the French call PAN, *Phénomènes Aéro-spatiaux Non-identifiés*. The latter acronym tends to replace that of UFOs

² Christian theology, judging that Angels are not corporeal, specifying that they are corporeal intelligences allows us not to confuse angelic intelligence with the intelligence of non-human beings within the historical perspective we have adopted.

³ Cf. Dick (1984).

⁴ Cf. Gress and Mirault (2016).

(Unidentified Flying Objects) due to its greater neutrality—the notion of “phenomenon,” which we will revisit, is more neutral and cautious than that of “object,” which seems to commit to the reality of the observed phenomenon.

All of this would be irrelevant to the issue at hand if, recently, an inflection in the acronym UAP had not been observed since 2022 and under the impetus of NASA, with the A no longer being heard as the initial of “*Aerial*” but as that of “*Anomalous*.” Similarly, when the Department of Defense announced the creation of the AARO (*All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office*) on July 20th, 2022, it was the term *Anomaly* that was chosen to describe the phenomena the newly established organization would address.

2.2 Etymology of the English terms *anomalous* and *Anomaly*

The recent substitution of *Anomaly* or *anomalous* for *Arial* is precious to us because the English word *anomalous* can be translated into French as both ‘anormal’ and ‘anomal,’ thus introducing a fruitful ambiguity. The English adjective *anomalous*, just like the noun *Anomaly*, is derived from the Latin *anomalus*, which itself was developed from the Greek *anomalos* meaning “irregular.” Moreover, *anomalos*, in Greek, is constructed from the term *homalos*, which can be translated as “similar” or “the same.”

Thus, what is *an-homalos* is literally the negation of “similar” or “the same,” the negation of what repeats identically, that is, fundamentally the *negation of an iteration*; therefore, *anomalous* is what is simply different, what cannot be reduced to identity, *what is not iterative*. To say that a phenomenon is *anomalous* is to indicate that it is *different*; but different from what? From what is identical, La Palice would say...

2.3 Etymology of the adjective ‘abnormal’

This is where an unexpected gap with French arises, which, with the adjectives ‘*anormal*’ and ‘*anomal*,’ contains a greater precision than the English term. Despite appearances, *anomalous* in English and *anomal* in French are not related, any more than *anomalous* and *anormal* in French are. Let’s start with the latter: the adjective ‘abnormal’ (*anormal* in French) is derived from the Latin *norma*, initially meaning square, and then, over time, its meaning expanded to signify “principle”

or “rule.” The adjective ‘*normalis*’, therefore, very logically first referred to what formed a right angle, then extended to the idea of conformity to a rule.

In this regard, what is normal in its original sense is what is determined by a square, therefore what does not lean to the right or the left, what is plumb, what is *balanced*, is also normal in its extended sense, which is compliant with a rule, which manifests regularity, in sum, what conforms to a standard. On the other hand, ‘abnormal’ is what deviates from a balance, a rule, and by extension, from regularity. The construction of the term ‘abnormal’ thus specifies *in relation to what* something is abnormal: it is abnormal in relation to *norma*, in relation to the rule, and can be translated as “irregular.”

2.4 Etymology of the noun ‘anomaly’

The term ‘anomaly,’ on the other hand, is derived from the Greek word ‘*nomos*,’ which has multiple meanings: while its translation as “law” is well-known, it should also include “custom,” “convention,” and “shared opinion.” The “*nomos*” does not adhere to the usual distinction between fact and law, since while it systematically evokes an imperative force, it can root this in fact through its customary and conventional aspect, or in law through its legislative dimension. The anomaly or the anomaly reflects this hesitation by qualifying both what deviates from conventional rules and what cannot be brought back to a known law of nature.

Overall, it appears that ‘anomalous’ in English, ‘*anormal*’ and ‘*anomal*’ in French, are based on three different roots, the first indicating a deviation from the same, the second a deviation from the norm, that is, from the rule, the third a deviation from the *nomos*, that is, fundamentally from an *authority having the force of law*, whether it be customary, conventional, natural, or scientific.

2.5 Etymology of the term ‘paranormal’

To these three terms must be added the one that, in the wake of 19th-century parapsychology, seems to have appeared in 1903 under the pen of James Maxwell⁵, namely ‘paranormal’. If the adjective ‘normal’ comes, as we have just said, from the Latin ‘*normalis*’ meaning conformity to a rule, the prefix ‘*para*’ comes from Greek and means “beside” or “parallel to,” with the noun ‘parallel’ itself being constructed from the prefix ‘*para*.’ It follows that *the paranormal is not against the norm*

5 Cf. Maxwell (1903). On this subject, one can read the excellent article of Leigh Penman, “The History of the Word *Paranormal*” (Penman 2015).

but rather *beside* or on the fringes of it, which is therefore at best incomplete and at worst false, since it cannot account for a series of phenomena developing outside what it claims to govern.

It follows from this initial approach, which consists of taking the characterizations seriously, that a first clarification could be made regarding what the deviation is in relation to: do ufological phenomena deviate from norms — *norma* —, laws — *nomoi* —, or iterations — *homalos*? The first case indicates a *normative* problem, the second a *legislative* problem, the third an *iterative* problem. Determining which category or categories ufological phenomena belong to would constitute a first clarification. Once this is done, it would be appropriate to ask what the deviation exhibited by such phenomena means: are they simply *different* from what the norms, laws, or iterative repetitions predict, or do they *violate* them?

3. The unusual is not the impossible: empirical norm and structural norm of perception

Let's return to the initial question of the testimony of a ufological phenomenon; is it based on the observation of a difference—*anomalous*—, a deviation from a norm (which one?) or from a scientifically established law? If it is a deviation from a norm, is that norm simply ineffective or is it violated by the observation? Finally, how do the abnormal and the anomaly relate to the paranormal?

It is true that a series of distinctions have been established by convention that can be recalled here: what is generally called *anormal* in French is what is unusual for a perception, *anomal* in French is what cannot be described according to a scientifically established rule nor predicted by a law, and *paranormal* is what relates to observable effects that could only be explained by an unknown force, which is itself unobservable. As for the English term 'anomalous,' which is very broad, it encompasses anything that shows a difference in relation to a regularity, regardless of the nature of that regularity.

One could therefore say, following these distinctions, that the civilian witness of a UFO phenomenon considers what is unusual to be abnormal, and that when he reports his testimony to the competent authorities, he does so because he is troubled by the non-customary, unprecedented nature of the observed phenomenon. But it is immediately apparent

that such a reduction of abnormality to the unusual is remarkably weak and unsatisfactory because, quite often, the phenomena in question are not only rare; they are also perceived as contrary to what should be possible. Let's illustrate this in two ways.

3.1 An unusual phenomenon is not an impossible phenomenon: the case of Valensole

Let's first recall the well-known Valensole encounter of 1965. The witness, Maurice Masse, claims to have seen an oval craft in his field and encountered two humanoids leaning over a patch of lavender, aiming some sort of "weapon" at him. Let's focus on these first: from a perceptual standpoint, we will readily acknowledge that encountering humanoids of one meter is unusual, but the encounter with a humanoid is only *disorienting from a perceptual perspective*, which itself is reduced to empirical normativity. Perceiving a humanoid does not contradict the laws of nature, does not contradict the laws of logic; *perceiving a humanoid does not fall, simply put, under what we consider logically impossible*; it is indeed a rare phenomenon, producing an empirical deviation from a perceptual habit, but it is not what a perception judges as absolutely impossible: it is merely an encounter for which we have not been empirically prepared. Even better, this could be proof of the existence of extraterrestrial beings whose existence can be anticipated through speculation, as Kant suggests in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781-1787):

If it were possible to decide the matter through some experience, I would gladly bet all my possessions that there are inhabitants [*Einwohner*] at least on some of the planets we see. That's why I say it's not just an opinion, but a strong belief (on the correctness of which I would already risk many advantages of life), that makes me think there are also inhabitants in other worlds [*Bewohner anderer Welten*]⁶.

Eventually, to put it very simply, encountering or perceiving a being with a non-human appearance on Earth is disconcerting but does not contradict logic in any way.

6 Kant (1781/1996), AK, III, 534-535, A 825/B 853.

3.2 What is an impossible phenomenon? The structural norms of perception

The case is quite different for characteristics associated with UAPs, particularly their instantaneous disappearance or the merging of multiple “objects” that initially appeared distinct. When numerous witnesses, both civilian and military, claim to have seen the observed phenomena disappear on the spot—such is the case of Ray Bowyer in the April 2007 sighting over the Channel reported by Leslie Kean⁷—something manifests that we tend to judge impossible. Jung himself reported with astonishment this phenomenon of sudden disappearance:

“According to a large number of testimonies, especially from the early days of their appearances, flying saucers suddenly appear and disappear just as suddenly. They can be detected by radar, but they remain invisible to the eye, and conversely, they can be observed by the eye without being recorded by radar!⁸”

Here, *the problem has nothing to do conceptually with small humanoids examining a field of lavender*; when a phenomenon suddenly disappears, we are not dealing merely with an issue of empirical rarity, but with something that, according to our standards, should not be possible, that is to say, something that is *contradictory*: a material phenomenon cannot suddenly disappear, elude perception, because that *contradicts* everything we understand about matter, which we always associate with permanence and continuity.

That is why many characteristics of UFOs can be understood through the concept of perceptual *impossibility*: seeing matter disappear on the spot contradicts what we consider to be its structural norms, contradicts what we know rationally and not just empirically about matter, namely that it cannot suddenly appear or suddenly disappear. The same goes for the merging of distinct phenomena into a single entity.

3.3 Perceiving an effect as “magical”: the enlightening case of the magic show

This distinction is perfectly evident through the case of the magic show. Under what conditions does a spectator judge that the effect presented to them is *magical*? Not because the effect is rare or unprecedented, but on the express condition that *something deemed absolutely impossible from a perceptual standpoint*—an instantaneous transposition of

objects, a transformation of one object into another, a body being cut and then reassembled, etc.—becomes possible in the performance, in sum, on the express condition that the structuring laws of perception seem to be violated. More precisely, it is understood that perception is associated with a certain idea of matter: thus, the laws of perception are nothing more than the considerations we all have about matter and which are not related to a problem of habit. For us, it is *inherently impossible* for matter to disappear instantly—that is, suddenly no longer be perceived—instantaneously transpose—that is, be perceived in two different places very far apart from each other in an instant—or merge with another material entity—that is, contradict the integrity of bodies.

If this is observed during a performance, then it *contradicts* what we *necessarily* conceive about matter, and it is because we all have such representations that everyone can understand, in a magic show, what is precisely *abnorma*. In short, being amazed by a magic trick is only possible if what our reasoning establishes about the material is found to be flawed and contradicted by what we see.

Hence the requirement to distinguish between what is normal by habit, and what is normal by structural necessity of what we deem possible regarding matter; by contrast, it can be determined with greater precision what *abnormal* [*anormal* in French] means depending on whether it is a flatly empirical problem of frequency or a problem of manifestation of what my perception nonetheless presents to me as impossible. A mechanical link with the paranormal would be established in that a perception of abnormal phenomena could be explained by the activation of a mental force *corrupting the structural norms of perception*, with the paranormal then being conceived as the domain of phenomena grasped in a mode parallel to that of ordinary perception.

3.4 What philosophy has to say about perception and matter

If there is one domain in which philosophy has made extensive efforts, it is that of perception. It has shown that perception is not solely constituted by our habits but also by implicit reasoning: we associate with matter the idea of a certain *permanence* coupled with *continuity*, so much so that a material element which, *instantaneously*, would come from nowhere, or disappear on the spot, or even change instantly

7 Kean (2011/2014), p. 105.

8 Jung (1958/1974), p. 68-69.

in favor of another, contradicts the very idea we have of “matter” regarding how it should manifest itself to us. Moreover, this means that through the perceptual framework, a certain relationship is established between matter and the spatio-temporal framework: it *persists* (temporality) in a *presence* (spatiality), and it seems perceptively impossible to encounter a sudden appearance—that is, an instantaneous presence—or a sudden disappearance—that is, the instantaneous end of a presence.

But if we take this observation to its conclusion, we are compelled to note that the very concept of matter only truly makes sense in relation to space⁹ and time, which can be considered the two necessary pillars of perception: to perceive is to perceive something here (space) and now (time). The question that arises then is the relationship between ufological phenomena and space and time: do witnesses report distortions of time and space when these phenomena are observed? Certainly yes, both through the well-known phenomenon of “missing time” and through the space of the apparitions, which many witnesses describe as an empty and artificial setting. These two aspects are crucial because if one considers that perception requires normal time and space, then the alteration of these should cast doubt on whether UFO phenomena fall under perception. It is not, in saying this, to deny the existence of UFO phenomena but to say that if human perception is conditioned by space and time, then an alteration of space and time should mechanically cast doubt on whether it is a perception that took place when “missing time” and/or an artificial and stationary spatial framework are reported.

Even better, this way of reasoning would allow the paranormal to be articulated with philosophy; the latter indeed allows for the establishment of the norms that authorize speaking of perception. But if the norms are violated, *if it is not a perception* that the witness is dealing with, then the paranormal can come into play, which would be nothing more than what allows us to name the type of representations available to the witness, parallel to the normal case of perception. Even better, and more speculatively, the paranormal would allow for the investigation of a force (of the mind?) that alters the normal forms of perception and establishes another framework of representation that deviates

from the ordinary perceptual experience.

3.5 Methodological consequences

Let’s take stock of what philosophy could contribute to the study of perception:

1. It is always necessary to distinguish within the “norm” what is merely the recording of an empirical habit—what we will henceforth call “empirical norm” and which can be established by an empirical perceptual psychology—from what designates a necessary structure of perception and which we will call “legislative norm,” as it dictates to our perception what, in the spatio-temporal manifestation of matter, is possible and impossible.
2. It then becomes evident that, at least from a perceptual standpoint, *the question of the appearance/disappearance and movement of UFOs is not of the same order as that of humanoids or bodies deemed extraterrestrial*, although the latter can manifest simultaneously with a UFO or as a result of it. The appearance of humanoids or non-human bodies is merely a perceptual break in habit, whereas the on-site disappearance of a supposed craft or the “fusion” of two crafts contradicts the idea of permanence associated with matter, as evidenced by the mental reflex of asking where the craft went after its disappearance, as if we immediately judged that it must persist, but elsewhere. Many intellectual elaborations around what UFOs are indeed rest on the necessity *for perception* to consider that if the craft is material, then it cannot truly disappear, and must therefore *be found elsewhere than in the usual perceptual field*, which gives rise to speculations about hidden dimensions and other possible “places” to locate an object that, for perception, must *continue* to be found *somewhere*¹⁰. Overall, it seems crucial to us to stop treating the question of UFOs and that of bodies deemed non-terrestrial together because, at least on a perceptual level, they absolutely do not belong to the same category, even though some witnesses claim to have observed humanoid bodies *in the crafts or next to them*.
3. However, this distinction must be nuanced as soon

9 We have extensively investigated the structural links between space and matter in Gress (2023).

10 We are merely indicating a line of thought here, but it would not be useless to ask to what extent the speculative elaborations dedicated to parallel worlds do not *simply serve to save the perceptual prejudices conveyed by the structural norms of perception*: since “matter” *must* persist, the perceptual structural norms tell us, then *another world is necessary to locate the persistent material object* when it suddenly eludes perception, or to locate its origin when it suddenly appears. However, this structural belief in the permanence of matter—in its substantiality—perhaps says nothing about the reality of things but only about *our way of conceiving what we perceive*, and it sometimes seems hasty to infer from it *physical models* that are indeed elaborate and appealing but seem only intended to satisfy perceptual prejudices.

as the observed body, whether it appears humanoid or “extraterrestrial,” behaves like a UFO, that is, disappears or appears suddenly. The reflection could here open up to the famous Men in Black, whose instant disappearances have been reported several times¹¹; in this case, there is no reason to perceptually *distinguish* such a body from a UFO, since they are linked by the same violation of perceptual impossibility and could therefore be *related*.

3.6 The dual fertility of the philosophical approach

Here, the dual utility of the philosophical approach is established. The first would summon everything that the history of philosophy since the 17th century has produced most fruitfully, namely all the reflection initiated by Descartes on what it means *to appear* for a consciousness, on what a “phenomenon¹²” is defined by the very fact that it appears for a consciousness—a field marked out by Leibniz, Lambert, and Kant—and on the intrinsic necessities of the perceptions of the latter. A strict *phenomenology* is required, aiming to delineate the norms of appearance and the impossibilities that can be inferred from it. Whether it is Descartes, Berkeley, Locke, Hume, Leibniz, Kant, or Hegel, these authors share the common endeavor of making prodigious efforts to account for perceptual structures and the universal norms that derive from them; by understanding what these legislative norms are, particularly the role played by time and space, it could be determined what deviates from them and deserves to be called abnormal. Naturally, such research is not yet complete, and a contemporary philosopher like Jocelyn Benoist is conducting very fruitful work on perceptual norms.¹³

A second would concern the link with matter: a quick historical glance first reveals that such a concept did not always exist. Matter (in Greek *hylè*) is a term originally meaning “wood,” just like the Latin *materia*. But Aristotle¹⁴ extended its meaning to make it a general concept; with the Stagirite¹⁵, the idea of “substance” combines two elements: the *form*, that gives the body its identity, and the *matter*, the

concrete substrate of the body, organized by the form. Thus, Aristotle completely invented the idea that bodies must have a kind of concrete “content” filling the form, in the same way that “wood” gave a concrete consistency to the tree. We have gradually come to consider this necessity of a “filling” of bodies through matter as obvious, and have stopped seeing that it was a concept primarily responding to the needs of Aristotle’s philosophy—allowing the *form* to have something to *inform*—and not an ontological obviousness. Worse still, we have come to believe that matter is *objective*, that is to say, *independent* of the human gaze, to such an extent that the study of matter has ended up becoming the very object of the physical sciences, as if the sciences had found an objective reality, unconditioned by human thought.

Thus, the concept of matter introduces a double intellectual trap; on the one hand, it obscures the fact that philosophers prior to Aristotle did not need this concept to think about bodies. Plato, for example, does not have a concept of matter, but he much more willingly evokes the idea of “sensible realities” without ever using the term *hylè*. There is therefore no unified content of bodies that would be matter in Plato, and when he needs to name them, he speaks of the *relationship* we have with them: bodies present themselves to us based on what we *feel*; we cannot speak of bodies other than from what our senses tell us. They are therefore realities that are first and foremost *relative* to what we feel about them, thus precisely *sensible* realities, which cannot be thought of independently of the information our senses provide us. The interest of the Platonic approach lies in not introducing objectivity where there is none, and in assuming that everything we can say about bodies will *ultimately* be relative to what we have felt about them. The Platonic approach thus proves to be fundamentally fruitful because, even if we introduce the concept of matter with Aristotle and his successors, we do not enhance our understanding of what bodies are, but rather obscure it: indeed, either we consider matter naively, and it is impossible for us to conceptually distinguish it from what is *tangible*, that is, from the *resistance* opposing touch; or we consider it scientifically, but in this case, matter presents itself in the form of measurements that,

11 The late Jean Mesnard reported astonishing cases on this subject. Thus, in July 1976, a woman traveling to Châtillon-sur-Loire (France) saw from her car a man dressed in black, wearing a black turtleneck sweater. “At the moment the light blue car passed by this man, he disappeared! On the spot, instantly!”; cf. Mesnard (2005/2016), p. 93.

12 There would be much to say, without a doubt, about the very term ‘phenomenon’ which comes from the Greek verb *phainein*, meaning to appear, and which gives the Greek noun *phainomenon*. In these terms, we have the root *pha* which will give *phos* meaning “light” and which will much later give photon. That all ufological phenomena involve a certain luminosity of unusual intensity and purity invites us to consider the link between *what appears*—the *phenomenon*—and *light*—*phos*—, a link to be established in light of what the legislative norms of perception should be.

13 Cf. in particular Benoist (2016) and (2017).

14 Cf. for example Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Z, 1039b20-34.

15 This is a term sometimes employed by scholars when referring to Aristotle; it derives from his place of birth, Stagira (near present day Thessaloniki, Greece). [Editor.]

ultimately, must be observed, that is, *seen*. The objectivity that matter seems to carry is therefore fallacious; it simulates an objective property of bodies, but its analysis reveals that, in the final instance, it can only be grasped in relation to the senses. The very idea of matter therefore seems deceptive, while the apprehension of bodies according to the conceptuality of sensible reality appears much more adequate to the relationship we maintain with them.

But from this first trap, a second one follows. Since the concept of matter exists, and it has entered common language, we tend to naively believe that its definition is clear; however, in fact, the definition of matter is so obscure that no philosopher has managed to define it for itself by giving it an immanent meaning: on the contrary, it has always been thought of *in relation to something other than itself* and *never in itself*. Aristotle himself, who nonetheless creates the concept in the *Metaphysics*, fails to provide a clear and autonomous definition, so much so that for him it is merely the *complement of the form* that the substance needs to be substance. Even in Aristotle, therefore, matter does not have intrinsic meaning, but only acquires significance from its complement, form, with which it composes substance. It will be the same, of course, in all Scholastic thought. Later, Descartes will not be able to think of matter for itself and will only be able to determine it based on its principal attribute, which is extension. In other words, matter will be defined by Descartes based on a spatial criterion, in that it will be conceived as what occupies a portion of space or, more precisely, as what *I cannot help but represent as extended*. A little later, Kant will partially return to Plato since he will make matter that which, from the thing-in-itself, affects me, and can therefore not be thought independently of what is felt.

We see from this brief reminder that an intrinsic definition of matter is unattainable, and this from the very beginning; it even seems impossible for its initial creator — Aristotle—to give it an autonomous and immanent meaning. We thus understand why Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753) was led to rethink the existence of the world without encumbering it with the concept of matter, showing that while the reality of the world was undeniable, its *materiality* contained more obscurity than clarity for the mind. In this regard, it is not forbidden to think that matter could be a *conceptual parasite* introduced by Aristotle, creating more confusion than clarity, which could be done without; one could then draw inspiration from Plato, for example, by returning to the first evidence,

namely that every perceived body presents itself as *a sensitive piece of information transmitted by the senses*, both on the naive level—tactile information of the tangible, visual information of the immediate gaze, etc.—and on the scientific level—the necessity of measuring.

4. The *nomos* of science and the status of anomaly: the anomic and the anomalous

The reflection that has just been conducted, however, only concerned perceptual abnormality, neglecting the scientific problem of anomic phenomena that cannot be reduced to any known rule or law, or even violate them, for example in the case of lightning accelerations incompatible with what we know about inertia, as Jacques Vallée and Bertrand Méheust remind us in the third round table of a famous conference¹⁶. However, the possibility that phenomena deviating from the laws manifest in physics is not self-evident; in *The Normal and the Pathological* (1966), the philosopher of medicine Georges Canguilhem recalled that Bichat (1771-1802) distinguished the biological domain from the physical and chemical domains by the fact that, in the latter, phenomena systematically observed the law, to such an extent that nothing “pathological” could occur there and, consequently, that nothing “normal” could take place either, with the normal only making sense in a pair, so to speak, meaning that if the pathological were possible.

Overall, it is understood that the deviation from a norm does not have the same significance as that observed in a physical law which, if violated, loses its universally legislative dimension and no longer deserves the name of law: there is no law in physics except by the universal constraint it exerts, the slightest exception precisely threatening its *legality*.¹⁷ That social beings can deviate from the supposed “social laws” is easily understandable, but that phenomena categorized as “physical” can free themselves from the laws of Nature introduces a discredit to the legality of said laws.

But perhaps it is appropriate to introduce a nuance here. If by *nomos* one means the authority having the force of law, then what escapes legality and appears as chaotic or disorderly—meaning: not ordered by a law or “escaping the domain governed by the law”—should be called *anomic*. On the other hand, what violates the law by taking the appearance of a phenomenon that known laws present as

¹⁶ Cf. Raullet and Juste-Duits (2000), p. 142, *sq.*

¹⁷ Of course, we are speaking in ideal terms here; in actual scientific practice, things are more flexible than this Manichean approach would suggest.

impossible should be called *anomal*. The domain of anomaly is therefore not univocal, as it can equally signify a form of disorder that no law would regulate—anomic phenomenon—or a challenge to the laws themselves, which would be contested by the very occurrence of the phenomenon—anomal phenomenon—as in the case of an acceleration contradicting what the laws of inertia present as impossible. Only the second understanding of anomaly threatens the legality of the law and, to use the terminology from the beginning of this section, only the anomaly risks introducing a “pathology” of the legal, which the anomic as defined does not convey.

Let’s imagine illustrating this the generic case of a lightning-fast acceleration deemed impossible in light of inertia. It would undoubtedly be an anomalous phenomenon, violating what inertia presents as impossible and not what it does not foresee. The first question to ask is to specify under what conditions such a law would be violated, and not simply to observe its violation by the phenomenon. We know that inertia only makes sense in relation to forces acting on masses, and it is therefore scientifically incomprehensible to observe accelerations contrary to inertia unless the following belief is presupposed: the bodies observed in ufology are massive. But what proves that they are indeed massive? The displacement of the UAP is only anomalous if it is massive, but the anomaly collapses if it is not.

The issue therefore seems to be the following: whenever a law of physics appears to be violated, *one should ask what needs to be assumed about the UAP for the law to be violated*. In the case of inertia, it is its mass-like nature that should be admitted, a mass-like nature that nothing, except for marginal material recoveries, has so far allowed to be objectified; only trajectories, velocities, and luminosities have been fully established. This would invite us to consider what non-massive luminous and swift phenomena might be, to probe the implications of atomic physics predictions that elementary particles—including the photon—have no mass, and so on.

5. An author not to be overlooked: Leibniz

In the swamp of the history of philosophy, an author stands out whose intellectual scope, combined with the breadth of his reflections, would allow him to be established as a guide on these questions: it is Leibniz (1646-1716). Mathematician, physicist, philosopher, theologian, but also geologist, linguist, and historian, Leibniz combines the genius of his thought

with the breadth of his knowledge, which made him the last European polymath.

5.1 The approach to “modalities”

The first fundamental element he clarified and from which we can benefit pertains to the question of *modalities*. These concepts date back to Aristotle and concern the relationship of a proposition (affirmation or negation) to reality: such a relationship can either state a necessity, a possibility, an impossibility, or a contingency. Leibniz significantly improved its use and, above all, he showed that the question of modalities was *the central question of the nature of the world*.

Now, in the questions that concern ufology in general and the concepts of abnormality and anomaly in particular, modalities are everywhere since what falls under physical anomaly can either indicate the *possibility of the non-legal* (anomic) or *the possibility of the legally impossible* (anomal), thus *the possibility of what should necessarily be impossible*. The anomic phenomenon indeed tells us that what is not subject to a law is still possible, while the anomal phenomenon indicates that *what should not be able to happen*—therefore the impossible—*does* happen.

Even better, Leibniz showed that what happens, therefore what exists, necessarily rests on what is possible, defined as being *non-contradictory*: the possible is the foundation of the existent, which means that what exists has a certain coherence since what is contradictory cannot attain existence. Hence this crucial paradox: to say that a phenomenon deemed impossible occurs and therefore exists is to say that it is possible, so much so that we are led to a *possibility of the impossible*. Of course, from Leibniz’s perspective, phrasing things this way, that is to say speaking of a “possibility of the impossible,” would be a rhetorical trick that poorly conceals the absurdity of such a phrase: in reality, in Leibnizian logic, *nothing impossible can exist or occur*, so we are led back to the third part, which invited us to always determine the implicit element(s) and *give the impression* that a law is being violated by the displacement or appearance of a UAP.

5.2 The question of the “miracle”

Another domain of Leibnizian thought involves questioning what it means for something we deemed impossible to come to pass; this aspect may seem theological because Leibniz calls it a “miracle.” But nothing prevents us from using Leibniz’s analysis of the miracle by taking it out of theology, by taking

it out of the sphere of Christian revelation, to make it the concept naming any situation where a law that is nonetheless necessary and universal seems to be violated.

Let's first consider what the word "miracle" tells us: its etymology based on "*mirus*", meaning "mirror," refers to something that is *seen* and *astonishes*. If the miracle is therefore this *phenomenon*, that is to say this appearance that astonishes because it deviates from everything that is known and normal, it can be conceived here as *a kind of deviation from the laws of nature*. Thus, several elements of great fertility appear.

It is first possible to use what philosophy says about miracles to think about UFO phenomena. We would certainly be broadening Leibniz's intentions¹⁸, but we might also find one of Jacques Vallée's inspirations in his famous article dedicated to the "morphology of the miracle¹⁹", which compares the apparitions of Fatima to UFO phenomena; thus, a whole conceptual framework could emerge, which one might call "matrixial" and which would outline the logical structure on which we should rely whenever a phenomenon seems to deviate from, or even contradict, a supposedly known law of nature.

What would be the benefit? First and foremost, it was about not confusing the "miracle" with rarity. Against a surprisingly widespread cliché, Leibniz indeed indicates that the miracle is not governed by its *rarity* and is therefore not determined by the infrequency of an occurrence; it concerns, on the contrary, the very quality of what presents itself and not its frequency. From this arises a paradox that Leibniz himself embraced, namely that many so-called scientific theories, describing universal and permanent phenomena, are *inadvertently* conceived in a miraculous manner without this being consciously perceived, because the high frequency of the described phenomena obscures the miraculous dimension of the explanation. This is the case with the Newtonian conception of gravitation since, if Newton were right, *invisible forces would act without contact and at a distance*, and *would force* bodies at a distance to adopt certain movements—which would be truly miraculous. Leibniz, who absolutely does not believe in the Newtonian approach to gravitation, points out the sophism usually committed, which consists of making one believe that, on the grounds that the gravitational phenomenon is universally present, it would be *natural* and therefore non-miraculous, an argument used by Newtonians

to mitigate the more than speculative nature of these forces acting at a distance and without contact. But *regularity is not the measure of the natural*, just as rarity is not the measure of the miraculous, that is what Leibniz means. This brings us back to the initial discussions dedicated to the crucial distinction between what is *unusual* and what is *structurally impossible*.

Finally, and if we still refer to Leibniz, a question related to the *intentionality* of the miracle would arise: it certainly deviates from the laws of nature, but it occurs because God willed it; however, God does not act arbitrarily or randomly, His will obeys an order. As a result, Leibniz aims to show that the "laws of nature" which are assumed to be universal are of a lesser universality than the order governing divine will. To put it another way, if the miracle is performed by God and if the divine will always follows the greatest order, then the laws of nature are merely a "sub-order," an order of low generality that, in the name of a higher order, can be violated. This allows us to understand two crucial elements:

- *Intentional does not mean arbitrary*, because the will of a perfect being—God—cannot be confused with that of an individual whim. That God has intentions does not imply that He does just anything.
- When a law of nature is violated, it is not all order that is disrupted but a certain natural order that should not be confused with the ultimate and truly universal order.

This Leibnizian analysis amounts to establishing a *hierarchy within the universal*: when a universal rule seems to be violated by a miracle, it is because a rule of greater universality has imposed itself, so that what we take for a law turns out to be only a kind of particular regulation, rendered inoperative if one rises to a higher degree of universality, divine intentionality being conceived as absolute universality—what we called *the ultimate and truly universal order*. By contrast, what we take for natural laws might well only pertain to a relative universality, destined to be surpassed.

5.3 The false obviousness of the notion of "law of nature"

From this, our final point is understood: one should not believe that the notion of "law of nature" is self-evident

18 The circumstances of Leibniz's reflection are extremely technical and involve both the general problem of perception and that of causality, through Malebranche's occasionalism, which Leibniz criticizes for explaining bodily movements as a "perpetual miracle." But the latter expands his reflection far beyond the circumstantial problem from which it originated. Cf. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* [*Discours de Métaphysique*], § 6: "God Does Nothing Which Is Not Orderly and It Is Not Even Possible to Imagine Events That Are Not Regular."

19 Cf. Vallée (1975).

and devoid of pretenses. Like many of his contemporaries, Leibniz is somewhat reluctant to accept the idea of an “obedience” of natural phenomena to the laws, as this amounts to treating natural phenomena as beings endowed with *intention* by virtue of which they should obey the universal rules that are the laws. It should not be forgotten that the concept of “law” is of political origin and was initially used exclusively to name rules addressed to beings endowed with intentionality: humans. Transposing the term “law” into the field of natural sciences is not without difficulty because while it is very clear how a citizen can obey or disobey rules by virtue of their intentionality, it is hard to understand how a natural phenomenon can “obey” a rule in the strict sense, as obedience involves the idea of intention. For this reason, several philosophers and physicists—and not the least among them!—such as Descartes and especially Leibniz, have used the concept of “law” in physics only with caution and sparingly, as they perceived the limits and the profound implications of such a concept.

The very concept of “law of nature” is therefore much less obvious than it seems, as it borrows from the political domain the idea of *intentional obedience* to laws to transpose it to that of inert beings, which one would have to believe “obey” universal rules. The old approach, essentially Aristotelian, which explained the movement of phenomena based on the “qualities” intrinsically contained within bodies, had the immense disadvantage of being metaphysical and strictly unobservable—no “quality” has ever been subject to observation or detection—but paradoxically had the merit of not attributing to inert bodies a form of obedience to rules whose compliance we do not quite understand, unless we precisely attribute to them the *intention* to comply.

Of course, one could respond in a positivist manner that laws are merely a metaphor: they do not imply real obedience from phenomena but are a convenient term to denote regularity; in other words, they do not constrain phenomena and do not imply anything intentional. But this positivist approach is doubly mediocre because, 1) it confuses what is frequent or regular with what is “natural,” and 2) it is conceptually inept since it can, at most, only establish iterative lists of regular connections (as Hume will admirably demonstrate, drawing skeptical conclusions from it). That is why, faced with the immense problems generated by the notion of law, Leibniz tends to think about the “internal dispositions” of bodies, dispositions that may or may not be

actualized, and which mean that *natural bodies are infinitely more complex than a composition of matter subject to natural laws*; there is in the German philosopher a whole reflection on potential forces, on the *virtualities*²⁰ of bodies, from which we would benefit by probing their scope, particularly in the ufological context.

6. Conclusion

The few avenues mentioned previously can be quickly summarized as follows:

1. Like any science, ufology should *delineate* and *define* its object. Nevertheless, the present article does not seek to define *a priori* the nature of the object in question but rather establishes a series of *criteria* from which it is possible to determine in what sense the strangeness of the observed phenomena manifests; the intellectual gain from this reorientation of questioning is to understand, according to the different modalities of strangeness, which perspective should be adopted to approach the phenomenon. Three questions, opening three perspectives, have thus been retained: does ufology deal with (i) the abnormal, in which case it would be a science of deviation from the normative; (ii) the anomalous, in which case it would be a science of deviation from the legislative; or (iii) the *anomalous*, in which case it would be merely an empirical science of deviation from the iterative? It is very possible that these three modalities together characterize ufology, in which case it would be essential to establish the hierarchy of these three modalities as well as their articulation in order to construct the systematicity of the three perspectives. If indeed the abnormal, the anomaly, and the anomalous are involved in ufology, then none of the three can be conceived in isolation, each constituting a different perspective on the same reality.
2. From a perceptual point of view, in the sense of ordinary perception, if we distinguish between what is empirically abnormal and what is structurally impossible, then it is certainly appropriate not to treat together phenomena that merely break a perceptual habit and those that violate the structural norms of perception, which amounts to saying that, from a perceptual point of view, perceiving a humanoid is not of the same order as

20 There would be much to gain from Marc Parmentier’s book, *Archives du virtuel* (2023).

dealing with a sudden appearance or disappearance of a phenomenon.

3. By prioritizing the structural norms of perception, one could engage in a reflection on *what precisely cannot be normal*, namely what violates the requirement of permanence associated with the phenomenon; thus, if perception assumes a spatio-temporal framework where the phenomenon should persist, it follows by contraposition that when a phenomenon frees itself from the requirement of permanence and continuity, it may not be perception. Perhaps this is the *proper domain of the paranormal, namely the study of the forces through which a mode of capturing phenomena other than ordinary perception is activated and which therefore cannot be called “perception.”*
4. The scientific question appears as such, engaging more with the *nomos* governing natural bodies than with the norm. It is undoubtedly necessary to distinguish between the anomic and the anomal, and to limit the risk of “pathologies” of the legal to the anomal, while examining under what precise conditions it is permissible to say that a law is violated.
5. Finally, with the help of Leibniz’s conceptual framework, it could be clarified what exactly the violation of a law of nature as a “miracle” means, which would allow for a link to be established with intentionality, as there is no “miracle” for Leibniz except when God, in the name of a higher order than that of the laws of nature, frees phenomena from them. The importance of the intentionality of UFO phenomena, notably emphasized by Eric Zurcher²¹, would otherwise receive at least a conceptual and metaphysical characterization that we consider fruitful.²²

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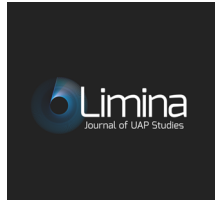
21 Cf. Guillemant & Zurcher (2025), p. 346.

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Understanding UAPs: Surveying the Nature Spirits Hypothesis

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ABSTRACT

The literature on UFOs / UAPs has seen much discussion concerning the central ontological question: on the rational assumption that we are dealing with something objectively real (i.e., not just the product of delusion or misperception or other prosaic explanations), *what* are we dealing with? A basic taxonomy of options can readily be constructed, with the initial division consisting of a split between naturalist theories (i.e., theories compatible with metaphysical naturalism) and non-naturalist theories (i.e., theories incompatible with metaphysical naturalism). Naturalist theories held sway within early ufology, especially the extraterrestrial hypothesis. However, dissenting non-naturalist voices gradually gained ground from the late 1960s onward, and today a variety of such theories receives sustained discussion. These utilize ideas derived from major world religions, from the history of philosophy, and even from recent developments in analytic metaphysics and philosophy of religion. My principal aim in this short paper is to provide an accessible overview and preliminary assessment of one important non-naturalist theory of UAP ontology: animism.

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1. Introduction

The ufology literature (both popular and scholarly) is split between a broadly skeptical or debunking side, and a broadly open or accepting side. The former considers the entire UFO phenomenon to be explicable in conventional naturalistic terms, wholly accountable by reference to some combination of prosaic factors like misperception, delusion, and deception.

The latter is open to unconventional explanations of the phenomenon, whether naturalistic or non-naturalistic, and it is this side of the literature which will be under consideration here.

A claim or theory is naturalistic if it is compatible with metaphysical naturalism. Though the precise formulation of ‘metaphysical naturalism’ (and cognates like ‘physicalism’ and ‘materialism’) has been the subject of debate within analytic

philosophy,¹ for present purposes we can get by with the following rough characterization: metaphysical naturalism is the claim that the only kind of reality is *physical* reality. In other words, the realm of the genuinely real is occupied entirely by things like space, time, and matter, such that there are no souls or gods or psychic powers or other sorts of irreducibly incorporeal objects or properties or events.

Some who accept the reality and unconventionality of UFOs / UAPs maintain that they fit within a naturalistic explanatory paradigm. By far the most common of these is the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH); indeed within popular culture and among the general public it is still the case that UFOs and space aliens are practically synonymous. Within the ufology literature the ETH was overwhelmingly dominant from the early 1950s through the late 1960s (even the debunking side of the literature took the ETH as its central opponent), after which it remained the prevailing viewpoint, though one receiving competition from alternative perspectives. Some of these alternatives are likewise naturalistic, and remain under discussion today. For example, there is the theory that UAPs are vehicles from parallel universes or other physical dimensions (rather than other planets within our universe);² there is the theory that UAPs are vehicles from the future, piloted by human beings thousands or millions of years advanced beyond us;³ there is the idea that they are products of terrestrial but hidden (perhaps underground or underwater) societies, piloted either by humans who broke away from the rest of the species or by non-human entities that have long shared the planet with us;⁴ more radically, there is the theory that we are all living in a computer simulation, with our experience of UAPs and other paranormal events arising from features of the programming.⁵ These by no means exhaust the range of naturalistic alternatives proposed in opposition to the ETH

(or occasionally in tandem with it, e.g., the eclectic notion that some UFOs are extraterrestrial while others are products of a breakaway human civilization), but should suffice for purposes of illustration.⁶

Non-naturalist accounts of the phenomenon grew in influence from the late 1960s onward. (By ‘non-naturalist accounts’ I intend any theory that is incompatible with metaphysical naturalism.) This was partly thanks to the work of authors like Keel (1970), Rogo (1977), Steiger (1973), and Vallée (1969), among others, who cast some doubt on the ETH and drew links between aspects of the phenomenon and other areas of inquiry, such as research into religious experience, folklore, parapsychology, and western esotericism. Clark (2000, p. 139) writes:

By the end of the 1960s, the consensus that had guided ufologists through the early years of the UFO controversy had broken down. Though to outsiders ufology was still assumed to be synonymous with belief in visitors from outer space, within ufology three schools of thought had begun to compete for dominance: the materialists (ETH partisans), the occultists (followers of Keel and Jacques Vallée), and the culture commentators (psychosocial theorists), who professed to find existential themes expressed in UFO reports, which were presumed to be subjective experiences.

Another reason for the growth of non-naturalist theories lay in the wider cultural changes taking place in the west, notably the rise of the New Age movement (which encouraged broadly spiritual interpretations of the phenomenon) and the traditionalist religious counter-reaction against it (which encouraged Christian critics of the New Age

1 See for instance Dumsday (2016), Goetz & Taliaferro (2008), Poland (1994), Rea (2002), Ritchie (2008), Stoljar (2010), and Strawson (2020). Note that not all treat ‘naturalism’ and ‘physicalism’ and ‘materialism’ as equivalent, though for simplicity’s sake I will do so here.

2 The US military whistleblower David Grusch, who came to prominence in summer 2023 with his allegations of a major government coverup of UAP data and technology, has been among the many recent figures expressing sympathy for this theory. Gipson *et al.* (2023), writing for *NewsNation*, report on his comments: “Grusch says the craft may not be traveling through space as we understand it. ‘It is a well-established fact, at least mathematically and based on empirical observation and analysis, that there most likely are physical, additional spatial dimensions,’ he said. ‘And you can imagine, four and five-dimensional space where what we experience is linear time, ends up being a physical dimension in higher dimensional space where you were living there. You could translate across what we perceive as a linear flow. So there is a possibility that this is a theory here. I’m not saying this is 100% the case but it could be that this is not necessarily extraterrestrial, and it’s actually coming from a higher dimensional physical space that might be co-located right here.’”

3 See especially Masters (2019; 2022).

4 See for instance Tonnie (2010) and Shaw & Shaw (2022).

5 This is hardly a favourite amongst serious ufologists, but it increasingly shows up in popular discussions. Consider for instance Stieb (2019), writing for the website *Vulture*: “Paranormal events are not hauntings or alien encounters, but glitches in the simulation. This theory is the one most explored on Reddit forums like r/Are We Living in a Simulation and r/Glitch in the Matrix, where users explore big ideas in philosophy funnelled into the details of the odd or the occult.”

6 To be clear, acceptance of a naturalistic explanation for UAPs does not entail acceptance of metaphysical naturalism. One can easily be a practicing Muslim (for instance) while also believing that UAPs are extraterrestrial vehicles piloted by space aliens. As defined here, a theory is naturalistic if it is *compatible with* metaphysical naturalism; it doesn’t have to *imply* metaphysical naturalism in order to count as naturalistic.

to interpret UFOs in religious terms, whether angelic,⁷ or, more often, demonic⁸.

Non-naturalist theories have continued to proliferate in the intervening decades, such that there is quite a range available for consideration by today's ufologists. When I first began this project, my intention was to present an accessible, up-to-date, concise-yet-reasonably-comprehensive overview of non-naturalist ontologies of the UFO phenomenon.

However, I soon realized that a work of such scope (useful though it would be) is more suitable to a monograph than a brief article. The number of such theories on offer is simply too large, and the literature to be surveyed too vast, to permit any but the most superficial of article-length overviews.

Consequently I have scaled back my ambitions considerably; the goal now is simply to survey and assess one among the more interesting of the non-naturalist ontologies broached in the recent literature: animism. On this view, the UFO phenomenon is attributable at least in part (if not entirely) to the activities of nature spirits.

The 'more interesting' criterion is of course largely subjective, and in this case reflects my disciplinary bias, insofar as the theory I opt to focus on here is one which intersects with recent developments in analytic philosophy of religion. I am disinclined to apologize for this bias, insofar as some selection criterion must be applied, and this one at least boasts the advantage of supplying a toehold for academics traditionally uninvolved in ufology (namely, philosophers) to enter the dialogue.

The remainder is divided as follows: in **section two** I clarify the nature of animism and survey the ways in which it has been brought to bear on the UFO question; I also provide a rough first-pass at evaluating those efforts. This assessment focuses less on the independent philosophical plausibility of

animism (which has its pros and cons and is much-debated), and more on its utility for ufology—i.e., whether and to what degree its truth might help to explain the phenomenon. I cap things off with a short concluding **third section**.

2. An Overview and Assessment of A Non-Naturalist UAP Ontology: Animism

There has been a growing scholarly interest in animism in recent years, an expansion that began in religious studies and anthropology,⁹ and has now extended to Biblical studies,¹⁰ theology,¹¹ and philosophy.¹² This increased interest is warranted, both due to the inherent philosophical interest of the view, and as a reflection of animism's global numerical strength; animists number in the millions at least, found mostly among indigenous groups and followers of new religious movements (e.g., Neo-Pagans widely affirm it).¹³

Dumsday (2024, p. 96), after reviewing the various competing definitions of animism present in the recent literature, puts forward the following as a workable sufficient condition for a view's counting as a type of animism: "A doctrine counts as a form of animism if it proposes that there exist living or even personal nature spirits that inhabit or partly constitute or are in some other way closely related to at least some *prima facie* impersonal objects, features, or processes of our environment (e.g., rocks, rivers, thunderstorms, etc.)." This understanding does appear to capture a core claim commonly shared by self-identified animists, while remaining noncommittal with respect to a host of intra-animist controversies (for instance the debate over how exactly a nature spirit is linked to its associated location or environmental trait,¹⁴ or the disagreement over whether it is possible for a man-made object to have an associated

7 As a notable example, the evangelist Billy Graham (1986) briefly entertained the UFOs-as-angelic hypothesis.

8 Representative volumes from this period include Rose (1975), Weldon & Levitt (1975), and Wilson (1974). Note that while the latter two books are rarely cited today, Rose's remains influential in some Eastern Orthodox circles.

9 For an overview of this segment of the renewal, see Laack (2020). Examples would include Harvey (2017), Rambelli (2019), and Wilkinson (2017; 2023).

10 See especially Joerstad (2019; 2020).

11 See Beck (2015) and Wallace (2019).

12 See Bretz (2020), Burley (2020, ch. 7), Dumsday (2024, ch. 3), Fales (2023), Hall (2019), Hendricks (2022), Oppy (2023), Smith (2020; 2022; 2023a; 2023b), and Van Eyghen (2023a; 2023b). Note that philosophical interest in animism could be considered substantially higher depending on how one views its relationship with panpsychism (where panpsychism is, roughly, the claim that all fundamental material entities are to some degree conscious or at least proto-conscious). Panpsychism has enjoyed a major resurgence within analytic metaphysics and philosophy of mind. Depending on one's precise definitions, animism and panpsychism might be seen as tightly linked, perhaps even mutually entailing. But some (for instance Skrbina (2020, pp. 103-104)) are loath to admit a connection and try to show that the two views ought to be considered separately. Not wanting to wade into that dispute, for present purposes I will focus solely on animism.

13 On Neo-Pagan animism see for instance diZerega (2020) and Kaldera (2012).

14 Fales (2023, p. 180) helpfully draws out some divisions on that point: "Animists appear to subscribe to a range of ontologies concerning the nature of the spirits, demons, and the like that inhabit their world. And they accept a number of conceptions of how those spirits are associated with or localized to designated animals, plants, or natural features of the environment. Sometimes these beings are conceived as distinct individuals that inhabit their natural hosts. Such beings may be able to detach themselves from their hosts on occasion to engage in various missions. Or they may be non-separable from the body of their host, though nevertheless distinguishable from their host. Or, on the other hand, it may be supposed that the natural item—geological feature, plant, or animal—just is a person, with a mind that has human or quasi-human powers. There may be reasons for the particular conception of this relation to be in play in particular cases."

spirit,¹⁵ etc.).

There are a number of interesting philosophical and experiential arguments to be made on behalf of animism (and of course counter-arguments lurking around every corner, as with any worthwhile ontology). These can be consulted in the above-cited sources, and in the interests of time they will not be canvassed here. The key questions for present purposes are: **(i) how has animism been deployed in explaining some or all of the UFO phenomenon?** And, **(ii) does that deployment actually do the explanatory work assigned it?**

Turning to **question (i)**, the answer depends in part on how broadly one takes the sense of ‘nature spirit’ to extend. Does it, for example, encompass fairies, such that discussions of links between ufology and fairy lore would *ipso facto* constitute a ufological appeal to animism? If so, then Vallée’s (1969) landmark *Passport to Magonia*, with its central thesis of an equivalence between the two,¹⁶ could certainly be counted as an early presentation of the idea. And even if one were to quibble here, perhaps on grounds that fairies—at least as understood in the paradigmatic early modern fairy lore of the UK and Ireland—are not strictly the spirits of natural objects or features of the environment,¹⁷ Vallée could still be seen as open to an animist interpretation of the UFO phenomenon; while he does spend more of his time in *Passport* delving specifically into fairy lore, he also cites a number of patristic, mediaeval, and Renaissance-era sources that discuss nature spirits—rather than fairies—quite explicitly (see Vallée (1969, pp. 20-27)), and he maintains that these reports likewise display clear commonalities with aspects of the UFO phenomenon. He also points out (*ibid.*, pp. 74-75) that the ontologies of some mediaeval esotericists included varieties of nature spirit that seem to correspond to a sort of fairy, blurring what might initially seem like solid dividing lines,

and he notes that in later Victorian-era fairy lore, fairies were sometimes described as associated with natural features (e.g., as inhabiting rocks or dwelling in the air).

Over the course of succeeding decades Vallée has come to favour a broader, interdimensional or ultraterrestrial ontology of UAPs (the precise contours of which I will not attempt to outline here) rather than a strictly animist one (though never outright disclaiming a possible role for nature spirits, so far as I am aware); nevertheless *Passport to Magonia* is significant in the present context as the first extended ufological treatment of the animist theory.

After the work of Vallée, other researchers would build upon the hypothesized connection between ufology, fairies, and related entities posited in traditional belief systems. Denzler (2001, p. 110) notes that in the 1970s several “suggested that they [UFO entities] might be more akin to ‘elementals’—the spirits inhabiting trees, water, rocks, flowers, and so on.” Folklorists like Rojcewicz (1991) built further on these conceptual linkages, as did paranormal theorists like Harpur (1994, p. 60), who wrote: “I am not convinced that the cultivation and subsequent ‘disenchantment’ of the landscape has done away with the daimons whose natural habitat it was.¹⁸ They may well be returning in new and unexpected forms, like the mystery big cats which lurk in the suburbs or the bizarre circular patterns impressed on the cornfields.”

This angle on the phenomenon is also sympathetically discussed by Harvard psychiatrist and abductee researcher John Mack in his first book on the topic (1994, ch. 1). In his later work Mack became even more enamoured by shamanistic and other indigenous forms of religious belief, and invested in their possible connections to the phenomenon. Thus the opening chapter of Mack’s (1999, pp. 7-9) later book spotlights several living indigenous belief

15 Kaldera (2012, p. 12) writes that animism is the “belief that not only all living things, but all natural things, and some man-made things, have an indwelling spirit/soul of their own” [emphasis added]. He adds (*ibid.*, p. 52): “In an animistic worldview, everything in nature is alive—not just plants and animals, but bodies of water, stones, mountains, the dirt itself. Many man-made objects are also alive. In ancient times, every lasting man-made object was a product of many hours of concentrated work, and became alive through attention, focus, and directed energy of its making. Today, objects made in a similar way can also develop souls and life-energy, although they may or may not need human attention to keep the soul in them.” It is worth observing that the universalist side of Kaldera’s animism (i.e., the claim that *everything* in nature counts as living) is not a feature of all forms of the theory. Van Eyghen (2023a, p. 2) points out that “animists do not always believe that *all* objects or *all* animals have spirits....Some (or even most) objects, plants and animals are regarded as devoid of spirits, as most westerners believe” [emphases in original].

16 Vallée (1969, p. 67) writes: “[L]et me simply state again my basic contention: the modern, global belief in flying saucers and their occupants is identical to an earlier belief in the fairy-faith. The entities described as the pilots of the craft are indistinguishable from the elves, sylphs, and *lutins* of the Middle Ages. Through the observations of unidentified flying objects, we are concerned with an agency our ancestors knew well and regarded with terror....”

17 Young (2023, p. 191) writes: “Although traditional fairies lived out in the wilds, they were not described as nature spirits in our sources. There was no sense that these fairies were the spirits of trees or flowers. If they were spirits of anything they were the spirits of places, and if the fairies ‘represented’ something it was a life-giving but implacable countryside.” Though I of course defer to Young’s expertise on fairy lore, I am not sure that his conceptual division is a convincing one—would not most animist systems count a regional spirit (say, the spirit of a given valley or desert) as a nature spirit? And yet at some point the boundaries between a nature spirit and other sorts of entities (gods for example) are liable to blur. For example, a spirit possessing providential control over all the oceans of the earth starts to sound more like Poseidon or some other pagan deity than a typical nature spirit. Neo-pagan thinkers have devoted some attention to this question of the ontological boundary lines between gods and nature spirits, though without coming to any very definite conclusions; see for instance Greer (2005, pp. 96-98), Kaldera (2012, pp. 16 and 52), and Beckett (2019, p. 23).

18 Note that by ‘daimons’ there he does not refer to Christian demonology, but to a more general notion of preternatural entities (which are here being envisioned along the lines of nature spirits).

systems, including the Lakota affirmation of nature spirits, and suggests that these all shed light on UFOs and their apparent occupants. He later expands on this theme, drawing explicit linkages between UFOs and the animal spirits (*ibid.*, p. 148) and forest spirits (*ibid.*, p. 172) of various global indigenous traditions.

That said, it is worth recalling that Mack never settled on any particular ontology of the phenomenon, and in the same book he sympathetically discusses other hypotheses, including the theory of parallel universes (*ibid.*, p. 62), a sort of emanationism (*ibid.*, pp. 65-70), and a kind of panentheism (*ibid.*, pp. 235-236). Ultimately he seems most comfortable with an eclectic or pluralist hypothesis, though one that is clearly compatible with animism and influenced by it (*ibid.*, pp. 288-289):

Whatever words we may use to describe this realm or realms, it appears ever more likely that we exist in a multidimensional cosmos or multiverse, within which space and time appear to be constructs of the mind that order or simplify the chaos of energy and vibration in which we are immersed.... The cosmos that is revealed by this opening of consciousness, far from being an empty place of dead matter and energy, appears to be filled with beings, creatures, spirits, intelligences, gods—the names vary according to the apparent worldview of the observer or function and behaviour of the entity at hand—that have through the millennia been intimately involved with human existence.... The idea that we live in a multidimensional universe populated by beings or life-forms that are less densely embodied than we are, or perhaps not embodied at all, is not new to Eastern religious traditions or to most of the indigenous peoples of the world.

More recently, the Sufi thinker Charles Upton argues that the UFO phenomenon is best situated conceptually within a broadly Neoplatonic system in which an elaborate hierarchy of being incorporates various layers of spiritual and semi-corporeal preternatural entities. Those entities include both nature spirits and jinn (beings posited in Islamic theology as intermediate between angels and humans). Some such beings are evil, and it is these that produce UFOs and their associated phenomena, often at the instigation of ceremonial magicians. Upton also suggests a connection between nature spirits and the ‘gods’ worshipped by contemporary Neo-

Pagans (2021, pp. 40-41):

Furthermore, the elemental spirits who form the connection between the natural world and its Creator are not evil, though they may be dangerous; the subtle, conscious archetype of a beautiful oak tree, for example, cannot be called a demon.... But the Jinn who are staging the present UFO manifestations almost certainly are demons.... It may even be true, though I can't prove it, that those in the Neo-Pagan world who are attracted to the worship of elementals and nature spirits instead of the Divine Spirit may actually be seducing and corrupting these spirits, even if, to begin with, they are basically benign, or neutral. If you were being worshipped by thousands of devotees because they were fascinated by you and believed that their contact with you could give them magical powers, wouldn't you be seriously tempted? Wouldn't you be influenced to forget that your only duty is to remember God and obey His will?

Hunter (2023, pp. 34-35) also briefly entertains the notion that animism may play a role in explaining UAPs (and anomalous phenomena more broadly), though seemingly only as part of a broader, eclectic ontological schema:

Diversity might also be a deep feature of consciousness itself—just as biological systems tend towards increased biodiversity, so too might consciousness tend towards psychodiversity—and this may have important implications for our understanding of the varieties of high strangeness experiences.... Not only does this suggest that there is a broad range of different states of consciousness involved in high strangeness experiences (altered states, trances, and so on), but it also implies that there are a great many different forms of mind and consciousness out there in the world, with which we might interact during such experiences. In a *world of many minds* we might expect to encounter ways of being that are ‘alien’ to our own particular sensibilities.... We might even expect to encounter non-human parts of our own minds. As such, perspectives like panpsychism (the notion that consciousness is a fundamental aspect of reality)... and animism (which suggests that the world is made up of persons, not all of which are human, and with

whom we must establish good relationships)...might provide useful frameworks for contemplating some high strangeness experiences [emphasis in original].

He goes on to tie this framework together with a multiverse ontology, so the resulting picture is complex, and it's not clear how much (if any) explanatory work Hunter really thinks can be *uniquely* assigned to objectively real nature spirits.

Although Thigpen's (2022) work is mostly focused on the possible reality of extraterrestrial intelligent life, and more specifically with the attempt to demonstrate that the existence of such life would be compatible with Roman Catholicism, in the book's appendix he does consider the UFO phenomenon and briefly suggests that it might be explained (at least in part) by reference to intelligent nature spirits immanent in our environment. One expects that the suggestion may have seemed a bit jarring to some of his Catholic readers, but to be fair it would seem less eyebrow-raising to those who have kept abreast of the renewed interest in animism by Christian scholars noted above.

Finally, Dumsday (2024) takes up the idea that animism's potential utility for explaining part of the UFO phenomenon might help address a philosophical objection levelled against it by Hendricks (2022). Hendricks argues that if nature spirits were real, we would expect that people today (including people in modern western societies) would commonly report encounters with them. And yet, he claims, such reports are quite rare, and he takes this to constitute strong evidence against the existence of nature spirits. After summarizing several pro-animist replies to this objection put forward by Smith (2022), Dumsday (2024, pp. 114-115) adds the following:

The back and forth between Smith and Hendricks regarding how to explain the alleged silence of nature spirits in modern industrialized society is interesting, and seems to me a draw. No doubt further reasons might be suggested as to why nature spirits refrain from communication, and/or why modern people fail to be attuned to such communication. To toss in just such a suggestion for animists to ponder: at the risk of increasing the strangeness quotient of the present discussion out of all acceptable proportions (no doubt some readers already have difficulty entertaining the reality of nature spirits), another pro-animist possibility

would be that such spirits are actually appearing to or communicating with modern people with some frequency, only under other guises. Perhaps they are manifesting themselves to us in ways that make more sense to us and/or better accord with our modern technological context and background beliefs. With that possibility in mind, it might be worth mentioning that a frequently recurrent theme amongst UFO contactees and abductees over the past several decades has been the danger of environmental destruction. I.e., people who claim to be contacted by space aliens or even taken aboard craft often claim that the big-eyed spindly grey beings (or attractive blonde Nordics or whoever) warn them of the dire risks of pollution or climate change or nuclear weapons etc., and ask the contactees/abductees to spread the word to their fellow humans. If intelligent and somewhat powerful sky spirits or spirits of certain geographical locales (for instance) exist and want to try and discourage our environmental destruction, manifesting in forms that fit with today's more common background beliefs might rationally be seen as a more hopeful strategy than appearing in forms that would have been more familiar to distant ancestors or contemporary indigenous cultures. (Which would the typical modern person find more compelling and/or less insane: the warning of an apparently technologically superior UFO occupant, or the warning of a self-identified tree spirit?) This would at least be one way of interpreting the UFO contactee/abductee phenomenon without having to buy into physically impossible visitation by literal extraterrestrials. (General relativity simply does not allow faster than light travel, so if ETs are out there beyond our solar system, they have no way of getting here within a feasible timescale. Whatever UFOs may be, they aren't piloted by aliens.) Conceivably then, an enterprising animist might make a careful analysis of the UFO literature and mine it for potentially relevant material in support of her view (though I expect such an argument would meet with quite a limited favourable reception).

The suggestion then is that since the ETH is unworkable, and the existence of nature spirits might account for at least one common feature of the modern UFO phenomenon (the occupants' frequently expressed interest in environmentalism),

then animism might be put to productive explanatory work in that context.

Doubtless I have missed other valuable sources that discuss possible linkages between UAPs and nature spirits (and I hope readers will draw my attention to materials I've overlooked), but the preceding should still suffice for providing an answer to question (i), even if an incomplete answer. And the passage from Dumsday (2024) makes for an apt segue into a discussion of **question (ii)**: whether animism is actually helpful in explaining any aspect of the phenomenon.

Assuming for the sake of argument that animism is itself rationally defensible (an issue which I cannot engage with here), my own inclination is to think that it is not going to be of much use for ufology. I put this forward as a tentative and preliminary assessment, and welcome pushback from advocates of the animist position, but my reasons are as follows.

The chief defect of animism in this context is its vagueness. Absent committing to a *specific form* of animism (e.g., Shinto animism, or the animism of some particular Neo-Pagan sect, or of some particular indigenous people group) we will know little about what kinds of nature spirits exist,¹⁹ how powerful or intelligent they are, what sorts of characters they possess, whether or to what degree they can cooperate amongst themselves—and over what distances—etc. This lack of specificity is a problem; absent more specific hypotheses, how is one to use animism to make clear theoretical predictions that can then be verified or disconfirmed by reference to (suitably vetted) UAP data?

To start from that last point regarding distances, UAPs are generally thought to be a global reality.²⁰ Let's say that at least one aspect of the phenomenon (intelligently directed glowing orbs, for example) is the manifestation of a nature spirit, perhaps the spirit of lightning. Is there one spirit of lightning for the entire planet, or multiple such spirits spread over many regions? If the latter, can they communicate with each other and cooperate? If so, what distances are involved? Can a lightning spirit in Mexico coordinate UAP activity with a lightning spirit in Australia? What reason is there to accept any one answer to these questions over another (again, in the absence of a specific confessional commitment)?

One could answer that it makes the most sense to posit

that there are a great many nature spirits of varying types and of varying degrees of intelligence and power, and that some at least are highly intelligent and very powerful, and that these are capable of coordinating UAP manifestations by many different nature spirits around the globe. Why? Precisely because such a version of animism (in contrast to other versions) would be maximally helpful in explaining the UFO phenomenon. But from a ufologist's point of view that will likely come across as *ad hoc* and unconvincing.

Additionally, though Dumsday has drawn attention to one component of the UFO phenomenon that *prima facie* accords well with animism (on the contentious assumptions that nature spirits are quite powerful and intelligent and motivated to try and halt environmental destruction), there are other components that seem to make little sense on an animist hypothesis. E.g., why all the failed prophecies? What's with the obsessive interest in sexually assaulting abductees? Why the huge variety of craft-types and occupant-types, when it would be less work and more convincing to be consistent with the imagery? And could nature spirits even succeed in producing the range of physical effects associated with UAPs?²¹ These are not intended as rhetorical questions, but as genuine inquiries put to those sympathetic to the nature spirits hypothesis. And I am happy to grant that there may be reasonable and principled animist answers to all of them; however, I cannot discern any easy route to their provision.

Moreover, when the larger context is taken into account, it is not clear that animism would supply a particularly effective explanation for the seeming environmental interests of (some) ufonauts. For why do the large majority of UFO events (whether CE1 - CE4) involve no communication pertaining to environmentalism? Wouldn't such communication be a far more common feature of these experiences, if this were really the underlying motivation of the beings bringing them about? And, contrary to Dumsday's supposition, it is not the case that modern westerners are inevitably more likely to find extraterrestrial imagery and messaging plausible, in contrast to imagery and messaging that is openly and unambiguously sourced by nature spirits. If the nature spirits made unambiguous experiences of themselves as common as are UFO experiences, such that

19 This issue has already been alluded to in the summary of Vallée above, and the question of where (or if?) to draw lines between fairies, nature spirits, elementals, gods etc. The prospects for taxonomical precision here seem dim.

20 I have occasionally seen this contradicted in the non-naturalist side of the UFO literature. Longtime ufologist Joe Jordan, for instance, argues that the phenomenon is virtually non-existent in South Korea, where he has lived since 2011. A proponent of the UFOs-as-demonic hypothesis, he suggests that this is explicable by reference to a much lower level of participation in occult and New Age activities by South Koreans, as compared with Americans. See Jordan & Dezember (2020, ch. 8).

21 Animism might seem especially ill-suited to account for the most dramatic of these, namely crash retrievals and non-human bodily remains (if in fact they exist). Though in fairness, these would pose a challenge for most (all?) non-naturalist ontologies of UAPs.

over the course of a decade tens of thousands of people from all over the world could report *consistent* messages from (say) tree spirits warning us against fossil fuels or nuclear weapons, that would surely be more compelling messaging than whatever ends up being conveyed by way of this bizarre array of divergent (indeed sometimes contradictory) UAP encounters and messages.

In short, while it is not unreasonable for ufologists to explore animism and its potential utility (and unsurprising that a variety of them has actually done so over the years), I am sceptical whether the effort can actually yield much in the way of explanatory benefit.

That is not to say the attempt is not worthwhile—I have provided nothing like a knockdown objection against making it, and the sorts of questions I have raised could reasonably be seen by committed animists less as objections against their position and more as launching pads for a new research program in which the implications of their theory are more fully fleshed out and clarified. I have no wish to discourage such work; however, I stand by my contention that, among the presently available non-naturalist hypotheses of the UFO phenomenon, animism likely does not rank among the most promising options.

3. Conclusion

This paper has had limited aims: to summarize a sample non-naturalist ontology recently discussed in the ufological literature as having potential explanatory utility for the discipline, and to subject that ontology to some scrutiny regarding that utility. I chose to focus on animism because that theory has recently received greater attention in my own field of analytic philosophy and has also long played a limited role in ufological theorizing. Many other ontologies could have been canvassed, and indeed many more ought to be, especially by those ufologists pursuing research agendas focused on non-naturalist views of the phenomenon. I hope the paper encourages further philosophical work in this domain.

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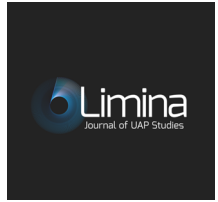
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The Discovery of OIL (Some Thoughts on Finding Other Intelligent Life)¹

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ABSTRACT

From the dawn of the modern age of UFOs in June 1947, the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) has been the dominant explanatory framework for the provenance of the devices and their presumably intelligent occupants. In more recent decades, however, students of the phenomenon have begun to think that it has nothing to do with off-worlders. Instead, the UFOonauts may very well be non-human locals. This essay presents one possible explanation for how this might be, weaving together insights from science, observations from religion, and our best collective evidence-to-date about the nature of UFOs. It concludes with an appeal for a dimension of inquiry that might shed further light on the UFO phenomenon to be added to the field of religious studies and a suggestion that science return to its roots and tweak some of its foundational assumptions in ways that could make the study of UFO phenomena not only more productive, but possible at all.

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“Anomalies are rarely beautiful when we are first introduced to them. They confound what we think we know.”

(Avi Loeb, *Extraterrestrial*, p. 99)

Twenty-six years ago I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the UFO and alien abduction movement. It was published in 2001 by the University of California Press (Denzler 2001) and received largely good reviews. By that time, there were a few things I was pretty sure were not going to happen in the world

of UFOs. I knew that a UFO declaring itself by landing on the White House lawn was pretty unlikely, documents pried from our government via the Freedom of Information Act were unlikely to give us a ringside seat to anything ultimately convincing, and a definitive revelation from some non-governmental source was equally unlikely.

On the other hand, I was pretty sure of a few things about UFOs. First, the phenomenon is real. It's not all hoaxes, misidentifications, or hallucinations. Second, there may be more than one thing happening with UFOs, but human

¹ This essay was originally delivered as a keynote address to the *Society for UAP Studies*' First Annual Conference, held in August 2024. It has been edited into an essay for *Limina*.

beings may lack the perceptual and cognitive abilities to be able (right now) to distinguish between these things.² Third, if this is so, attempts to make sense of the phenomenon with a single theory may be doomed to failure because no one theory can make sense of all the rich variability in the data.

The default hypothesis about the origin of UFOs that has been operative since the beginning of the modern UFO era is the extraterrestrial hypothesis (or ETH). It may be right. Perhaps incredibly advanced off-world technology can account for all the bewildering data. But I tend to doubt it. I'll wager that the ETH is only partially right, at best...if it's correct at all. There are other possibilities that may be harder to wrap our heads around, but closer to the truth. I want to chase one of those possibilities in this paper.

When I wrote my dissertation, I tried very hard to be sympathetic to UFO experiencers of all stripes without betraying the self-negating objectivity that the scholarly world demanded of me...and the threshold for what could be perceived as a lack of objectivity was pretty low. My advisor, for instance, was horrified at my merely mentioning the barest facts about the Roswell incident in one mid-sized paragraph. He said that to mention it at all made me sound like too much of a "believer." I knew I could not let my personal biases show, whether for or against UFO reality, much less could I offer any opinions about what UFOs might be if they were real, but the Roswell thing really shocked me. Clearly the river of denial in academia ran more deeply than I had imagined, and I tried hard to keep my "freak flag" safely folded up and out of sight.

But now I'd like to flaunt my biases and run a freaky thought or two up the flagpole. The following ideas are just speculative thoughts, not something I'm willing to go to the stake for. They are *informed* by what science tells us about Reality, but they are *shaped* by what 70+ years of modern UFO encounters have suggested to us. This is, in a way, the final chapter of my book—the chapter that I couldn't have written in 2001 even if I'd had the conceptual tools and intellectual freedom to do so.

My book outlined the history of human encounters with and reactions to the UFO phenomenon, exploring the two main interpretive frameworks that had been used within the UFO community to understand what was going on: science

and religion.

If the UFO myth has done nothing else in the twentieth century, it has crystallized within itself 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. It is a quest that in all times and ages has taken the more astute, the more persistent, or the more fortunate to the edges of reality—to the ends of our cognitive maps (and further), to the mystical margins that are said to join this world with a World Beyond.... "The study of UFOs is an opportunity to move toward a new reality, a means of increasing the borders of our awareness. The edge of reality is also the edge of knowledge. But beyond this edge is another science and another knowledge" (Denzler 2001, 159; embedded quote Hynek and Vallée 1975, 263).

Jeffrey Kripal has observed that "an author of the impossible is someone who has ceased to live, think, and imagine only in the left brain, who has worked hard and long to synchronize the two forms of consciousness and identity and bring them both online together" (Kripal 2010, 270). To the rollcall of that other science and that other knowledge toward which UFOs beckon us, I have an (im-)possible response: "Yes. I'm here."

1. Alternative theories about the nature of UFOs

There are a number of reasons to doubt the ETH as an explanation for UFOs, ranging from the odd behavior of the anomalies themselves³ to the even odder (though more readily understandable) behavior of the U.S. government, which has simultaneously promoted and debunked the idea almost from the outset.⁴ If the government seems to be more than a little evasive and manipulative when it comes to dealing with the subject of UFOs (and it does), the phenomenon in and of itself seems to be pretty much a carnival fun house in its own right.

2 Over the years, this has become a more popular position with a number of students of the UFO phenomenon. John Alexander, for instance, has also observed, "Clearly there is no single theory that will explain the totality of such complex events" (Alexander 2011, 269). Similarly, "even if some UAP turn out to be attributable to extraterrestrial civilizations, others may yet have a more mysterious and even unfathomable nature" (Lomas and Case 2023, 616).

3 For specific arguments against the ETH, see Vallée 1988, pp. 85-86, 99, 133, 161, 191, 259, 294, 297, 325-326, and Chapter 9; as well as Vallée 1990. The chorus of thoughtful people rejecting the ETH has grown over the years to include, for example, Kastrup 2023.

4 For an excellent treatment of the government's role in seeding the UFO subculture with disinformation, see Hansen 2001, esp. Chapter 18. See also Fawcett and Greenwood 1984; Haines 1997; and Gorightly 2021.

The craft go faster and fly higher than any technology we've had on Earth since the dawn of the modern UFO era in June 1947. They seem to deliberately toy with anything we can put in the air to try to track them. They go from sea to air and back again seamlessly, so even if we could go as fast as they do, we might not be able to follow them. They execute maneuvers that defy the laws of physics as we know them and would pulverize a human body: they change direction on a dime, disappear instantly into thin air, or sail with impunity into the sides of solid mountains. They change shape and color before our eyes. They may leave traces on the nearby environment or may fail to show up on radar screens or film no matter how experienced the photographer or fancy the equipment. They may disgorge beings that look a lot like us, or like insects or reptiles or robots (humanoid and otherwise). They can injure witnesses, or heal them (and their pets) of both chronic and acute health conditions. They may or may not come to us when beckoned, while indisputably showing themselves to unsuspecting people who never thought they'd see a UFO. As if this weren't enough, in many cases paranormal events like poltergeist disturbances occur in the wake of UFO sightings⁵ or psychic gifts may blossom in the experiencers.⁶

Knowing what to make of the phenomenon when you strip it down to basic behavioral traits like these is tricky. The ETH begins to seem like just "a tidy explanation for a grossly untidy phenomenon" (Cutchin 2015, 23). It is clearly not "strange enough to fit the facts" of UFO behavior (Vallée 1988, 325). Over the decades, a number of other ideas that try to account for some of that untidiness have been championed. They break down into three main branches of thought about the possible provenance of UFOs.

2. Other theories about UFOs

1. Material-based, namely:

Pure ETH (1947, on)

- A. Ancient astronauts: a tangent of the ETH (e.g., Alexander Kazantsev 1946; Brinsley Le Poer Trench

- 1960; Paul Misraki 1962; W. Raymond Drake 1964; Erik von Däniken 1968; Zechariah Sitchin 1976; Robert Temple 1976; Richard Dolan 2020)
- B. Atmospheric animals (e.g., Trevor Constable 1958, 1976; Bruce MacEvoy 2024)
- C. Prior earth civilizations
- i. Silurian Hypothesis: underground or underwater, hidden remnants of a long-defunct prior civilization on Earth (e.g., proposed *sans* UFO component in 2018 by astrophysicists Adam Frank and Gavin Schmidt; upgraded to consider UFO phenomena by Bernardo Kastrup in 2023)
 - ii. Crypto-terrestrials—quasi-extinct creatures (who may long ago have lost robust fitness for their evolutionary niche), a few of whom linger on (e.g., Mac Tonnies 2010)
- D. Our progeny from far into the future (e.g., Michael Masters 2019)

2. Psycho-social based, namely:

Projections individually or collectively created due to intrapsychic or social stressors (numerous authors).

- E. Archetypes (e.g., Carl Jung 1957)
- F. Tulpas

3. Non-material, characterized variously as:

- G. Cryptids—animal-like creatures that move between our Earth-based reality and some other realm or condition
- H. Faeries
- I. Demons/angels (most conservative/evangelical Christians)
- J. Djinn
- K. Deities
- L. Interdimensionals/ultraterrestrials (Hynek and Vallée 1975; Keel 1970, 1971, 1975; Vallée 1970; Madden 2023)

The first is materialist/mechanistic, conceptualizing the craft and the intelligences behind them as thoroughly corporeal. The ETH is the chief expression of this way of

5 The link between UFO sightings and subsequent psychic/paranormal activity has been recognized for decades. John Keel had begun to make the connection by the mid-1960s. He pointed it out as early as 1970 in *Operation Trojan Horse*, and subsequently in 1971 (esp. p. 126), in 1975 (esp. pp. 116, 156). The paranormal aspects of UFO events also began to shift the thinking of Vallée and Hynek by the 1970s. See their *The Edge of Reality*. Also see Vallée 1975, esp. Chapter 1; and Vallée 1988, esp. Chapter 6. More recently, see Hall 2001, 543-546; Ouellet 2015; Lacastski, Kelleher, and Knapp 2021, esp. Chapters 6, 9, and 16; and Coulthart 2021.

6 I met Mary Beth Wrenn at a local UFO group meeting, well before she assumed the mantle of being a professional psychic. She told me that she had been abducted by aliens and had begun to have psychic abilities. Later that day she used those abilities to tell me that I would complete my Ph.D. under totally different circumstances than the ones I was then enmeshed within. I was certain she was wrong. A number of years later I was cleaning out my files, and I ran across the field notes I had made that day. I was surprised to realize that everything Mary Beth told me had happened...without any machinations from me.

thinking about our aerial anomalies, which is usually the foundational assumption behind ancient astronaut theories as well. Other proposed materialist approaches have included the idea that UFOs might be from our human future or might be remnants of long-defunct hominid civilizations on earth that pre-dated the ascendancy of homo sapiens.

The second approach is psycho-social, focusing on UFOs as, essentially, mirrors of humanity. Under this schema, UFOs are cognitive and perceptual phenomena that we unwittingly create or tricks that we unconsciously play on ourselves. UFOs, in short, mainly tell us about us. Ultimately the questions addressed with this approach can be fruitful in providing insights into human beings and our cultures, but tend to obscure or obliterate the independent ontological status of the UFOs themselves.

The third approach to understanding UFOs and their occupants posits their natural home as a coterminous reality that extends beyond, but is “near,” our three (or four) experienced dimensions. The idea that an inhabited alternate reality exists can be traced back to our earliest ancestors, who periodically reported meeting entities from that region. The idea of there being an alternate reality as well as the idea that it is inhabited have been erased from the canons of the acceptable in the last few hundred years, largely through the rise of science and its favorite son, technology, as well as the emergence of modernity in general...but they have never completely died out. With the arrival of the “flying saucers,” the idea of alternate realities has begun to be revived, but this time with a faint imprimatur of scientific respectability.

3. My hypothesis in a nutshell

Science’s strictly materialist foundational assumptions about reality have abstracted out any idea of a non-material reality—or at least, any meaningful idea of one. We are left with a thoroughly material world, but (and this is key) one that is dynamic and not static. It changes, and those changes appear just by chance to have a point: greater complexity. We call this process “evolution.” Materialist science has tended to implicitly (if not explicitly) conceptualize the highest achievement of evolution on our planet as the creation of biological life. Out of that drive toward life, increasingly complex forms have arisen, until consciousness itself became

manifest in the workings of the material brain. The highest instantiation of consciousness, science implicitly suggests, is humanity.⁷

Many scientists and scholars, however, have come to believe that consciousness is not an epiphenomenon of the material brain but exists somehow “conjunct” the brain yet not strictly “from” it. Physicians prominent in the neurosciences like Eben Alexander and Marjorie Wollacott, for instance, have abandoned a materialist approach to consciousness. Scholars in the humanities and social sciences also raise objections and propose alternatives to the materialist approach to this most central attribute of being human. The political scientist Alexander Wendt, for example, adopts the idea that consciousness may be a fundamental macroscopic quantum trait of the universe in relationship to which human beings are “walking wave functions” (Wendt 2015).

The physicist Paul Davies also believes that consciousness “is a fundamental feature of the universe”—not just of human beings. Because it is everywhere, he says, we can expect consciousness to have evolved in places other than Earth (Davies 1995, 124-129). It evolved, he says, because the entire universe has a “mathematical unity” to it that self-organizes toward consciousness. It’s not just a universe of overlapping events and processes that are essentially unrelated.

The reason we can understand this mathematical unity, says Davies, is because the ability to do so is hardwired into the human brain. These brain structures allow us to use math to become aware of the fundamental order lying beneath the surface of things, including the order that “permit[s] matter to self-organize to the point where consciousness emerges” in creatures like us (Davies 1995, 127). The incredible thing about all this is that the ability to think in the complex mathematical terms necessary most likely developed within us long ago, *before* we needed to use it, and especially before we needed to do abstract advanced mathematics. After all, he writes, “Mathematics is not something that you find lying around in your back yard.... [It’s] very, very far removed from everyday affairs” (*Ibid.*, 127).

In other words, Davies believes that the physical laws of the universe have a mathematical organization that has led to the evolution of consciousness and to mathematically gifted

⁷ This depiction of evolution is bare-bones and simplistic, and there are various nuances, by-ways, and complexities that the theory has taken over the years—too many to mention here. Chance seems to play a significant role and consciousness sits at the apex of the evolutionary chain of being and becoming. It’s the most important (and vexing) thing to be explained. I am indebted to anthropologist Maya Cowan for pointing out to me that my short riff on evolution suggests its intentional progression toward an end. In truth, biological anthropologists do not see evolution as having any kind of intentional rationale. Rather, they view it as tending to confer survival advantage (or not) in any given ecological niche, but that conferment is without intention. It’s just the way the system works. The end result on this planet so far is consciousness. Intelligence. Sentience.

minds. Those mathematical gifts evolved and persisted in human brains long before they were ever needed...or used. When they were finally employed, they ultimately allowed us to think in sufficiently complex ways to look “backward” in time and understand the laws that resulted in us. Unlike many other attributes of brain and (arguably) even of consciousness in the animal world, the ability to do complex math is a tool that appears to be unique to humanity.

I would ask, however, what if the human ability to do abstract, advanced math is a tool built into our brains that does not *only* allow us to look *backward* to discover the basic laws of the universe that allowed our brains and ultimately consciousness to be? What if this is also a tool that could enable us to look “*forward*” to understand something about consciousness in the universe *as it may have evolved outside the human species*? What if we are not at the peak of the evolutionary chain that has produced consciousness? What if we are not at the peak just in terms of consciousness here on earth, never mind the entire cosmos? What if, instead, we are close to the middle or even the bottom end of earth’s evolution-of-consciousness chain of events, and there are other forms of consciousness that have evolved “beyond” us?⁸ Can we use consciousness at our level of attainment as well as our mathematical gifts to understand what might be evidence of such beings and figure out some of their essential traits?

Furthermore, what if evolution in our little corner of the universe was not limited to the three- (or four-)dimensional reality that life forms like human beings live within and can easily understand? What if there are dimensions of reality that we do not experience—at least, not on a daily basis? The discipline of physics (much of it, if not all) theorizes that there are other dimensions of which we are not normally aware that are more or less right “beside”—or better yet, “interwoven with”—what we experience. Physicists have tentatively mapped their nature and speculated about what reality would look like from within them. Assuming that in one sense or another they do exist, is there any necessary reason why the processes of evolution, including the evolution of consciousness, would have been limited to our three dimensions rather than operating in all that are available?

I suggest as a working hypothesis:

- That multi-dimensionality is a salient quality of this part of the cosmos we call “Earth”;
- That the forces of evolution operate on all available levels;
- That non-human life forms exhibiting both intelligence and consciousness may have evolved here and call Earth home;⁹
- That the intelligence(s) behind UFOs may be example(s) of such life forms;
- That if they are, then given the reported appearance of most of them they may constitute a branch of the primate family tree, since that seems to be the branch in 3D that has evolved the most complex forms of intelligence and consciousness;
- That they may have evolved into (or within) a dimensional evolutionary niche that is different from but not far removed from the 3D;
- That just as there are multiple kinds of 3D life on Earth, with varying morphologies and kinds and levels of intelligence, so there may be multiple kinds of beyond-3D life on Earth;
- That because they co-inhabit this planet with us, we have interacted with these life forms and come to know them by various names over the millennia; and
- In some cases, we have formed close relationships with them.

UFOs (and possibly the non-human intelligences [NHI] described by other names throughout history) might be explained by all of the above. Knowledge of their existence is something that was held before the Enlightenment, expunged by the ascendancy of rigid materialism as the default worldview behind science, nevertheless clung to and preserved by indigenous cultures, by occult seekers of a variety of stripes, and by experiencers of the anomalous around the world, and is just beginning to be re-imagined. The UFO subculture has been at the forefront of that re-imagining. The U.S. government seems to be trying to catch up, with its recent admission that UFOs are real after all (though there has been some careful hedging-about of that admission subsequently) (Cooper, Blumenthal, and Kean 2017). But

8 In making these connections I am indebted to two forward-thinking scholars of the UFO phenomenon: religious studies professor Diana Pasulka (2023, 32-33), who has observed that ability to conceptualize and understand UFOs may require a more advanced kind of mathematics (also see Pasulka 2019), and Michael Masters (2019), a biological anthropologist who uses evolutionary theory to posit that at least some of the entities associated with UFOs may be our distant relatives.

9 Kenneth Arnold’s opinion about what the UFOs were that he had sighted went from “military vehicles” at the time to “possibly extraterrestrial” by late July of that year to “most likely native to this Earth” fifteen years later (Clelland 2018, 55).

to create a bit of linguistic distance between what is now sanctioned as legitimate in contradistinction to what has gone before, the government has given the phenomenon a shiny new name: unidentified anomalous/aerial phenomena (UAP).

4. Breaking it down

4.1 The dimensions

Once upon a time, almost all human beings believed in the existence of invisible realities that were occupied by various forms of life (fairies, gods, jinn, elementals, demons, angels...) with varying degrees of apparent intelligence. Then came Sir Isaac Newton, his contemporaries, and his successors, and the conceptual world—at least for most intellectual elites in Euro-centric society and its dominions—began to be defined in much narrower, mechanistic, materialist terms.¹⁰

As many ideas circulating among elite thought-leaders tend to do, the materialist way of understanding reality slowly diffused among the less-educated masses, becoming a central belief of those who considered themselves to be rational and well-informed. Reality was conceptualized as one measurable thing, and it was Newtonian in nature. The gifts this worldview bestowed via technological innovations served to reinforce the truth and value of this approach.¹¹ Though by the 19th century there were some who used mathematics (a respectable and accepted route to scientific knowledge) to “reimagine transcendence and revitalize theistic beliefs,” including a belief in invisible dimensions, most scientists were not only *not* convinced but downright appalled at such a “credulous and simple-minded” use of the science of their day (White 2014, 1483; see also White 2018). Nevertheless, the scientific narrative about reality did not govern all thought. As Christopher White points out,

Mathematical truths, like religious truths, had long been considered ways of seeing beyond the shadowy phenomenal world to the highest realities beyond them.... Not every scientist and mathematician gave up on otherworldly realities and

ways of conceptualizing or envisioning them (White 2014, 1483, 1484).¹²

When unseen realities finally re-emerged from the outer darkness where a materialist science had tried to banish them, it was for one primary reason: things didn’t make sense without them. Mathematical things.

The theory of relativity and development of quantum mechanics forever changed the face of a Newtonian understanding of the world. As theoreticians chased the revelations provided by advanced mathematics, the equations didn’t make sense without the inclusion of unseen realities, i.e., other dimensions. The exact nature of those dimensions has not been nailed down yet, but theories range from multiverses where everything that can happen DOES happen, to universes composed of varying finite numbers of dimensions. We don’t see the dimensions beyond our 3 or 4, they say, because the rest are rolled up into extremely tiny, impenetrable pinpoints of energy. There is no tangible evidence for them, they explain, but the math tells us that they exist.

That doesn’t keep physicists, however, from trying to imagine what they are like and how we might perceive them if we bumped up against them in our 3D/4D window onto reality. Of particular interest is the dimension conceptualized as “closest” to our familiar 3D reality—the 5th dimension. Scientists using the Large Hadron Collider are trying to coax sub-atomic particles to manifest to us from the reality next door in the form of gravitons. Physicists aren’t certain that gravitons exist, but if they can be found they would be evidence for the reality of a 5th dimension.

For the rest of us who would like to know more about these dimensions but don’t have enough room on our credit cards to buy a collider, we’re left to try to imagine what we would perceive if something from the dimension next door became observable in our 3D/4D world. Some physicists think that “ripples or fluctuations in the 5th dimension [would] appear as light or even particles in our reality.” Whatever we could perceive would no doubt appear distorted or wavy, because we’d be seeing, in effect, “shadows” from the

10 The fact that Newton and a number of his contemporaries were also alchemists, students of the kabbalah, etc., is not normally mentioned alongside the facts of their discoveries and ideas with regard to the material world. For an excellent account of the development of science into an era-defining way of relating to reality, see Shapin 1996.

11 An idea that complicates the straightforward picture I am trying to paint, here, is that our “technology is not generated by humans but is somehow derived supernaturally, as a gift from either gods or non-humans” (Pasulka 2023; cited in Madden 2023, 112). The key point is not just the physical changes in our society that technology causes, but the changes in our relationship to each other, the world, and the cosmos that technology induces (Tonnie 2010, 121).

12 I strongly suspect (but of course cannot prove) that this reticence to reject the idea of higher realities was at least partly due to some scientists and mathematicians, just like some commoners, having personal experience(s) with what Jeffrey Kripal calls, the super-natural. See the corpus of Kripal’s work starting with 2010, 2011, 2019, 2022, 2024, and Kripal and Strieber 2016.

other dimension. Imagine our 3D reality to be a swimming pool, they say, and human beings are creatures who live out their lives underwater. We might not be able to see the ripples that form at the surface of the water (ripples from the 5D world), but we would be able to see a wavy, distorted shadow of the ripples on the bottom of the pool (Hickey 2024).¹³ We are never likely to be able to [directly] see or understand what 5D reality is like, say physicists, unless “some [other]-dimensional life-form pulls us from our three-dimensional Spaceland and gives us a view of the world from its perspective” (Groleau 2003).

I suggest that perhaps this is exactly what UAPs have been giving us: a glimpse into another level of reality. As any good UAP sighting database would confirm, their manifestations in our world could be described in exactly these terms.

- They often appear as balls of light;
- When they appear as particles, though, it’s not just at the sub-atomic or atomic level like the hypothetical graviton. They appear as solid structures that are visible to the unaided human eye, trackable on radar, and capable of leaving physical traces;
- Sometimes they change shape or seem to split into many or merge into one, all of which might be expected of a 5D object manifesting in 3D/4D reality;¹⁴
- Their points of entry or departure sometimes appear in our reality as exactly these kinds of wavy, distorted areas;
- They (or their non-human intelligent [NHI] occupants) have lifted hapless human beings into disorienting settings that may be within their reality.

As Leslie Kean has observed, UAPs operate as if they were “outside the boundaries of our physical world but *in it* at

the same time” (2011, p. 102). Perhaps it’s because they are.

4.2 The non-human intelligences

Michael Masters is a biological anthropologist with an intriguing theory about UAPs. In greatly condensed form, his basic argument is that the ETH has significant problems when accounting for UAPs and their reported occupants. The bipedal, big-brained, intelligent species that is humanity is “a physiological form that is not likely to evolve on a separate planet elsewhere in the universe” (Masters 2019, 63, see also 65, 69). In particular, walking upright evolved among our proto-human ancestors about 6-8 million years ago, he writes. It has led to a number of changes in our shape and neurology, and it would be unlikely to have happened in a closely similar way on other life-supporting planets due to environmental (e.g., gravitational) differences between those planets and Earth. Any other species on Earth that is similarly bipedal is the result of “similar [evolutionary] problems resulting in similar solutions, in similar environments” (*Ibid.*, 69). We are thus more likely to share traits (physiological and cognitive) with creatures that have evolved within this Earth environment than we are to share traits with extraterrestrials. The fact that the NHIs behind UAPs share our basic morphology in a number of key respects suggests that they could be what humanity looks like in our distant evolutionary future. UAP occupants, suggests Masters, may be our descendants. They could be our kids.¹⁵

Another clue in support of this relationship, Masters points out, lies in how we communicate. The physiology of communication as it might have evolved in some extraterrestrial species could be so far removed from the norms on Earth as to make mutual understanding extremely difficult. These likely hurdles extend to the cognitive and symbolic aspects of language, which could be even more

¹³ I am indebted to Hickey (2024) for this simple explanation of what 5D might look like to us. For a survey of the many worlds hypothesis at a lay level of understanding, see Byrne (2008).

¹⁴ For the classic treatment of how objects familiar to us in 3D might appear in 1D or 2D worlds, see Abbott (1884, repr. 2012). Abbott is commonly referred to as a theologian, but during his university years he did prize-winning work in (you guessed it) mathematics, as well. The fictitious author of the book, “A Square,” gives this dedication to the story (emphasis mine):

This Work is Dedicated
By a Humble Native of Flatland
In the Hope that
Even as he was Initiated into the Mysteries
Of THREE Dimensions
Having been previously conversant
With ONLY TWO
So the Citizens of that Celestial Region
May aspire yet higher and higher
To the Secrets of FOUR FIVE OR EVEN SIX Dimensions....

In light of this, I hope I am not far off in thinking that Abbott would find commendable my own enlarged imagination herein.

¹⁵ See Masters 2019, chapter 8 in particular for an explanation of the biological evolution of these future humans into the forms reported today by UFO experiencers.

divergent from Earth norms (*Ibid.*, 84-85). There are 6,000 to 7,000 different languages spoken on this planet, and any human can potentially learn any of them. The reason, Masters says, is because we are a single species and share certain basic biological and perceptual skills (*Ibid.*, 85). Interestingly, UAP reports from around the world all say that the entities communicate in the experiencer's native language. While an off-world NHI might have extreme difficulty doing so, "future humans would have a much easier time communicating with us in their own past [i.e., our present], as a result of cultural continuity and our shared history on the same planet" (*Ibid.*, 88).

Masters' theory is thought-provoking. When I considered his evolutionary perspective together with the other pieces of evidence about UAP behavior, however, I came up with a slightly different scenario. Is it possible that the majority of UAP occupants are a branch of the evolutionary tree here on earth that split off from the early primate branch at some point in the long-ago past and went on to develop and evolve into its own niche in the local dimensional environment? That local environment does not stop with the 3D, physical world as we experience it. But the niche into which they evolved (the 5th?) is close enough to our own 3D niche that they can move between it and ours when they choose to and in doing so become visible to us. Ergo, at times they seem physical, but then they (to our senses) suddenly "disappear" as they go back to their own niche.¹⁶ Their ability to speak to us in our many native languages would come from the fact that they have lived and moved among us for eons and had ample opportunity to track our development and learn our languages.

This is admittedly all speculative, and Masters has done the heavy theoretical lifting. I'm simply tweaking his work and making a slightly different assumption about dimensionality. Whereas Masters proposes that time travel is possible (counting "time" as another dimension), I propose that reality includes other dimensions beyond the fourth one of time and that given the right know-how they may be traversable.

More and more students of the UAP phenomenon are suspecting that the NHIs behind the UAPs are locals—not off-worlders. If this is true, there are currently at least three

attempts to account for how they came to be here with us. One is some form of the Silurian Hypothesis, which posits the entities as remnants of a humanoid race that existed on earth and then met disaster at some point in the pre-history of *homo sapiens* (Kastrup 2004; also Tonnie's 2010; Lomas, Case, and Masters 2024), one is Masters' Time Traveling Progeny Hypothesis, and another is my own Distant Cousins from Next Door Hypothesis. As Mac Tonnie's has observed, "Alien contact—whatever 'alien' might ultimately mean—might be what the process of evolution looks like to the human mind" (2010, 18).

4.3 Their interests

Why these NHIs are manifesting themselves on Earth (or in our 3D/4D segment of it) can only be guessed at by looking at how they have conducted themselves and what they say to the people they interact with (assuming their standards of truth-telling are no worse than our own,¹⁷ and making allowances for the foibles of human memory). There seem to be three major rationales proposed for their presence: general environmental study, research into human biology and reproduction, and alarm over human behavior.

Environment: As Vallée has observed, UAP occupants are forever seen digging around in the dirt, collecting samples of soil, vegetation, and who-knows-what-else. This gives them the appearance of being scientists and explorers. Vallée thinks they've been doing these things far longer than any normal scientific project would take, which militates against their being ETs. But perhaps his vision in this regard is too anthropocentric. Perhaps the repetition reflects a scientific endeavor with a longitudinal study design that staggers the imagination of relatively short-lived humans. If they are indeed engaged in some sort of study, they may not be physical scientists. Masters suggests they could be archeologists and anthropologists from the future coming back in time to do field work on the lives and times of their forebears (i.e., us) (Masters 2019, 90). Perhaps, I would suggest, they could be engaged in a field of scientific endeavor that humanity has yet to define for itself, so their actions seem nonsensical to us. Or as a friend has suggested, perhaps they

16 For what it is worth, some UAP entities now claim that they come from the same place that experiencers do (Hall 2001, 531, 532, 541, 553-554, 559). There are several ways to think about the fact that in the contactee era the UAP entities claimed to be from space but in more modern times have also claimed an origin on Earth. They could have been lying earlier, lying today, or there could be more than one group appearing in our skies. As Mac Tonnie's points out, "[W]e should never believe what the others tell us without taking into account their obvious need for secrecy" (2010, p. 99). For now, their claims about where they come from are simply data points to consider.

17 Tonnie's suggests that we should not necessarily buy hook-line-and-sinker what the UFO occupants tell us, because they seem to have a need for secrecy and may shape what they say in order to remain a bit of a mystery to us (2010, pp. 24, 99; see also pp. 66-67).

are gathering samples as part of a terra-forming project on some other planet.¹⁸

In truth, however, I tend to side with Vallée. The nature of this repetitive activity makes me wonder if it's all just a show—a part of the choreography of their manifesting themselves to us in non-threatening ways. According to Ardy Sixkiller Clarke's informants, American Indian traditions say they've been doing these kinds of things on Earth for thousands of years (Clarke 2012, loc. 387, 1678.). Similarly the NHIs who abducted Herbert Schirmer in 1967 told him they were engaged in a slow “reveal” campaign to prepare the way for eventual open contact. They purposely contacted people at random so as not to reveal too much of a pattern, they told Schirmer. They want to keep us confused so we won't get too upset as we gradually get used to their presence (Hall 2001, 531; Lindeman n.d.). In other words, “You should believe in us some, but not too much” (Lear 2020).

Biology: They also seem to have a fascination with human reproduction. Betty and Barney Hill were famously subjected to procedures during their 1961 abduction that had something to do with their reproductive systems. Indeed, the NHIs seen by Schirmer told him that “they had a ‘breeding analysis’ program and had been observing Earth for a long time” (Lindeman n.d.).

In the era of the abductees, biological/reproductive manipulations became one of the defining features of close encounters. The rationale for this, however, continues to be a matter of debate. It has lost all semblance of being anything so neutral as a matter of mere “analysis” on the part of the entities and has taken on more questionable—even ominous—overtones of genetic manipulation or even infiltration of the human race (Jacobs 1998; *ibid.* 2015; Hopkins 1987; *ibid.* 1996; Hopkins and Rainey 2003). Some of Clarke's informants have said that the entities they encountered were not the tribal Star Nations and ancestors of yore but a new group of entities who were interested in inserting themselves into the human population through genetic engineering of their own species using materials taken from humans they abducted (Clarke 2012, 160-169).

Human Welfare: The NHIs behind the UAPs have long been thought to be coming here to help humanity. In the early decades of the post-WWII era, the messages contactees and other kinds of close encounter experiencers shared

from the beings concentrated heavily on the danger of nuclear weapons. The pattern of UAP sightings over the decades verifies that they have a keen interest in our nuclear technology, especially our nuclear weapons. This is not a benign, observational interest. In fact, there have been multiple instances where UFOs have been sighted above nuclear missile installations at the same time that every single missile went offline—a situation that these facilities are designed to prevent happening (Hastings 2017, especially chapter 10; Hancock, Porritt, and Grosvenor 2023). At other times, their presence has occurred at the same time that nuclear weapons facilities went into “launch” mode for a short time without any human operator giving the necessary instructions to make that happen (Alexander 2011, 171-172). In a similar vein, it is not unusual for them to render missiles aboard fighter jets unable to launch or handheld guns unable to be fired (Clarke 2010, 20-21, 197; Alexander 2011, 33-34).

I think this is a key to understanding who they are and why they are seen so often. It's not that from some distant vantage point in space they saw us explode a nuclear device and came on over to investigate and caution us. Rather, the issue is that they live here in these close cosmic environs with us, and our nuclear capability is a threat to their existence... not just our own. In one sense, these NHIs and their interest in us are nothing new. UAPs and various types of non-material entities have featured in human history (mythic history, at the very least) for quite a long time, and still do for members of religious traditions (Vallée 1969; Vallée and Aubeck 2009).¹⁹ In another sense, however, there is something new about what's happening with UAPs today.

Within one month in 1945, humanity exploded three nuclear devices (at Alamogordo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki) in a wartime setting. Within a couple of days of the last bomb, a strange object appeared in the skies over the Trinity test site and by all accounts crashed (Vallée and Harris 2021). The wartime use of nukes was followed by two nuclear detonations (tests) conducted by the U.S. during relative peace in 1946 (Wikipedia 2024, “List” and “Nuclear”). In 1948, the US military created a plan to send nuclear missiles to 30 different cities in the Soviet Union if an attack were ever ordered by the president (Hastings 2017, 219.) This suggests that we either had enough warhead-capped missiles to do so or could quickly have had the necessary number.

18 My thanks to my friend Tom Davis for drawing my attention to this idea.

19 For contemporary treatments of non-material entities that some see as forerunners of the modern UFO, also see Keel (1970); Harpur (1994); Purkiss (2000); and Lomas and Case (2023).

By December 1948, UAPs were being seen regularly near the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Sandia Base in Albuquerque (*Ibid.*, 38).

Note that while UAPs have a track record of shutting down nuclear missile silos, shooting down test rockets (Cooper 2023; also NICAP n.d.; Alexander 2011, 168-172; and Hastings 2017), and even disabling weapons on military aircraft and simple handheld guns, they did NOT anticipate Hiroshima and Nagasaki and prevent that carnage. They did NOT prevent us from using nuclear weapons to commit actual violence. Did they not know in advance that this was our intent? Did they not care? It's hard to know. After we had demonstrated our intent, however, they seemed to take notice.

Are they really here to try to save us from ourselves? Are they an altruistic lot, when all is said and done? Maybe. But note the areas of interest that they seem to focus upon. The danger of messing around with breaking apart atoms was their first and strongest area of concern. In more recent decades, as the nuclear threat has diminished somewhat, they have begun to focus their warnings on environmental degradation. The reason for this new global interest is not supported by their behavior, however. While they are seen surprisingly often at nuclear sites, they aren't reported hovering very often near toxin-laden Superfund sites on land or the floating garbage islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Let's bracket the idea that they are just being altruistic and look instead at what they might have to gain by what they say and what they do.²⁰ Engaging in a bit of speculation as to why they have an interest in the ecology of our 3D reality might lead us into some dark places when considered alongside their apparent genetic interest in human beings. Since the actual evidence for their having such a genetic program is exceedingly thin, however, we can only speculate, which does us little good. On the other hand, when it comes to our nuclear capabilities, our reasoning about the interest of the NHIs can be less opaque because the evidence for that interest, in terms of behaviors that we can track, is much more substantial. Their words match their deeds.

It has been noted in the past that the messages from these NHIs seem to be copycatting whatever our current social concerns are in a given time period. The implication is that UAPs and their occupants are just projections of our collective angst. They deliver, as if from outside us,

messages that we are trying to tell ourselves. This is one of the observations about UAP behavior used to support psycho-social theories about their origin.

However, human angst over the last 70+ years has covered a lot more ground than nuclear fears and environmental concerns. Yet you never hear these NHIs talking about social justice issues, or inflation and recession, or political shenanigans, or the rapid rise in rates of obesity worldwide, or the benefits and dangers of artificial intelligence, or cancer and other scourges, or hunger in technological and developing nations alike, or the increase in gun violence...all issues of concern for the welfare of humanity. If UAPs and their occupants are really just our own projections onto the cosmos, the narrow range of their reported interests compared to the wide range of human concerns needs to be explained.

The record so far shows that UAP occupants have a fairly narrow range of issues that they speak about with those they contact. Those issues almost exclusively show an ongoing concern for one or two things in human society that, if they share this earth with us, conceivably might directly impact their own lives. For the first time in history, human beings have the capability to impact our shared environment in massively negative ways. And this matters to them. Unlike the whales and sparrows and prairie dogs and all other forms of life in our 3D/4D world that cannot advocate for their own preservation by trying to get humans to adjust their behaviors, the NHIs associated with UAPs can—and apparently do. Maybe the reason we see them as often as we do is because they're patrolling the neighborhood to try to make sure humanity doesn't turn it into a wasteland?

4.4 Our relationship with them

There have been numerous theories about the ways in which UAP entities might have interacted with humanity down through history (from ancient times until today). One set of theories is that extraterrestrial NHIs were involved in the biological evolution of *homo sapiens*.²¹ Another set explains the creation of great monuments and temples as aided by extraterrestrial knowledge and technology, if not in fact being the direct result of their efforts. Most of these theories have been discounted as giving too little credit to the natural

20 Tonnies also believes that the NHIs may not be especially altruistic (2010, p. 86).

21 Most recently, Harvard astronomer Avi Loeb suggested that human evolution really might have had a "nudge" along the way from beings he conceives of as extraterrestrials. At least, he maintains, the idea should not be dismissed out of hand (2021, 168). Also note this from Pulitzer Prize finalist Garrett Graff: "Maybe...this is all less of a leap than we think...our evolution was more preordained and automatic than we currently believe" (2023, 419-420).

processes of evolution and to the growing ingenuity and talent of our species over time.

However, the ideas are “sticky.” They persist in the UAP community and seem to percolate into the thinking of more and more people as time goes on, with suitable adjustments in terms of just who our proposed benefactors were. Whether these ideas about ancient alien STEM will one day help to structure a new revolution in scientific thought remains to be seen. In the meantime, I would like to think about a different and important aspect of human life in the context of a multi-dimensional neighborhood cosmos with intelligent beings populating it. I want to think about humanity’s religious beliefs and behaviors.

In October 2017 a foreign object was discovered traveling through our solar system. As astronomers worldwide rushed to figure out what it was before it disappeared back into the depths of space, they found that it defied the laws of physics governing the movement of things like asteroids and comets. It was, some suspected, a technological rather than a natural thing—a mechanical stand-in for our first confirmed interstellar visitors. The many conversations that have ensued about this wanderer “often veer into the religious,” says Avi Loeb, a professor of astronomy at Harvard University who was involved in the discovery (2021, 153). It’s not an unusual reaction to encounters with an unexpected “other” that fall outside the parameters of the known.

In 1973, the chair of the physics department at Southeast Missouri State, Harley Rutledge, assembled equipment and a college-educated team of observers to track and try to explain (away) a series of UAP sightings that had been occurring in the area. It was the first scientific field study of its kind, and the findings were not at all what everyone expected. His first unmistakable encounter with a UAP left him in awe:

A great wave of excitement overwhelmed me. Never had I experienced such exhilaration. UFOs really exist. And I was an eyewitness! ... [Later that night] I slowly succumbed to sleep, believing that my life would never be the same.... For more than a year, as I approached that particular episode during public lectures, I had difficulty dealing with the emotion it stirred. Even now, the impact of the experience may surface without warning (Rutledge 1981, 43-47).

As the immediate psychological impact wore off, Rutledge thought about what had happened.

More was involved than the measurement of physical properties of UFOs by dispassionate observers. A relationship, a cognizance, between us and the UFO intelligence evolved. A game was played.... In this Project, we dealt with an intelligence equal to or greater than that of man.... In my opinion, this additional consideration is more important than the measurements or establishing that the phenomenon exists. This facet of the UFO phenomenon perturbed me as much as the advanced technology we observed. It is a facet I cannot really fathom—and I have thought about it every day for more than seven years (*Ibid.*, 23-33, 236).²²

As Loeb noted, reactions to encounters with NHI—whether in person or via what appear to be their artifacts—often go beyond simple awe and veer into frank religiosity. For instance:

In officially atheistic, communist Russia, a 1965 spate of UAP sightings in Kazakstan produced feelings of awe in local residents and, to the great consternation of the authorities, resulted in a revival of religion (Edwards 1966, 272-274).

French farmer Maurice Masse had a close encounter with a UAP and its occupants in the summer of 1965. He said he’d developed some “new abilities” in the wake of the event, considered the land upon which it had occurred as personally “sacred,” and ultimately admitted that he had communicated with the entities he encountered. Nevertheless, he refused to countenance a religious interpretation of the event (Vallée 1990, 96-101).

On the other hand, Nebraska patrolman Herbert Schirmer, who was taken aboard a landed UAP in 1967, over the years came to view his experience as a positive religious event (Clark, 1998, 611-615; *Night Sky II* n.d.).

Conversely, New Mexico patrolman Lonnie Zamora had the opposite reaction to his 1964 sighting. The first person he called for assistance

²² Compare this note from an anthropologist reporting on nocturnal lights while doing fieldwork in Chile 25 years later: “There seemed to be a kind of ‘game’ going on, with an exchange of actions or interactions between the objects and us, mediated by some type of acknowledgement of our presence and our attitudes.... to this context we should add another component: the phenomenon of intercommunication between the objects concerning our group” (Escobar 2012, 1, 40).

when the sighting ended was fellow officer M.S. Chavez, who soon arrived at the site to find Zamora pale, sweating, and badly shaken. “You look like you’ve seen the devil,” Chavez quipped to try to lighten Zamora’s mood. “Well, maybe I have,” the officer responded, then asked Chavez if he thought he (Zamora) should talk to a priest before he talked to anyone else about the sighting (Project Blue Book, 1964).

Betty Andreasson Luca, a conservative Christian who had a series of close encounters starting in 1967, ultimately decided that her experiences were from God (Fowler 1979; Fowler, 1982).

Forty years later, businessman and conservative Christian Chris Bledsoe had an extraordinary experience with UAPs and their associated NHIs about which he ultimately made the same interpretation. They slowly changed him into a person who rejected the label “religious” but embraced the label “spiritual” (Bledsoe 2023).

Even Kenneth Arnold, whose 1947 sighting initiated the modern age of UAPs, experienced a series of odd, paranormal-type events both during and after his sighting—events that he did not mention in public at the time. As his thoughts developed, he came to feel that the whole thing was essentially a spiritual experience (Clelland 2018, 54-61).

It is a well-worn observation, nowadays, that any sufficiently advanced technology might look like something supernatural to an observer lacking a similar level of scientific know-how. The result of such encounters is to awaken a “fundamental religious impulse” within us. When that impulse is triggered, we don’t tend to “theorize about transcendence but to worship it” (Berger 1969, 86, 87). Even the modern scientific mind, Loeb says, can see “a good approximation to God” in such situations (Loeb 2021, 153-154). The reasons for this appear to be rooted in our biology.

The human brain is apparently hardwired to need “gods”—or at least to respond to certain kinds of stimuli as if they were gods, according to Newberg, D’Aquili, and Rause

in their book *Why God Won’t Go Away*. The center of sensitivity to these triggers is in the limbic system—the oldest part of the brain. This important neural nexus was present even in Neanderthals and is part of the evidence that they, too, likely had some kind of propensity to feel transcendence and respond with some form of worship when confronted with triggering events (Newberg, D’Aquili, and Rause 2001, 55).²³

If the NHIs behind UAPs have been around our cosmic neighborhood for as far back as we can remember—which is what the historical record strongly suggests, at least in terms of our belief—then it would make sense that close encounters with them might have triggered our forebears just as they trigger us today and could ultimately have led to the growth of not only mythic stories about non-human creatures like fairies, jinni, and elementals, but also religious traditions about gods, devils, and angels.

This means that the field of religious studies likely has a strong role to play in advancing our understanding of the intelligences behind UAPs. Religion is a worldwide, pan-historical phenomenon. This makes it a record without equal that has something important to say about our longstanding relationship with the NHIs who have impressed us so profoundly throughout our history that we have sometimes ascribed the powers of gods to them. But I am not advocating for a religious studies approach in the usual sense, although that has wisdom to offer.

Typically the study of religion proceeds along two broad paths. The first is the traditional one that goes back for millennia: theological. The inquirer stands within a religious tradition and studies it as an authoritative pronouncement about what a deity wants and how humans ought therefore to behave. It is based in a fundamental attitude of worship toward the deity. The second is a more recent development that gained traction in academia in the mid-1900s: socio-historical and historical-critical. The inquirer stands outside of [or firmly brackets] any kind of frank commitment to the object of study, adopts an attitude of more or less dispassionate examination, uses the tools of the social sciences and historical criticism, and looks at the thing not as a deity-centered phenomenon but a human-centered one. In other words, the phenomenon is treated as if it tells us all kinds of things about humanity, with little attention given to the

23 Newberg is a neuroscientist whose work focuses on the relationships between brain function and religious states, a field called “neurotheology.” Also see Nelson (2011, 173). Michael Shermer, a professional skeptic and ardent supporter of scientific materialism, takes up the neurology of transcendence for a few pages in *How We Believe* (2000, 65-69). The role of events like UFO encounters in religious belief is examined in a more socio-psychological vein by James McClenon in *Wondrous Events* (1994).

ontological status of the deity/-ies themselves.²⁴

Mining the wealth of data buried in the world's religious traditions for insights about the nature of UAP occupants is going to require a hybrid approach. It will mean studying the "gods" themselves for the first time as active actors on the world stage in and for themselves, not just in terms of how they relate to and affect human beings. It will mean using the methods of the social sciences, the physical sciences, and historical-critical scholarship.²⁵ It will mean putting under the metaphorical microscope the NHIs that our hard-wiring has led us to regard with awe in the past and who still strike us with awe today. It will mean looking at their interactions with humanity in much the same way that we look at political, economic, and cultural interactions between, say, ancient city-states in the Middle East. It will mean treating them first and foremost as independent entities apart from any consideration of the ways in which they may stimulate our religious impulses.

Let me make myself a bit clearer. If we studied whales the way we have so far studied "god/the gods," we would study traditions *about* alleged human contacts with whales, devise belief systems that invoke whales as a reason for how things are or should be, perform rituals to honor or appease whales, build monuments in which to ritualize our relationship to them.... Or, in a more modern vein, we would study how the idea of whales has been shaped by human culture and thinking, or how groups of humans have behaved and continue to behave in the name of whales, or the role of beliefs about and practices invoking whales in the rise of commerce in human society, etc.

We would know little to nothing about the unique (compared to humans) nature of whales' skin or anatomy, how they live and move through a medium that we can only visit, how they organize their social life (if any), how they communicate with each other, exactly where in the vast oceans are the areas they call "home" (if any), how they

propagate and care for their young (assuming such exist), and how they fit into the larger ecology of reality.... We would know little to nothing about whales as and for themselves, and mostly know only about them as a mirror of ourselves in one sense (theological) or another (sociological).²⁶

We can change this. We can develop an anthropology of the NHIs as a unique non-human culture. A particularly rich lode of information lies in our religious traditions, where we have more information about the NHIs that share our planet with us than just what we have been able to gather in the last 75 years or what we *will* be able to gather in the next 75 years, and we need to make use of it. In our species' childhood, these entities manifested to us, and it may be that we took them to be gods.²⁷ They are manifesting to us today in new terms that are more likely to make sense to us at our current stage of species development: as technologies we might be able to kick the tires of if we could get our hands on one,²⁸ and as scientists – whether environmental, anthropological, or biological. But we still have a tendency to respond with awe and feel as if we may have touched something super-natural when we encounter them. This is to be expected, given the neural structures that we have. Is it, however, what is needed as the relationship between us continues to evolve?

At this point some readers will be wondering if I'm an atheist or agnostic and whether I'm promoting an abandonment of religion or, more broadly, spirituality because I'm attributing everything to these NHIs instead. The answer to both questions is "no." I do find myself leaning more toward a deist interpretation of Source rather than a theistic interpretation, which irritates me. I never much cared for deism as a way to conceptualize Source, but I can't deny that my reasoning (and a few life experiences) have led me there anyway. I am, however, saying that all religious traditions can be examined using the framework of understanding alleged encounters with god(s) and other assorted non-human entities as encounters with these NHIs,

24 For an example of the theologically embedded approach when applied to UAP phenomena, see Barry Downing (1968). Broadening the setting and changing the tools available for the study of religion brought the inquiry more closely in line with other fields of academic inquiry, which has led to the expansion of what counts as "religion" – including, ironically enough, science itself when practiced and promoted in dogmatic and dismissive ways. Doubt, observes Walter Truett Anderson, was the force that drove scientific inquiry, but the product of that doubt often functioned as a certainty that replaced religion as "the source of absolute truth" and cast "hard-nosed scientists" in the role of its priestly caste expounding a "new metaphysical realism" built on the worshipful "mystique of the scientific fact" (1990, 33, 13, 72, 258). Also see Midgley (1992), and Midgley (2002).

25 I note that Tonnies makes a plea for the creation of a thorough "taxonomy of the otherworldly" (2010, 52-52). From the hard sciences and technology end of inquiry, Josef F. Blumrich examines a sacred text to discover what he feels could be evidence of an NHI in antiquity. He encourages other engineers to get involved in the study of UAP (or as they were called in his day, UFO) phenomena by using their skills to look closely at other ancient texts (sacred, mythic, etc.) as well as archeological evidence (1974, 146-147).

26 For those wanting to know more about whales, dolphins, and porpoises, especially how we define intelligence in non-humans species, see Mann 2018.

27 The question inevitably arises as to whether this was by design on the part of the NHIs or not. Did they seek our worship and submission, or did we offer it so readily that they simply learned to cope with the fact or use it to their advantage when necessary? Or a combination of the above?

28 Some say we have done so already. That is a subject for a whole different paper.

and I do not privilege any one religious tradition as having “gotten it right” with regard to Source while all others “got it wrong.”

5. For example: one possible point of departure for NHI studies

“[W]e are often watched at close distance by beings that we ourselves cannot see,” wrote Patrice Malidoma Somé, an African (Dagara tribe) shaman who was educated in the finest Western tradition but ultimately also underwent initiation into his tribe’s form of adult male education, as well. “And...when we do see these otherworldly beings, it is often only after they have given us permission to see further—and only after they have made some adjustment to themselves to preserve their integrity” (1994, 225). The NHIs behind UAPs have been doing just that for at least the last 70+ years.

Each age and each tradition, according to sociologist Peter Berger, has its own unique signals of transcendence that must be confronted (1969, 9-82), just as Somé did. “The critical reality principle,” says philosopher and theologian John Hick, is “that there are realities external to us, but... we are never aware of them as they are in themselves, but always as they appear to us with our particular cognitive machinery and conceptual resources...” (1999, 41). Because they appear to us in this way, says Huston Smith, the noted historian of religions, “Enigmatic energies of some kind seem to be at work, but...it is the very mischief to verify them or identify what they are.” The intermediate (other-dimensional) world that is the natural home of these energies consists of a hodge-podge of creatures that have been called by different names at different times and places in human history. Some of these alleged creatures are probably fanciful, but others likely have a factual basis (Smith 1982, 93-94).²⁹ Separating out the fanciful from the factual may be tricky, but one guiding principle might be that when an entity is described in closely similar terms among very different cultures and across different expanses of time, it is more likely to be real. I suggest that one of these non-human intelligences has been

documented in the Moslem faith. They are known as the jinn, and they sound very similar to the UAP NHIs of our day.

Born in the 12th century, Muhyi al-Din ibn al-‘Arabi was an influential Islamic scholar and mystic as well as a prolific writer. He described a realm intermediate between the abode of Allah and that of humanity to which humanity occasionally has access. He called this place “the imaginal realm.”³⁰ Time behaves differently there, but it is still a sensory realm. The senses that must be used to perceive it, however, are analogs to our physical senses and not our physical senses themselves. The beings that inhabit this reality are varied, but the ones with whom humanity has the most contact are the jinn, who are “neither angels nor corporeal things, but they have qualities that are both spiritual and corporeal, luminous and dark.” The mythical expression of this luminosity is that jinn can look like they are made of fire that does not give off smoke. In more modern terms, they can appear to glow or be self-luminescent.

Ibn Arabi says that three kinds of beings typically manifest themselves in the realm of imaginal reality: angels, jinn, and human beings. In doing so, beings that naturally do not have corporeal bodies may become embodied, while those with normally corporeal bodies may become “spiritualized.” The NHIs known as jinn are neither inherently good nor inherently bad; they make choices in their behavior, just as humans do. Knowing what kind of NHI (to use our contemporary term) you’re dealing with can be tricky. It’s easy to think you’re interacting with one kind when events later suggest you were actually interacting with a very different kind.

The jinn are known to be shape-shifters, and though they are not corporeal in any human sense, they can be difficult to distinguish from material, sensory objects. Despite being noncorporeal, they can leave effects on material objects and can even be killed.³¹ One person’s experiences with them may be perceived simultaneously by nearby individuals or remain confined to the one targeted person. They can appear in view and then disappear in the blink of an eye or when you turn your head for a moment. This is because these beings,

29 The most recent efforts to name, validate and understand human encounters with these “enigmatic energies” have been undertaken by Jeffrey Kripal in a growing body of scholarship. Please see footnote 12.

30 This description of the jinn is taken from Chitick (1994, 69-77, 83-95). For another description of the jinn, see Playford (2024, 159-173). Playford uses religious questions raised by the existence of jinn in Moslem thought to approach the same questions with regard to more traditionally conceived extraterrestrials. Chitick’s translation is taken from the work of Henri Corban, who translated the Islamic texts into Western languages and, according to some critics, also unduly Westernized the traditional understanding of the “imaginal.” Playford addresses this issue by focusing on the material/immaterial nature of the jinn, ultimately stating that while they may be conceptualized as material entities, the nature of that materiality is very different from human materiality. Correspondingly, the nature of their native realm (the imaginal realm) is not usually visible to human eyes but is also not geographically separate from the human realm. “As a result, in a sense, the jinn do live on ‘Earth’, albeit, under normal circumstances, not in the way that we do.” (2024, 165, 169).

31 For the idea that jinn have limited life spans and are subject to death (including being killed), see Playford 2024.

in becoming embodied and being seen, become somewhat “fixed” in their corporeality and shape until they can make the viewer break their gaze for even just a split second.

The chief trait of the imaginal reality is its “ambiguity, its uncertainty, its deceptive qualities.” One of the chief delights of the jinn is to give humans supposedly special knowledge that is, in fact, irrational and untrue. To use an indigenous term that has made its way into our modern culture, imaginal reality is the home of the trickster.³² Because human beings are largely out of our depth in this reality and lack clear-eyed experience with these sorts of NHIs, Ibn Arabi enjoins us to use great caution.

6. And this leaves us...where?

“One of the elements that keeps history from being a complete bore is that it is full of ‘surprises.’”

(Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, p. 16)

“Personally,” says theoretical physicist Michio Kaku, “...I am thrilled by the idea of entirely new worlds that exist next to ours” (2005, 360). Whether we want to conceptualize them as other dimensions or multiple alternate universes—that can be ironed out in time by our mathematical adepts. What I have been arguing for is that UAP and their associated phenomena are evidence that these other realities exist, that they are essentially “right here,” and that they are probably teeming with life.³³ Even intelligent life. Which brings me back to the ETH.

Could I be wrong? What if there is intelligent extraterrestrial life that has been visiting Earth? It could happen, you know. And I agree that there’s a greater-than-0% chance that it’s already happening. How much greater is a matter for debate.

But if it is happening...how do we know that what drew them here was *homo sapiens*? What if it was this other nearby reality and its NHIs that the ETs wanted to establish contact with, instead? Not us? What if making contact with humanity is the ET version of an African camera safari? Or what if making contact with us is their own version of having an “in-

the-wild petting zoo”?

These possibilities might seem like they’d be a crushing blow to human dignity if they were true, especially if we collectively persist in the idea that human beings are, either through special creation or through evolution, the pinnacle of conscious, intelligent life on earth. “Just as we once gave up on the belief that the Earth was at the center of the universe,” says Loeb, “so must we start to act from the clear statistical likelihood that we are not intelligent sentient creatures without peers....[W]e are very likely a great deal less accomplished than what the universe has already witnessed” (2021, 152). The UAP phenomenon suggests that we don’t have far to look to find our peers...and indeed, our superiors in at least some respects.

Does the scenario I have painted to explain UAPs and their occupants threaten to take us backward, back to a time when witches and fairies and gods and goblins were still a part of most peoples’ mental furniture? By re-introducing the super-natural,³⁴ are we in danger of losing a firm grip on scientific thinking? (Assuming that this form of thinking is widespread, which may be a dubious assumption to start with.) Or by pointing to UAPs as signs of an intelligence that appears to surpass our own in at least some ways, do we thereby diminish human dignity and worth?

I would like to borrow a thought from the feminist theorist Donna Haraway to propose a new way of talking about ourselves. Haraway, who is wrapped up in the world of dog shows, writes about dogs and their relationship to humans, pointing out that the two are “co-constitutive companion species” that are co-evolving. Dogs are not just companion *animals*, she emphasizes, but a companion *species*. She puts them on a level with us, because we are both more than individual creatures involved in owning and being owned. We are each members of a whole species wrapped up in a co-creative companionship that is, she believes, “the rule [in evolution], not the exception” (2016, 94, 106).

I would like to take her insight to freaky heights and propose that human beings and the NHIs behind UAPs are companion species, too. In his legendary *Book of the Damned*, Charles Fort mused that it’s possible the human race is the

32 For an excellent, in-depth treatment of the trickster, see Hansen 2001.

33 It is especially intriguing to think about whether some or all of the variety of “mysterious creatures” that have been described throughout human history—including this present scientifically enlightened time—are in any way a part of these “new worlds” that are really so very old. As jumping-off points, see, for instance, Keel (1994), Keel (1995), Keel (1975); Sanderson (1970); Evans-Wentz (1911 repr. 2004).

34 My thanks to Jeff Kripal for all the work he has done to liberate this term from the burial shroud bestowed upon it by modern materialism.

“property” of “someone else” (1919 repr. 1974, 163).³⁵ If so, we may be “property” in a way similar to the way dogs are property to us. In other words, it is not an incidental relationship; it is profoundly consequential to both of us. It is a part of what constitutes each of us as a species. We are companions of each other. And like all good companions, we and the NHIs “are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species” (Haraway 2016, 94).

7. Confronting our signals of transcendence

UAPs are our signals of transcendence in the 21st century, and we need to confront them both as individual thinkers/experiencers and as a species. If acknowledging not just their current presence but their historical existence threatens to take us back to a pre-Enlightenment time, to a world before the ascendancy of materialism and the expulsion of the gods and elementals and angels and fairies and jinn and demons and spirits.... If it threatens to take us back to a quasi-medieval populated cosmos, so be it. Because we keep on bumping into all of these kinds of things, and the materialist worldview is not doing justice to our lived experiences.

[T]he full scope of the way that UAP appear and are experienced in the lifeworld...are ultimately not fully knowable through the world as conceived in the sciences.... I am aware of the reasons we must be careful with relying only on eyewitness testimony. Mistakes in perception and identification occur, biases abound, judgments about what is appearing are not always sound, and we know that there are limitations in memory.... But this does not mean that we completely give up on the individual lived experiences as providing access to knowledge and truth. Thomas Bullard, for example, introduces criteria for judging some experiences as having more weight than others [Bullard 2016, 308-311].... We must, in my view, transcend the idea that the world as known through our instruments is more real or more true than the world as we experience it (Engels, 2024).

There are some dangers in doing this. In an age when

political and religious fundamentalisms heavily tinged with authoritarianism are oozing out of the darkest places of the human unconscious worldwide, simultaneously having other parts of our collective consciousness trying to open up to reality in this way can be dicey. But it’s also, in my opinion, the only authentic path forward. As Somé said, in reflecting on his initiation into his tribal reality after being thoroughly schooled in the Western perspective, opening up will be, as all encounters with the imaginal are, deeply transformational. And <<insert your favorite god’s name here>> knows we could use a transformation.

So the authentic study of UAPs and their NHIs, I believe, will take us back to the beginning of the materialist age and the rise of science, where we have much work to do. The western presumption of materialism, says John Hick, is

only an assumption, and it is challenged by many signals of transcendence in the universe....It is entirely rational and sane to regard the religious experience of humanity not simply as imaginative projection but as a range of responses involving the imagination to an ultimate reality that is both within us and beyond us (1999, 253).

UAPs are one source of contact with a reality that appears to be beyond our everyday experience of the material world and triggers a response in us that points us toward understanding reality in much larger terms. This doesn’t mean abandoning science or scientific modes of thought. It does mean questioning some of the foundational assumptions of science and tweaking them, as well as learning to integrate how we approach and think about various kinds of phenomena.

You must be used to changing modes of awareness depending on what task you are being asked to perform. You must be alert to the way in which you are looking at things, and know at any time the place from which you are looking at them (Somé 1994, 230).

We need to learn to do this without shielding our eyes from the things that are inconvenient, disorienting, or even frightening to see. In doing so, it may feel as if we are going backward in time and reverting to more “primitive” ways of

35 More charitably, Mac Tonnies suggests that the NHIs may be “a surprisingly vulnerable intelligence that relies largely on subterfuge and disinformation [of its own making] to achieve its goals...in order to co-exist with us” because in some way(s) they need us (2010, 24).

experiencing reality, but we are not. As the poet T.S. Eliot said:

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

8. Afterthoughts

The idea that UAPs are manifestations of another realm of existence co-local to our own that is occupied by intelligent beings who have interacted with us throughout our long existence on this planet is not new with me. I did not come up with most of the ideas that I have pieced together here. The way I have put them together in an attempt to weave the scientific and religious aspects of UAPs, however, does create a larger pattern of my own making, and there are perhaps one or two new threads that make the UAP cosmology I have woven unique.

For those who would like to confront the idea of UAPs as modern signals of transcendence, but from slightly different angles, I would suggest Bernardo Kastrup's *Meaning in Absurdity: What Bizarre Phenomena Can Tell Us about the Nature of Reality* and James Madden's *Unidentified Flying Hyperobject: UFOs, Philosophy, and the End of the World*. As well as, of course, the authors cited within this manuscript, all of whom contributed to the formation of my thoughts starting back in the 1990s when I was a UFO neophyte hungry to know more and trying to make sense of it all.

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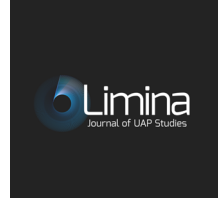
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One Science for both UFOlogists and Astrobiologists?

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, scientists among UFO investigators outside the mainstream seek to explain UAP (Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena) with the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Within the lab walls of safe science, astrobiologists believe extraterrestrial life exists on exoplanets but deny that aliens are visiting earth. Both work with a scientific mindset. Both believe in the “ETI myth.” But astrobiologists shun ufologists. Can we invite both ufologists and astrobiologists to enjoy each other’s company in the same laboratory?

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“Understanding of UAP must come from the scientific community,” avers chemist Robert Powell at the Scientific Coalition for UAP Studies (Powell, *UFOs: A Scientist Explains What we Know and Don’t Know* 2024, 169). If this is the case, why don’t all interested scientists share the same image of science? Why do astrobiologists and ufologists shy away from mutual affirmation?

Chris Impey, astrobiologist at the University of Arizona, has the answer: ufologists are not allowed into the club of real scientists because ufologists do not pass the smell test.

“Why am I a UFO agnostic? ... I think it

likely that there is advanced life with technological capabilities somewhere in the universe, and maybe in our galaxy. But the way UFOs present themselves doesn’t pass the smell test” (Impey 2022, 27).¹

Ufology’s smell test failure leads to the giggle factor. In their tome, *Life in the Cosmos*, Manasi Lingam and Avi Loeb cock their ears to the “giggle factor” when considering UFOs (SETI too). Lingam and Loeb protest, saying the giggle factor exacerbates a “jejune portrayal of ETIs in the media” (Lingam and Loeb 2021, Kindle 196).

I protest as well. The scholarly strain within ufology is

¹ The standard position of astrobiologists and astrophysicists is that it is highly probable that intelligent civilizations exist on exoplanets, but they are not coming here to Earth. Here is Adam Frank, astrophysicist at University of Rochester: “What’s most frustrating about the U.F.O.s story is that it obscures the fact that scientists like me and my colleagues are on the threshold of gathering data that may be relevant to the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life. But this evidence involves subtle findings about phenomena far away in the galaxy—not sensational findings just a few miles away in our own atmosphere” (Frank 2021).

committed to rigorous scientific standards. I could imagine a coffee break where astrobiologists and ufologists enjoy the same brewed aromas of aerospace investigation.

In addition to sharing the single smell of sound science, astrobiologists and ufologists share something extra-scientific. Tacitly, scientists in both fields sense that something of special importance is inherent in their subject matter. The near infinity of space combined with the prospect that we share our vast universe with nonhuman intelligence plucks the strings of our terrestrial psyche with tunes of awe, majesty, magnificence.² Just imagining the extraterrestrial hypothesis strikes up a contrapuntal melody of cosmos and soul, infinity and depth, origin and destiny.

The worldview presupposed by scientific method is disenchanted. What the scientist hopes to find is an explanation that is physical and causal. No appeal to spirits, fairies, or supernatural agency counts as a scientific explanation. This goes for both astrobiologists and ufologists. But is that all we need to consider?

Many who sip on the brew of both astrobiology and ufology tacitly construct an additional worldview, a myth, an extra-scientific set of specious assumptions. I call this set of assumptions the *ETI myth* (Peters, UFOs—God’s Chariots? 2014). According to this scientized myth, evolution occurs on exoplanets just as it does on Earth. The built-in entelechy or goal of biological evolution, according to this myth, is increased complexity that takes the form of increased intelligence. The greater the time to evolve, the higher the level of intelligence.

There is more to this myth. The chief marks of more highly evolved intelligence are alleged to be science and technology. Some extraterrestrial societies may have evolved longer than we earthlings have. It follows, therefore, that some extraterrestrial civilizations will be more advanced than we on earth in science, technology, longevity, morality, and even multi-species harmony. It follows further that contact with more advanced ETI would greatly benefit earth, perhaps even redeeming earth from the threat of nuclear war or from ecological self-destruction.

This is a myth. It is a supra-scientific myth even if it is a disenchanted myth. Like sugar plums, this myth dances in the dreams of many of our space scientists. For our scientists to

pass the smell test, should we demand that they bracket out this myth and stick to empirical research?

In no way do I wish to discourage pursuit of the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Yet, I recommend that both astrobiologists and ufologists think of the ETI myth strictly as a research hypothesis and avoid cultivating a belief that we earthlings can find salvation in science and technology.

1. What is astrobiology?

Astrobiology provides a progressive research program in that it collects data and expands human knowledge about our universe. Therefore, we must consider astrobiology to be reputable science (Octavio Chon-Torres, Ted Peters, Richard Seckbach, and Russell Gordon, eds 2021). Yet, there is more. Astrobiology is a scientific field that plucks the strings of religious sensibility (Peters 2022).

“Astrobiology is the study of the origin, evolution, and distribution of life in the universe,” is NASA’s definition (NASA 2022). Lucas John Mix elaborates. Astrobiology “happens when you put together what astronomy, physics, planetary science, geology, chemistry, biology, and a host of other disciplines have to say about life and try to make a single narrative” (Mix 2009, 4).

This term, *astrobiology*, replaced the term, *exobiology*, in the 1990s. *Exobiology* was the term previously employed by Carl Sagan, Frank Drake, SETI, NASA, and others. Jill Tarter, former SETI director, adds the “future” to NASA’s otherwise acceptable definition. “Astrobiology is the science that deals with the origin, evolution, distribution, and future of life in the Universe” (Tarter 2006, 20). Astrobiology is also the science on which terrestrial civilization will rely when we make extraterrestrial contact.³

NASA’s Mars expert, Christopher McKay, alerts us to the fact that the science of astrobiology ineluctably raises philosophical questions. “Astrobiology has within it three broad questions that have deep philosophical as well as scientific import. These are the origin of life, the search for a second genesis of life, and the expansion of life beyond Earth” (McKay 2000, 45). Note that this science as science already has “deep philosophical” import built in.

This philosophical import has religious import too. Not

2 The term “non-human intelligence” or NHI means any sentient intelligent non-human lifeform regardless of nature or ultimate origin that may be presumed responsible for unidentified anomalous phenomena or of which the Federal Government has become aware (Congressional_Record 7/13/2023, S2953).

3 SETI and METI may hasten contact. Earth should prepare. In a recent article in the International Journal of Astrobiology, Ilan Fischer and Shacked Avrashi employ a method they call “theory of subjective expected relative similarity” or SERS. Such a method spawns constructive forecasting of ETI behavior based on “similarity-indicating signals.” Such speculative research is needed for preparation before contact. “Scientists and policymakers should not only prepare for a first encounter, but continually monitor new evidence, plan ahead and update various applicable policies” (Fischer and Avrashi 2024, 8).

necessarily formal or institutional religion is at stake here. Rather, it is religion understood as the depth of culture. “Culture is the form of religion, and religion is the substance of culture,” wrote theologian Paul Tillich (Tillich 1951-1963, 3:158). Religious sensibilities become engaged when the depths of consciousness are brought to the surface. NASA astronomer and former science-and-religion officer at AAAS Jennifer Wiseman makes a religious forecast. “The detection of even simple life beyond Earth would be profound for humanity, indicating life has sprung up through *multiple Genesis events* throughout the universe” (Wiseman 2018, 131). Astrobiology, curiously, is an already *religious* science (Peters, Astrobiology: The Almost Religious Science 2022).

2. What is ufology?

For decades *ufology* has been the familiar term to describe those who investigate UFO reports, consolidate data, tender hypotheses, and publish results (Hoffman 2024) (Ammon 2024) (Powell, Hancock, et al. 2023). Recently, *ufology* has been renamed *UAP Studies*. This is due to the replacement of UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) with ‘UAP’. Now, what does UAP stand for? It depends on what you designate with the ‘A’. It could refer to aerial, aerospace, anomalous, or anything else. The Scientific Coalition for UAP Studies along with the Society for UAP Studies prefer Unidentified *Aerospace* Phenomena.

MUFON (Mutual UFO Network) provides us with an etymological definition of the field, a field honored since the early 1970s.

UFOlogy is the array of subject matter and activities associated with an interest in unidentified flying objects (UFOs). UFOs have been subject to various investigations over the years by governments, independent groups, and scientists. The term derives from UFO, which is pronounced as an acronym, and the suffix -logy, which comes from the Ancient Greek

λογία (*logiā*) (MUFON 2020).⁴

The first thing a scientist does is establish classifications or categories of material to be researched. MUFON incorporates the five categories of a famed UFO researcher, Jacques Vallée.

1. Sighting
2. Physical effects: for example, radar sighting
3. Life form or living entity
4. Reality transformation: witnesses experienced a transformation of their sense of reality (often corresponding to the popular characterization of the incident as an abduction)
5. Physiological impact: Such as death or serious injury⁵

This is the subject matter to be studied scientifically with what is frequently dubbed the “nuts ‘n’ bolts” method.

The nuts ‘n’ bolts branch of ufology is developing methods of instrumentation for data assemblage. “Instrumented field research has played a crucial role in establishing the scientific study of UAP, providing much needed legitimacy to the field” says Phillip Ailleris (Ailleris 2024, 28). Data. More data. That is the current objective of nuts ‘n’ bolts ufology.

Note that the existence or non-existence of extraterrestrial or non-human intelligence does not appear on the above list.⁶ Even so, ufologists consider the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) as one promising explanation for this subject matter.⁷ To consider let alone confront nonhuman intelligence, we may forecast, would have a major impact on terrestrial human consciousness.

There is indeed a genuine UFO phenomenon and it constitutes one of the many mysteries that nature offers us. In my view it represents an opportunity to practice some good science and to become aware of levels of consciousness we had not

4 In launching the new journal, *Limina: The Journal of UAP Studies*, editor-in-chief Michael Cifone limits ufology to science while expanding UAP Studies to include the humanities in addition to the sciences. UAP Studies includes ufology but adds more. “Using this broader term ‘UAP Studies’ we consciously step away from classical ‘ufology’ *per se* and allow our inquiry to proceed afresh – to find its own way, even while it draws significantly from existing sciences, from the humanities, and from other more mature scholarly fields” (Cifone, Editorial 2024, 3). In short, it is the subject matter—UFOs or UAP—that will guide or determine the methods employed.

5 MUFON, “UFO Categorization—Vallée System: <https://mufon.com/what-is-ufology/>.”

6 According to scientists working on Avi Loeb’s Galileo Project at Harvard, “UAP are almost automatically associated in the public imagination with an extraterrestrial origin.” Despite this, Galileo scientists—now ufologists—turn their attention to more prosaic and local anomalies. “The goal of the Galileo Project’s UAP investigation is initially broader in scope and more foundational: it is to determine whether there are measurable phenomena in or near earth’s atmosphere which can be confidently classified as *scientific anomalies*” (Watters, Loeb and Laukien, *et al.* 2023, 6).

7 One task before today’s ufologist is careful categorization of hypotheses. “Careful thinking about UFOs over this last three-quarters of a century has produced a number of options for understanding the phenomena other than the ETH.... We may be dealing with more than one phenomenon but are lumping them together as ‘UAPs’ or ‘UFOs’ because we lack the perceptual, technological, and/or cognitive sophistication to discriminate between them. The new openness toward study of the topic presents us with reason to hope that this question can be explored and engaged with more fully going forward,” avers Brenda Denzler (Denzler 2024).

previously recognized (Vallée 2008, Kindle 100).

Like astrobiologists, ufologists anticipate questions of profound philosophical if not religious import. This requires more than nuts-and-bolts science. It requires the methods of cultural studies.

Despite the scientific data gathering used in investigating UAP reports, ufologists don't receive coffee klatch invitations from astrobiologists. James Moore explains.

The science of UFOs is minuscule and deeply marginalized. Although many scientists think privately that UFOs deserve study, there are no opportunities or incentives to do it....For both science and the state, it seems, the UFO is not an 'object' at all, but a *non-object*, something not just unidentified but unseen and thus ignored (Moore 1993, 57).

Astrobiologists seem to assume ufologists tracking anomalous phenomena in Earth's skies have nothing to tell us about civilizations on exoplanets.

3. Why don't ufologists pass the smell test?

From the perspective of the astrobiologist, ufologists do not pass the smell test.⁸ That is, they do not measure up to the criteria of relevant or rigorous science.

Most likely this is due to mixed smells. The scent of flying saucer sightings comes mixed with the odors of fantastic abduction reports, suspicious paranormal claims, pseudo-scientific Ancient Alien television shows, and UFO religious cults. In short, UAP sounds like a return to premodern enchantment. "Saucer culture is a deeply interrelated web of claims and beliefs, with strands of that web reaching far

beyond UFO culture into the nooks and crannies of popular culture and popular religion," is the observation of Gregory Reece (Reece 2007, 3). For the field of UAP Studies to pass today's smell test, will it have to isolate its subject matter and circumscribe it with publicly confirmable empirical data? Might this require letting go of paranormal claims and perhaps even abduction reports, at least for the time being?

History of Religions scholar Diana Pasulka seems confused about this. She notices how the recent wave of scientists fascinated with UAP Studies gives attention to measurable data while ignoring the paranormal.

They focused on hard science and assumed they were dealing with crafts that worked within the frameworks of traditional physics. The supernatural and paranormal aspects of the phenomenon were and are still largely ignored (Pasulka 2023, 98).⁹

This is descriptively accurate, in my judgment. Yet, more should be said. One might suggest to Doctor Pasulka that today's scientists are well equipped to deal with traditional physics. But they are not equipped to explain the supernatural or paranormal, let alone the ETI myth. Should we ask our scientists to investigate UFO-related paranormal claims? This would be like asking a weather reporter with a yardstick to measure the water content of the fog.

The paranormal stigmatizes ufology.¹⁰ Harvard's Tim Lomas at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health reminds us that ufology has been stigmatized by its association with the paranormal. Ufology "retains the stigma of the paranormal and remains outside the boundaries of serious inquiry ... given recent [post 2017] developments regarding UAP, the topic now surely warrants at least serious engagement from the scientific community" (Lomas 2024, 104).¹¹

This strongly suggests that, at least for the time being,

8 A brief scorecard of recently spawned scientific UFO organizations ready to pass the smell test would include the Galileo Project, SCU (Scientific Coalition for UAP Studies), SUAPS (Society for UAP Studies), and, most recently, UAPx. "UAPx is a (501c3) non-profit organization co-founded by Naval veterans Gary Voorhis and Kevin Day, who were involved in the (2004) Nimitz carrier strike group UAP encounter ... UAPx is devoted to identification and classification of the initially unidentified and unclassified" (Szydagis, *et al.* 2023, 3,4).

9 "I was surprised by the caliber of scientists and researchers who believed they were in contact with nonhuman intelligence...I was also shocked by the level of commitment to spirituality and esoteric practices that I found among them" (Pasulka 2023, 172). Now, Dr. Pasulka, which is it: scientific research or personal experience?

10 Michael Zimmerman offers an enlightening analysis of the non-acceptance by establishment scientists of the UFO abduction phenomenon. Zimmerman proffers the hypothesis that established scientists constitute the elite in charge of the dominant "social ontology" of modern society. Accounts of UFO abductions, in contrast, belong in the category of "forbidden knowledge." Astrobiologists along with other established scientists decree "someone else ought neither to investigate nor to affirm nonconformist concepts that threaten the social ontology" (Zimmerman 1997, 236). Today's renaissance of scientific interest in UAP focuses on anomalous aerial phenomena, but tends to place paranormal claims on the back shelf.

11 To proceed within the restrictions of scientific method with its materialist assumptions may shut the door on dealing with the larger reality possibly revealed in the paranormal dimension of the UFO phenomenon. "The difficult truth," according to Jeffrey Kripal at Rice University, "is that the UFO phenomenon has both an objective 'hard' aspect (think fighter-jet videos, photographs, alleged metamaterials, apparent advanced propulsion methods, missile silo shutdown, and landing marks) and a subjective 'soft' or 'human' aspect (think close encounters, multiple and coordinated visual sightings, altered states of consciousness, subsequent paranormal powers, visionary displays, and experienced traumatic or transcendent abductions) (Kripal 2024, 57-58). Even though we ask our scientists to investigate UAP, we do not expect the conclusions drawn by science to be the final word on the nature of reality. We can imagine astrobiologists hosting a picnic and inviting only those ufologists who take a scientific approach that avoids investigating paranormal claims.

scientists engaged in UAP studies should immunize their empirical methods from paranormal and abduction claims.¹² Yet, even with this dietary constriction, there is still room for tasting ETH.¹³

This constriction of the UAP Studies menu might persuade at least one renowned astrobiologist to share a coffee klatch with a ufologist. After delineating a list of scientific reasons for remaining skeptical about the extraterrestrial hypothesis to explain UFOs, SETI astronomer Seth Shostak still grants that “the question of whether UFOs are truly interstellar spacecraft needs to be addressed by careful examination of the claims” (Shostak 2020, 14).

At this point I trust we have established that our scientists engaged in UAP studies at SCU and SUAPS along with MUFON are cognizant of the criteria that measure sound science and are committed to meeting those criteria. They are capable of passing the smell test. They deserve invitations to the next astrobiologist conference.

What about the unavoidable giggle factor prompted by the paranormal? Please do not misunderstand me. I recognize that claims of the paranormal along with abduction narratives belong to the phenomenon. And they warrant study. But a strict science that passes Chris Impey’s smell test may not be ready to conduct the aspects of UAP that hint at enchantment. Along with the science, we will need to draw from other disciplines such as philosophy, history, social science, and theology.

Now I wish to turn to something extra-scientific that both astrobiologists and ufologists share, namely, a taste for the ETI myth.

4. The ETI myth

“Religion, geopolitics, and the ETI/UAP topic are all converging,” observes ufologist Jensine Andresen (Andresen 2023, 17). Can we give fitting attention to this convergence?

Some scholars should be called upon to examine both astrobiology and ufology within the wider cultural context.

12 Should ufology include investigation of UFO abduction cases? Yes, claims Kimberly Engels, who relies on phenomenological method—a method which includes both subjective experiences along with phenomenal objects as they appear to subjectivity. “It is true that ufology and discussion of eyewitness accounts has long suffered from lack of scholarly rigor and methodological soundness, which has overall lent to the discrediting of UAP studies as a serious academic pursuit. The conversations I am hosting are part of an effort to change that and take these experiences seriously while at the same time keeping our critical thinking skills engaged” (Engels 2024). I appreciate Engels’ phenomenological approach and say so (Peters 2024). Yet, until the scientific reformation Engels prescribes is complete, I suggest ufologists stick to publicly confirmable data if they want an invitation to an astrobiologist’s picnic. To talk about the paranormal dimension of UAP, ufologists may still have to schedule their own picnics.

13 ETH need not be the sole or even primary focus of ufology. Beginning in 1947, observes Larry Hancock of SCU, UFOs “focused reconnaissance targeting both strategic military bases and key atomic warfare facilities” (Hancock 2017, 381). One practical value of continued scientific ufology will be its contribution to national security.

14 What I call the ‘ETI myth’, Keith Cooper calls the ‘altruism assumption’ (Cooper 2020, 27). “The problem is, evolution is not necessarily about altruism, just as it is also not necessarily about intelligence” (Cooper 2020, 32). In short, the theory of evolution does not support the idea that over time biology will become increasingly intelligent let alone altruistic.

When we do, I think we will unbosom a subtle belief system that I call the *UFO Myth*. This myth belongs to the frame surrounding the pictures drawn for us by both astrobiologists and ufologists.

As mentioned above, simply studying outer space inspires. The mysteries of near infinite space along with speculations about extraterrestrial intelligence shock our religious sensibilities. Space consciousness elicits a sense of awe, magnificence, and transcendence. Do such sensibilities influence the assumptions and speculations of scientific researchers? Yes, of course.

Our scientists know well the theory of evolution. They also have witnessed four centuries of scientific and technological progress. With a mere slip of the magician’s hand, technological progress slips into the theory of biological evolution. Presto. We now have a telic and hopeful story about extraterrestrial life that goes like this: a more highly evolved nonhuman intelligence is more advanced in science and technology and perhaps other virtues as well.

Arizona State University astrobiologist, Paul Davies, employs the term, “biological determinism,” to introduce the ETI myth.

Given the right conditions, life inevitably will form after a sufficiently long time, and once life gets started, it will very probably progress toward intelligence....Biological determinism is the prevailing philosophy at NASA, among SETI researcher, school children, journalists, and even the rich and famous (Davies 2000, 15).

Contact with more highly advanced ETIs will transform life on earth, the myth then tells us. In fact, earth will be rescued from self-destructive scenarios. Exobiologist Carl Sagan and SETI leader Frank Drake, for example, speculate that contact with extraterrestrials “would inevitably enrich mankind beyond measure” (Sagan 1975, 89).¹⁴ Heaven in the form of extraterrestrial intelligence is coming to earth to

“enrich” us “beyond measure.”¹⁵

Boston University theologian John Hart elevates advanced science to the status of earth’s savior. “In the vastness of space and over its eons of time, life on other worlds, too, might have evolved to be intelligent life. Extraterrestrial intelligent life (ETI) might be billions of years older than terrestrial intelligent life (TI)—and considerably more advanced biologically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually” (Hart 2014, 20).

According to the ETI myth, science saves. And if terrestrial science fails to save, then a more advanced extraterrestrial science will make salvation happen.

Here is a summary of ETI myth presupposed dogmas.

- Evolution is progressive.
- Evolution progresses from the simple to the complex.
- Complex life evolves into intelligence over time.
- Intelligence leads to science and technology.
- Evolving life on exoplanets has progressed longer than it has on earth.
- ETI is more advanced than we are on earth.
- Therefore, advanced ETI has the capacity to redeem earth from self-destruction.

Science saves. And if terrestrial science fails us, then a more highly advanced extraterrestrial science can do it for us.

5. The myth makes the scientist into both priest and king.

Like archaic myths of kingship in ancient Egypt or Babylonia which crowned the king with heavenly blessing, this myth crowns today’s scientist as king of today’s knowledge. It will be earth’s expert in science and technology who marks the connection between terrestrials and extraterrestrials. Presto.

A priesthood is born that connects earth with heaven and, thankfully, prophesies imminent salvation for earth. In short, the ETI myth represents scientists doing theology without a license.

Specifically, let’s ask: from what will our extraterrestrial scientists save us? From the 1950s through the 1980s, contactees claimed that benevolent ETIs would save earth from self-destruction by nuclear war. Science journalist Keith Cooper reports how in 1982 exobiologist Carl Sagen told U.S. Senator William Proxmire that “finding ET could help us avoid nuking ourselves back to the Stone Age” (Cooper 2020, 24). One ETI myth for both ufology and astrobiology.

From the late 1980s to the present, the earth’s threat of self-destruction has changed from nuclear war to environmental devastation. Harvard’s John Mack reports how in this period “abductees are being told over and over that this phenomenon is occurring in the context of the threat to the Earth as a living system, a response to the ecological devastation” (Mack 2021, 149).¹⁶ Whether from nuclear destruction or ecological destruction, our angels in outer space can provide the science and accompanying technology for us to save ourselves.

But, unfortunately, this hope-inspiring myth fails to pass the smell test. The very idea of progressive evolution is a supra-scientific insertion. It is not sound science. Why? Because Darwinian evolutionary theory routinely if not universally excludes teleology at the level of assumption. The world’s leading evolutionary biologists decry any overall direction to evolutionary development. But ETI myth advocates still try to sneak it in under the tent flap.¹⁷

If we summarize the soteriology of the ETI myth it looks like this: from the heavens alien saviors will come to earth with a more advanced science that will rescue us from self-destruction through thermonuclear war or through demolition of our environment. If terrestrial scientists have

15 Dystopian as well as utopian scenarios are sometimes deemed plausible. “Human self-worth and self-regard, including the (apparently delusional) sense of human control over human destiny” is under threat, warns Michael Zimmerman of the Society for UAP Studies. “First, there is the prospect of high-level disclosure that UAP are both objectively real and utterly mysterious. Second, there is the impending creation of ASI, a ‘singularity’ that would allow humankind *rapidly* to be eclipsed by a far greater and to us incomprehensible ‘intelligence’. Particularly disturbing would be near-simultaneous disclosure of non-human UFOs and attainment of ASI (Zimmerman 2024). But utopians are not discouraged. At least not Jensine Andresen. “Extraterrestrial UAP must, by necessity, be kind and benevolent—because otherwise, it already would have obliterated itself by means of its access to the immense amounts of energy necessary to travel interstellar and/or intergalactic distances” (Andresen 2023, 15).

16 As mentioned above, Zimmerman distinguishes between the dominant social ontology and its trickster opponent, forbidden knowledge. He places the UFO abduction phenomenon in the latter category. But does this placement exempt abductees from sharing the UFO myth? I don’t think so. In Zimmerman’s own account of two women abducted by aliens and physically examined, the abducted women report something remarkable. The aliens tell the women about their concern for “genetic coding” and “mutual advancement” (Zimmerman 1997, 241). This means both the aliens and the abducted earthlings frame their knowledge in terms of evolutionary science, and even include the advance of the species. This testimony belongs to the dominant social ontology, not to forbidden knowledge.

17 Philosopher of science Daniel Dennet articulates the problem. “Global, long-term progress, amounting to the view that things in the biosphere are, in general, getting better and better and better, was denied by Darwin, and although it is often imagined by onlookers to be an implication of evolution, it is simply a mistake — a mistake no orthodox Darwinians fall for” (Dennett 1995, 299).

not yet been able to save us from ourselves, then in the future extraterrestrial scientists will save us. So goes the ETI myth.¹⁸

What should be obvious is that this myth has stolen Christian soteriology and tacked it on to both astrobiology and ufology. “Our efforts to discover real E.T.s may have more to do with promoting a vision of salvation than with pursuing scientific investigation,” is the judgment of evangelical theologian, James Herrick (Herrick 2008, 72).

6. Conclusion

We’ve been asking why astrobiologists and ufologists don’t enjoy one another’s company during coffee break. We found the answer: astrobiologists don’t think ufology passes the smell test—that is, ufology is insufficiently relevant or rigorous.

This is a mistake. In recent decades scientists engaged in UAP Studies have demonstrated rigorous scientific methodological reflection, created new technologies for data gathering, stringent standards for data assessment, and sober hypothesizing (Powell, UFOs: A Scientist Explains What we Know and Don’t Know 2024). These ufologists themselves are credentialed scientists who transfer their already honed research skills to investigating as-yet-unidentified aerospace phenomena. “The gold standard of scientific work is to make quantitative measurements using well-calibrated instruments under well-understood conditions,” write Wesley Watters and Avi Loeb at Harvard’s Galileo Project; “and this is the approach taken in this work” (Watters, Loeb and *et.al.*, The Scientific Investigation of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) Using Multimodal Ground-Based Observatories 2023, 39).

This means ufologists do not need collegial invitations from astrobiologists to establish their credibility. Intellectual integrity among today’s UFO scientists is obvious, public, and respectable. Ufologists pass the smell test.

Because of their common interest in ETH, it seems to me that astrobiologists and ufologists could enjoy shared conversation while sipping their Starbucks. Nevertheless, those ufologists who would also like to investigate abduction reports and other claims of the paranormal may need to go it alone.

My added caution to both astrobiologists and ufologists is to bracket out (*epoché*) the ontology of the ETI myth. For the

most part, the ETI myth is harmless. Believing this myth may even inspire one’s motive to pursue the ETH, to be sure. But commitment to scientific rigor should keep the myth in the category of a hypothesis still needing confirmation.

Personally, I hope the ETI myth turns out to be true. But this should remain in the category of hope rather than sober science. So, my final advice to both astrobiologists and ufologists is twofold. First, *stick to sober science and share an occasional coffee klatch*. Second, *add into ufology multi-disciplinary research of paranormal claims and abduction narratives*.

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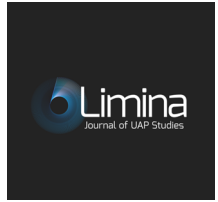
18 For good or ill, modern science has elected to collect knowledge without meaning. For knowledge to be meaningful, it must be meaningful to somebody. Meaning belongs to subjectivity. But modern science brackets out subjectivity in favor of an exclusive objectivity. Michael Cifone applies the term, *nihilism*, to scientific methodology (Cifone 2014). Whether we like it or not, we must admit that the function of the ETI myth is to smuggle meaning back into science. But this does not pass the smell test. Now, I am very happy to proffer a theology of salvation. But to do so I would rely specifically on theological resources. I would not ask science to perform a theological task without a license.

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Expectations about Nonhuman Intelligences: Fermi's Challenge, Divine Hiddenness, and the White House Lawn

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ABSTRACT

Why are scientists so often dismissive of UAP studies? Part of the answer to this question must acknowledge common arguments for disbelief in flying saucers. One such argument appeals to the incompatibility between the behavior we would expect to see from nonhuman intelligences, and what we actually see. I argue that common variations of this line of reasoning are unsound. There are strong similarities between three arguments: the argument suggested by the Fermi paradox, the argument suggested by the question of why UAP do not land on the White House lawn, and the atheistic argument suggested by the problems of evil and divine hiddenness. A standard response to the atheistic argument, which is well-known in the philosophical literature, carries over to the other two arguments. In sections 2 through 4, I present each of the three arguments, and I demonstrate their similarities. In section 5, I present a standard philosophical rebuttal to the problem of divine hiddenness. In section 6, I demonstrate how this rebuttal applies at least as well to both of the other arguments. In the final section, I discuss some upshots of this result. The primary upshot is that a common reason for serious scientists not to take UAP studies seriously rests on a bad argument.

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1. Introduction

Science popularizers often dismiss research into UAP. An assertion made by Stephen Hawking is a representative

example: “I am discounting the reports of UFOs. Why would they appear only to cranks and weirdos?” (Hawking 2008) UAP researchers sometimes seem puzzled by this dismissive attitude. Why scientists tend not to take UAP studies seriously

is, undoubtedly, a complicated sociological phenomenon.^{1,2} One part of the explanation of this phenomenon should acknowledge common arguments for disbelief in flying saucers. Hawking suggests one such argument; he is echoed by many other science communicators. The argument bears crucial similarities to two other influential arguments in different domains of inquiry. This sort of reasoning becomes unconvincing once the similarities to these other arguments are fully appreciated.

In section 2, I present a formulation of the argument suggested by the so-called Fermi paradox. Fermi's challenge is raised by the question of why, if there are many alien civilizations out *there*, we do not see any of them *here*. In section 3, I show how this problem is similar in significant respects to a standard challenge for UAP studies: why, if UAP are piloted by nonhuman intelligences, do they not land on the White House Lawn? In section 4, I present a formulation of the problem of divine hiddenness. This problem for Christian theism is often introduced via the question of why, if God exists, evidence for his existence is inconclusive at best.

In each case, I distinguish a *challenge* posed by the relevant question from an *argument* for a specific conclusion. In each case, the salient argument concludes that something-or-other is unlikely to exist—whether that something is an extraterrestrial civilization, an alien UAP pilot, or God. In each case, the salient argument relies on a premise to the effect that there is a violation of our expectations about how such an entity (or entities) would act. And in each case, I suggest a similar response: the challenge may be ignored, because a violation of our expectations is unsurprising, if not outright probable. Sections 5 and 6 are devoted to this point. Section 7 contains concluding discussion.

The upshot is that it is a mistake to use this form of argumentation to dismiss SETI, UAP studies, or theism. Unfortunately for their proponents, these arguments are unsound. Skeptics should find other reasons not to take seriously these subject matters. SETI, UAP studies, and theism, strange bedfellows though they may be, are all in the same boat, at least in this respect.

2. Fermi's Challenge and Hart's Argument

According to lore, renowned physicist Enrico Fermi once uttered his famous question—something along the lines of, “But where is everybody?”—as a reaction to the apparent high likelihood that there are many alien civilizations in our galaxy. It is natural to take this question as posing a challenge to anyone who believes its presupposition. So let us interpret Fermi as being committed to

Fermi's Challenge: If you believe that there are likely many alien civilizations in the galaxy, then you must explain why we do not see them on Earth.³

The challenge, put another way, is to provide a reason why we do not see the aliens here on Earth. In his influential paper on the Fermi paradox, Michael H. Hart summarizes an argument that is naturally suggested by Fermi's Challenge:

[The fact that there are no intelligent beings from outer space on Earth now], like all facts, requires an explanation. Once this is recognized, an argument is suggested... If the argument goes, there were intelligent beings elsewhere in our Galaxy, then they would eventually have achieved space travel, and would have explored and colonized the Earth. However, ... they are not here; therefore, they do not exist (Hart 1975, p. 128).

This argument aims to prove that there are indeed no alien civilizations in our galaxy. An expository problem is that the main premise, which asserts that intelligent beings definitely would colonize Earth if they existed, masks much of the underlying structure of the argument. We can easily imagine that the galaxy might be full of technologically advanced alien civilizations, which simply choose to mind their own business, happily farming away on their own home planets.⁴ The proponent of the argument should concede this point and formalize Hart's Argument as follows:

1 For discussion of the sociological issues, see the essays in Part III of Sagan and Page 1972; and Powell 2024: Ch. 7-9. True understanding of these issues arguably requires study of the recent history of the UAP topic. See Dolan 2000 and 2009; Graff 2023; and Eghigian 2024 for differing presentations.

2 Of course, not all scientists dismiss UAP studies. It would appear that there has always been significant interest in the scientific community since the latter half of the 20th century, as witnessed by McDonald 1972, Hynek 1972, Vallee 1975, Hill 1995, and Dick 1996, among many others. For further references, see Powell 2024.

3 Whether Fermi was actually committed to Fermi's Challenge is an open question. See Cirkovic 2018: Ch. 1; Frank 2023, p. 21; and Tipler 1980.

4 Compare Howard-Snyder 1999, p. 82-4; van Inwagen 2006, p. 64-5.

Hart's Argument

H1. If there were alien civilizations in the galaxy, then aliens would be on Earth now, unless there were some reason why they would not visit Earth.

H2. There are no aliens on Earth now.

H3. There is no reason why they would not visit Earth.

H4. So, there are no alien civilizations in the galaxy.

Clearly, if you accept the premises, then you must accept the conclusion of Hart's Argument. But are the premises true? H1 seems independently plausible. When we speculate on the vastness of our galaxy, fairly "conservative" estimates concerning the potential for technologically advanced civilizations to develop suggest that there should be at least thousands of such civilizations in the history of the galaxy.⁵ Since these civilizations could travel here, presumably they would, unless there were some reason or reasons why not. And, while it is controversial (especially among UAP researchers), H2 certainly appears to be compelling to the preponderance of scientists.

It seems that anyone interested in SETI must formulate a concise reply to H3. Hart explicitly presupposes that in order to reply to his argument, we must take up his challenge. It is compelling to think that if you have no reply to the challenge, then you have no business using valuable scientific resources. So it would appear incumbent upon the SETI researcher to hypothesize why the aliens are not here now. A cottage industry has grown in the past few decades, based upon a rejection of H3, with speculation about possible reasons why we do not observe aliens on Earth.⁶

I do not, however, have a particular horse in that race. In the end, I will argue that there is a very general reply to Hart's Argument that does not rely upon the adoption of any particular hypothesis that explains the observed cosmic silence. The reply is general in that it also applies to the other arguments discussed below.

3. Frank's Challenge and the White House Lawn Argument

Popular science communicators often argue against belief in flying saucers by posing a challenge, in much the same way

that Fermi's Challenge is posed. Thus, Neil deGrasse Tyson asserts,

...if we had an alien invasion, more than the US government would know about [it.] We would know about it. We, with cameras and smartphones, we are crowdsourcing an alien invasion of Earth because everybody has a camera, [a] high-resolution camera (Sforza 2023).

Similarly, Lord Martin Rees says,

I think most astronomers would dismiss [UFO sightings]. I dismiss them because if aliens had made the great effort to traverse interstellar distances to come here, they wouldn't just meet a few well-known cranks, make a few circles in corn fields and go away again (Spiegel 2012).

And Adam Frank writes,

If we are being frequently visited by aliens, why don't they just land on the White House lawn and announce themselves? There is a recurring narrative, perhaps best exemplified by the TV show "The X-Files," that these creatures have some mysterious reason to remain hidden from us. But if the mission of these aliens calls for stealth, they seem surprisingly incompetent. You would think that creatures technologically capable of traversing the mind-boggling distances between the stars would also know how to turn off their high beams at night and to elude our primitive infrared cameras (Frank 2021).⁷

I suppose you get the idea.⁸ What is important is that each of these quotes appeals to our expectations about what our experience of alien visitation would be like. As a result, each suggests a challenge for the study of UAP. Because Frank's writing most clearly makes this challenge, let us call it

Frank's Challenge: If you believe that aliens might be the pilots of UAP, then you must explain why they do not make themselves publicly known, for example, by

5 See Shklovskii and Sagan 1967, Ch. 29; Cirkovic 2018: sec. 3.9; and Frank 2023: Ch. 1.

6 See Hart 1975; Shklovskii and Sagan 1972, Ch. 24; Frank 2023; and Cirkovic 2018 for discussion and further references.

7 Compare Frank 2023, p. 119-21.

8 See also Condon 1968, p. 26: "[The UFO question] would be settled in a few minutes if a flying saucer were to land on the lawn of a hotel where a convention of the American Physical Society was in progress, and its occupants were to emerge...".

landing on the White House lawn.

It is worth taking a moment to clarify the concept of public knowledge involved in Frank's Challenge. Let us say that if a claim is publicly known, then the evidence for that claim is readily available to essentially everyone, and the claim itself is ordinarily considered common ground in most conversations.⁹ We may distinguish publicly known claims from situations where the evidence for something may be available only to a select few. Thus, it has been suggested that there are people within the government who have alien bodies from crashed UAP. But this evidence of aliens has not been released, so it is not publicly known. In a different sort of scenario, private knowledge may fail to convert into public knowledge when a UAP experiencer reports an event of high "strangeness" rating (Hynek 1972, Ch. 4). Even if she conveys everything she experienced accurately, and even if this is evidence for her to believe that she was indeed confronted by an alien, the queer nature of her evidence may undermine the credibility of her testimony. As a result, perhaps she cannot, by testifying about her experience, convert the event into something that is publicly known. On the other hand, if videos of a flying saucer on the White House lawn were all over the internet, all the major news networks were talking about it, and the president addressed the nation about it on television, then, presumably, that would properly be considered public knowledge.

Closely associated with Frank's Challenge is an argument, of which we get hints in each of the above quotations. The argument may be formulated in much the same way that we formalized Hart's Argument:

The White House Lawn Argument

WHL1. If there were aliens piloting UAP, then they would make themselves publicly known, unless there were some reason why they would decide not to.

WHL2. They do not make themselves publicly known.

WHL3. There is no reason why they would decide not to make themselves publicly known.

WHL4. So, no UAP are piloted by aliens.¹⁰

The structural similarities between the White House Lawn Argument and Hart's Argument are obvious. Both WHL1 and WHL2 seem independently plausible. The third premise again appears to be where all the action is. Indeed, there is something of a cottage industry consisting in speculation about what the alien agendas might be, and how our visitors might go about their work.¹¹ Those ufologists who speculate in this way choose to take up Frank's Challenge. Again, I have no dog in that fight, and so I set that matter aside.

Instead, let us turn to the evaluation of these arguments. Are they any good? To that end, we will consider a group of classic problems for Christian theism. I will argue that a standard reply to these problems carries over to the realms of SETI research and UAP studies.

4. The Atheist's Challenge and Divine Hiddenness

A very common reason for disbelieving in a theistic conception of God is voiced in the question, "If God exists, then why does he allow bad things to occur?" This question raises a problem for theism, commonly called 'the problem of evil'.¹² The problem of evil has a close cousin, or, maybe more aptly put, an offspring, which is commonly called 'the problem of divine hiddenness'. This problem can be voiced in the form of a challenge raised by an atheist:

Atheist's Challenge: If you believe there might be an unsurpassable God, then you must explain why he does not make himself publicly known.

The reasoning underwriting Atheist's Challenge is voiced in a closely associated argument, which we may call

The Divine Hiddenness Argument

DH1. If God were to exist as unsurpassable and expressing perfect love to all of humanity, then he

⁹ See Stalnaker 1974 for clarification of the concept of common ground.

¹⁰ Clarification of some technical terms is perhaps overdue. By 'alien' I tend to mean something like what is meant by 'nonhuman intelligence'. I use 'piloted by' not according to its ordinary meaning, but very broadly, in such a way that even a UAP that did not contain an alien, and was not remotely operated by an alien, and was not even controlled by a computer program that an alien had authored, but whose proper functioning was appropriately descended from what an alien once did, that UAP would still be "piloted by" an alien. In addition, by 'UAP' I mean roughly what is meant by 'UFO', but I intend to refer not merely to those things that we cannot immediately identify, but more appropriately to observed objects for which we have enough information such that, under a typical observation, a given object would be identifiable, but in our observation it is not identifiable because it represents some sort of anomaly. However, much more can be said to clarify the concept, especially regarding the constitutive concepts of *identifiability* and *anomaly*. See e.g., Hill 1995, p. 26-7; Hynek 1972, Part 1; and Powell 2024, p. 1-3.

¹¹ See for example Dolan 2022 and 2020; Strieber 2023; and Hastings 2017: Ch. 8.

¹² See Howard-Snyder 1996; Hudson 2020; and van Inwagen 2006 for further references.

would make himself publicly known, unless he had some reason not to do so.

DH2. God does not make himself publicly known.

DH3. There is no reason why God would not make himself publicly known.

DH4. So, there is no unsurpassable and perfectly loving God.

The structural similarities between the Divine Hiddenness Argument, the White House Lawn Argument, and Hart's Argument are obvious. And again, the first two premises seem plausible. When we reflect on the nature of God, we recognize that he is not lacking in power and knowledge, and moreover he is perfect in all moral respects. So he would love each of us at least as much as a good father loves his children. But a good father is "there" for his children, unless circumstances beyond his control prevent him from doing so, or he has some important plan that requires his absence. God, if he exists, unfortunately does not appear to be "there" for us. He apparently cannot even be bothered to give us straightforward evidence for his existence.¹³

Again, the action in the argument occurs in the third premise. And again, there is something of a cottage industry of speculation about God's possible plans, attempting to justify his decision not to provide for us some conclusive and unambiguous evidence for his existence. Let us call these stories 'theodicies'.^{14,15}

Like the earlier arguments, the important question is why we should believe the third premise. And here, the atheist has a ready answer. He might say, "The fact that so much ink has been spilled writing theodicies, trying—but failing!—to explain the reasons for God's absence, is evidence enough that there is no good reason why God would remain hidden. For if there were such a reason, then we would probably have found it by now." After making a speech along these lines, the atheist may then find it rhetorically persuasive to reissue his challenge (Hudson 2020, p. 19-20).

This reasoning applies analogically both to Hart's Argument and to the White House Lawn Argument. Their proponents express the analogical rationales for their respective third premises. Hart argues against a variety of theodicy-analogues (Hart 1975, p. 129-34). Frank writes, "... the discussion always ends up sounding like the script of a

(bad) science fiction film" (Frank 2011). But is this a good rationalization?

5. Noseeum Inferences

The above rationale in favor of DH3 presupposes the failure of all theodicies heretofore espoused. The claim here is that there is always a flaw, some thin crack, which, when a wedge is applied, breaks the story open and exposes it for what it is: just another piece of speculative fiction. This is controversial. Presumably, the authors of those stories would not agree that they are mere pieces of fiction. But again, I have no rooster in that ring, and so I at least am willing to concede the point. Let us therefore assume that every theodicy ever told fails to justify divine hiddenness.

Even if all the ink spilled over theodicies were washed away, the atheist's rationalization of DH3 would still be lacking. That rationalization relies on the following principle:

Noseeum Assumption(DHA): If there were a reason for God to stay hidden, then we would probably be aware of that reason and we would recognize it as such.

Put the other way around, Noseeum Assumption(DHA) implies that if we do not see a reason for God to stay hidden, then there probably is no reason (Howard-Snyder 1999, p. 104-5). If this assumption were generalized to any claim whatever, it would clearly be false. It would be far too close to the shunned principle expressed by the phrase "absence of evidence is evidence of absence". There are ever so many subject matters about which we know very little, for which a noseeum assumption would be incorrect: in general, any topic about which our ability to perform inquiry is significantly hindered by our own imperfect epistemic situation. On the other hand, there are obviously plenty of subject matters where a noseeum assumption is warranted.

The question is whether we are in a position to know what might be God's reason for hiding, or whether we have any evidence for the idea that we would recognize the reason if there were one. So let us assume, for a thought experiment, that God exists and is truly unsurpassable. On this assumption, should we mere humans expect to see God's

13 Compare Hudson 2020, Ch. 3; van Inwagen 2006, Ch. 8; Rea 2018, Ch. 2.

14 See Howard-Snyder 1999, p. 86-101 for a description of some theodicies.

15 It is standard to distinguish between *theodicy* and *defense*. My usage of 'theodicy' does not quite fit with all usage in the literature. Compare Lewis 1993, p. 104-6; and van Inwagen 2006, p. 7.

reason? Reflection on the question suggests that we would not. There are two crucial points here.¹⁶

First, much like the drunk searching for his car keys under the streetlight, there is a vast darkness where the light of our cognitive capacities do not shine. The reasons for action that are available to God may be completely beyond our ken, due to the unlimited nature of his intelligence, and the very limited nature of ours. Because of his epistemic perfection, God can understand literally infinitely more than we are able to grasp. Some of the facts that are unavailable to us are reasons for him to act in one way or another. We, imperfect epistemic agents that we are, are unable even to entertain these facts, let alone to adjudicate whether they are good reasons for his absence.

Second, even if we can entertain God's reasons, we might not be in a position to recognize them as such. Let us extend the analogy involving the drunk who is searching for his keys. We may suppose that the keys, due to some fortunate accident, dropped out of his pocket under the beam of the streetlight. But if he has had enough whiskey, the drunk might not be able to identify the keys, even if they were directly under his nose. Likewise, we might be able to entertain God's reason for acting as he does, while the fact that it is a reason escapes us. The lesson is that it is possible to grasp a certain claim, and yet be unable to recognize this further fact about it, namely, that it is a reason for God to stay hidden.

My goal here is not to present a full defense of theism from the atheist's attack. Rather, I aim to rehearse an established point in the philosophical study of religion: the theist has an avenue of reply to the Divine Hiddenness Argument, which does not require that he take up the Atheist's Challenge. Because the Divine Hiddenness Argument is similar in all relevant respects to Hart's Argument and the White House Lawn Argument, there are analogous upshots for these two arguments.

6. Applications to the Earlier Arguments

How do the above considerations bear with respect to Hart's Argument and the White House Lawn Argument? Let us take them in turn. In order to rationalize H3, it would appear that Hart must appeal to

Noseeum Assumption(HA): If there were a reason why technologically advanced aliens would not visit Earth, then we would probably be aware of that reason and we would recognize it as such.

Unfortunately, reflection on our discussion of the Divine Hiddenness Argument suggests that this principle is untrue. For any alien civilization out there in the past fifty million or so years, do you find it plausible that we might be aware of the explanation why or why not they have travelled to Earth? I myself do not see the appeal of that. We very likely would not be aware of most possible explanations. The best we can do is shrug and admit that we are in no position to know much of anything about their particular contingent circumstances. Indeed, I am inclined to accept the stronger claim that, for all we know, we may not even be able to grasp the actual explanation for why a given technologically advanced alien civilization is not now on Earth.¹⁷

How does this approach fare with respect to the White House Lawn Argument? In order to rationalize WHL3, it seems that Frank must appeal to

Noseeum Assumption(WHLA): If there were a reason why alien UAP pilots would not make themselves publicly known, then we would probably be aware of that reason and we would recognize it as such.

Noseeum Assumption(WHLA) is in the same boat as Noseeum Assumption(HA) and Noseeum Assumption(DHA). Let us suppose that long ago, and far away, some aliens advanced enough technologically to send crafts vaguely in the direction of Earth. Suppose either that some of those crafts, or their von Neumann descendants, are here today, and we observe some of them as UAP.¹⁸

Are we in any position whatever to know much at all about the products of their intelligent activity? Bear in mind that the aliens evolved under unknown circumstances. We know next to nothing about their compositional makeup. We know nothing of their cognitive architectures. We know nothing of the organization of their society, or even whether they inhabit something that truly deserves the name 'society'. Indeed, we know very little about them at all, perhaps aside from the assumed fact that they sent the UAP to Earth, and that their technology is far more advanced than ours. We

¹⁶ Compare Hudson 2020, Ch. 2-3; and Howard-Snyder 1999, p. 110-12.

¹⁷ Compare Van Inwagen 1996, p. 167-9; and Howard-Snyder 1999, p. 108-9.

¹⁸ See Frank 2023, p. 211; and Tipler 1980 for brief descriptions of von Neumann probes/replicators.

should not be surprised if the plans that such beings are able to make are enormously complex and sophisticated. Their goals and motivations may be so foreign to us that we are unable even to entertain them. Again, the appropriate reaction is to admit that we are at sea, totally in the dark, and the best we can do is to fumble about like our drunk friend.

The point can be driven a bit further. Like our drunk friend, we can search only the illuminated patch of light available to us. But our search parameters may, as a matter of coincidence, define the correct search area, just as the drunk's keys may have slipped from his pocket and coincidentally landed under the streetlight. So let us suppose that there are aliens, and their reason for not making themselves publicly known is indeed something that we can comprehend. Suppose even that many of us, in our ordinary musings, has entertained this state of affairs; it is something mundane to us.

Does it then follow that we are in a position to recognize *that* as the fact that explains why the aliens stay hidden? It does not, because their reasons may be so foreign to what we assume are valid reasons for action that we are not in a position to see them as such. We know nothing about their desires, intentions, or values. Perhaps we should be unsure whether they have mental attitudes that truly deserve the names 'desire', 'intention', or 'value'. We might even properly doubt the idea that they exemplify any ordinary conception of personality.¹⁹ So, for all we know, their reasons may be in plain sight, but we pass them by because of the radical dissimilarities between our patterns of thought and theirs.²⁰

Let us close with one final analogy, involving the game of chess. I am an adult chess novice. Every so often, my nine-year-old daughter and I play a match. Typically, when she makes a questionable move, I can quickly and easily form a good hypothesis why she did it. If I were to play against another adult of my skill level, I would probably be able to do the same, but it would take at least several minutes of careful deliberation. It would require even more effort and rigorous study to understand the move of a grandmaster. What about an apparently questionable move executed by an artificial intelligence? Try as I might, I may never have a good explanation why it made the move, especially if we press pause and I must hypothesize without any knowledge of how the match evolves. This final scenario is analogous to our epistemic situation with respect to advanced nonhuman intelligences, and the question why they do not land on the White House lawn.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this essay may be misinterpreted. It may be helpful to discuss what I have *not* tried to establish.

Most obviously, I have not argued that there are alien civilizations in our galaxy, or that there are alien UAP pilots, or that an unsurpassable God exists. I have not even suggested that there is any good evidence for these controversial claims. I have merely demonstrated that, for each of these domains, there is a popular argument that aims toward dismissal of the domain, and it bears important structural similarities to the arguments of the other two domains. There are adequate rebuttals to all the arguments, and, crucially, these rebuttals need not take on the challenges that are intertwined with the arguments.

It is important to recognize that these rebuttals are not merely variants of hypotheses that purport to explain cosmic or divine silence. Those hypotheses aim to take on their associated challenges. Instead, the above rebuttals avoid those challenges, and assert merely that we are totally in the dark about what aliens would be like, and so there is no rationale available to the proponents of those arguments for their respective third premises. The arguments fail due to their undefended premises, which, moreover, appear to be *indefensible*.

I do not, however, claim that it is a waste of time to take up any of those challenges. Indeed, for each domain, it is plausible that significant advances have occurred (or will occur) as a result of speculation about theodicies, or their analogues in the realms of SETI and UAP studies. But caution in speculation is recommended, especially when we are thinking about aliens and fringe science. There is a fine line between scientific speculation and science fiction, and perhaps too often the one inappropriately blends into the other (but I do not claim that this is *always* a bad thing).

Let us turn to positive upshots. This avenue of reply to the White House Lawn Argument is general in that it applies at least as well—and sometimes even better—if UAP pilots are conceived as something weirder than mere extraterrestrials: extra-dimensional, inter-dimensional, crypto-terrestrial, time-travelers, or even a kind of entity such that our conceptual apparatus cannot now latch onto its nature, or for which we currently have no appropriate terminology. These hypotheses, assuming they qualify as such, carry extra baggage, however, in that they often presuppose much more

19 For some discussion of conceptions of personhood, see for example Feldman 1992, p. 100-104; and Parfit 1984, Ch. 10.

20 Compare Madden 2023, Part 1; also Bates 2021. For further references in this vein, see Cirkovic 2018, Ch. 4.

speculative empirical claims, with metaphysical assumptions that are often only vaguely understood, if at all. We should have no in-principle problem with metaphysics as such, but it is something that should generally be left to those with special training in the relevant theories and their presuppositions. Sloppy metaphysics can easily sound like the ravings of a crackpot, and even good metaphysics often seems absurd.

Dismissive attitudes about SETI or UAP studies cannot be grounded in these considerations involving our expectations about nonhuman intelligences. Science popularizers are wrong to dismiss the study of UAP merely because of their assumptions regarding what our evidential situation would be like if we were being visited. These arguments provide no reason to disbelieve in alien UAP pilots. When we consider the possibility of alien visitation, we should let go of our preconceptions, open up our minds, and swallow down a healthy helping of epistemic humility.

An established point in the philosophical study of religion smoothly transfers to its analogues in the domains of SETI and UAP studies. Finally, SETI researchers should take note of the similarities between Fermi's Challenge and Frank's Challenge: for any response to Fermi's Challenge, there is a parallel response to Frank's Challenge, which at least deserves serious consideration.²¹

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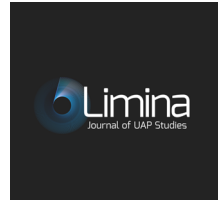
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UAP Indications Analysis 1945-1975 United States Atomic Warfare Complex¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an assessment of indicators associated with Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP) reports included in the SCU Pattern Recognition Study (Hancock et al., 2023a). The Pattern Recognition study analyzed UAP incidents geographically proximal to US military installations between 1945 and 1975. A set of 590 comprehensively documented UAP reports from this period were collected from select sources, including Project Blue Book. Study sites included: 1) atomic materials production, 2) atomic weapons assembly, 3) atomic weapons stockpiles, 4) atomic weapons deployment, and 5) rocket/missile testing and development. The Pattern Recognition Study concluded that intelligent and focused activity was associated with UAP at atomic facilities to a greater degree than conventional non-atomic military facilities. Further study of the UAP activity frequency, type and pattern indicated the need to assess possible intentions relating to information collection, obstruction of military activities, and aggressive engagement. An additional 284 incidents were examined based on relevant UAP activity, for a total of 874 incidents. A list of indicators was created and mapped to four major scenarios for assessment. Based on the analysis of indications for UAP incidents included for this study, an Atomic Weapons Survey was indicated as the most likely scenario. The less likely scenarios were General Military Survey, Atomic Warfare Prevention and Military Aggression respectively.

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1. Introduction

The methodology used in this indications analysis was adapted from industry standard practices within the US Intelligence Community for threat and warnings studies. It

provides an approach to evaluating observed activities that are not reproducible, nor predictably repeatable (Grabo, 2004). Indications studies involve long-term collection of activities occurring within a specific area of interest. With sufficient data, it is possible to identify anomalies in that activity. If

¹ J. Pierson, DSS (Contributing Advisor): Methodology, Writing - Review & Editing.

deemed worthy of further study, the next step in the process involves developing a set of hypothetical motives of intention. The existing hypothetical intentions are described below.

1.1 General Military Survey

In its most basic form, military intelligence involves the collection of information on both the capabilities and vulnerabilities of a military force (Richelson, 2016). A general survey includes estimates of the size and readiness of an armed force in all its operational domains (ground, air, sea, and space). Information is collected on all types of weapons, as well as the systems and logistics capabilities available for delivering each category of weapon. To identify vulnerabilities, a determination must be made of the ability of each element of the armed force to detect threats and defend itself from attack. While a general military survey is intended to be comprehensive which covers all classes of weapons, special focus is normally placed on those weapons classified as strategic. Strategic weapons are defined as those capable of destroying an adversary's population centers, industrial base, and utilities, transportation, and communications infrastructure. A lack of distinct focus on atomic weapons or other specialized weapons systems, as compared to general military resources, is a primary indication of a General Military Survey.

1.2 Atomic Weapons Survey

Information collection efforts focusing on atomic weapons are categorized as a strategic weapons survey. An entity conducting a strategic weapons survey focuses information collection efforts on the development, production capacity, stockpiling, and delivery platforms for weapons of massive physical destruction. For this study, such strategic weapons are defined as nuclear and thermonuclear bombs and missile warheads. Weapons-grade radioactive materials production plants can be identified by the large number and size of associated power transmission lines and other engineering elements. These identifiable elements are required to produce exceptionally high levels of electrical power required for atomic isotope separation. Air and water isotope sampling also allows a characterization of the level of atomic technology in use, as well as estimating the types of weapons in production, which includes a differentiation between nuclear and thermonuclear weapons (Richelson, 2007). Increased UAP activity at atomic facilities, coupled with a lack

of comparable levels of activity at general military facilities, is a primary indication of a focused Atomic Weapons Survey.

1.3 Atomic Warfare Prevention

Preempting or intervening to degrade strategic military action requires focused information collection efforts against strategic weapons development facilities and weapons delivery facilities. In addition to reconnaissance, there would be some level of "engagement" with those utilizing such defense systems to fully verify their capabilities (Burrows, 2001). A deliberate attempt to disrupt or prevent functional operations for atomic weapons delivery, followed by a disengagement or disablement of an atomic weapons mission is a primary indication of Atomic Warfare Prevention.

1.4 Military Aggression

A major challenge in evaluating Military Aggression is that certain activities which are part of a general military survey, are also part of the planning for future hostile action. Activities that trigger a defensive response are key to the detection, location, and recording of military capabilities regarding surveillance, security, communications, weaponry, and response time. One factor that helps differentiate intentions regarding those activities include the determination of whether they are being carried out in a clandestine manner (indicative of possible plans for aggression) or overtly (suggestive of a survey). Another consideration is whether disguise or deception is involved in collections or response testing (ferreting) activities. The actual compromise or destruction of military assets is a major consideration in determining intention. However special consideration is given to incidental effects caused by proximity to energy systems or accidental collision. A direct engagement with military personnel, resulting in the substantial risk or sustained damage to property and/or personal injury or death is a primary indication of Military Aggression.

2. Methodology

The methodology encompassed four steps: 1) Collect and build a data base of the most credible incidents possible, 2) Chart the incidents to reveal patterns within the data, 3) Analyze patterns to identify activity indicators, and 4) Map activity indicators to scenarios of "intent." The conceptual model for the overall process of pattern recognition and

indications analysis is illustrated in Figure 1.

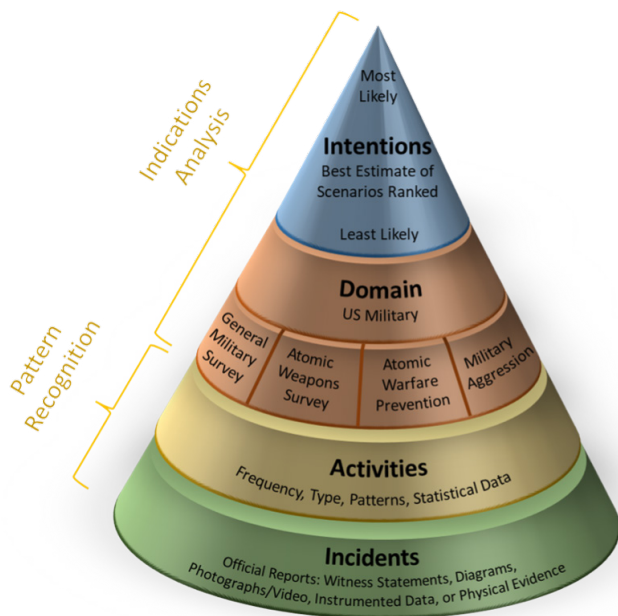


Figure 1. Intentions Study Model

2.1 Data Sources and Selection

Hancock et al., 2023a examined UAP reports between 1945 and 1975, where the data indicated an anomalous level of UAP activity at military facilities. The reports were taken from the Brad Sparks Comprehensive Catalog of 2,200 Project Blue Book Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO) Unknowns (Sparks, 2020); National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) chronologies (NICAP), and the books *Clear Intent* (Fawcett and Greenwood, 1984) and *Faded Giant* (Salas and Klotz, 2005). Incidents that were officially reported to and investigated by the U.S. Air Force's various UFO investigations programs (SIGN, GRUDGE, BLUEBOOK) (Swords and Powell, 2012), law enforcement, and other organizations that conducted such investigations, were included. Reports from military personnel, law enforcement, pilots, and other trained observers were reviewed for sufficient detail, such as date, time, location, distinguishing features and specific activities.

After compiling the incident data into an Excel database, manual reviews were conducted to remove duplicates,

resulting in a final set of entries for analysis. A total of 874 incidents were included in the study data set, including 590 from Hancock et al., 2023a, and an additional 284 from above-listed data sources. Relevant UAP activity included aircraft encounters/engagements, radar tracking, radar interference/jamming, radio interference, UAP over military installation, UAP observed during missile, rocket and high-altitude balloon tests, and directed radar transmissions.

2.2 Intention Scenarios and Indicators

A total of 31 indicators were scored for each scenario. Scores are based on the quality of information available for each indicator, the frequency and strength of pattern of activity for the indicator, and whether the pattern of activity supports the specific scenario (see Figure 2). Scores range from +3 (Highly supportive that the indicator is true), 0 (Neither supports nor suggests the opposite), and -3 (Highly supportive that the opposite is true). **Column 1** is the number designator for each indicator; **Column 2** is a specific indicator of activity evidenced by UAP reports; **Column 3** is a data quality score based on the quality and quantity of information available to make an informed assessment; **Column 4** is a pattern support score based on the presence or absence of a pattern described by the specific indicator; and **Columns 5, 6, 7** and **8** provide specific indicator pattern support for the respective scenarios: 1) General Military Survey, 2) Atomic Weapons Survey, 3) Atomic Warfare Prevention, and 4) Military Aggression.

Scores for each scenario are based on a detailed analysis of the content and credibility of the individual reports associated with each indicator. Finally, a decision is reached for the likelihood of each intention scenario based on the combined data. The methodology described here is based on the structured debate and scenarios and indicators structured analytic techniques.

Figure 2 shows each UAP pattern indicator and our assessment of existing data in terms of data quality, prevalence of the existing pattern, and its strength in support of each hypothetical intention (or scenario).

2.3 Indications Analysis Matrix

		Data Quality	Pattern Support	General Military Survey	Atomic weapons survey	Atomic Warfare Prevention	Military Aggression
1a	UAP activity at all first-generation atomic weapons materials production facilities	3	3	1	3	0	0
1b	UAP activity at all first-generation atomic weapons design and assembly facilities	3	3	1	3	0	0
1c	Extended surveillance at all first-generation atomic weapons design and assembly facilities	3	-3	0	0	-3	-3
2a	UAP activities at national atomic weapons stockpiles	3	3	2	3	1	1
2b	Extended surveillance at national atomic weapons stockpiles	3	0	0	0	-3	-3
3a	UAP activities at thermonuclear weapons deployment sites	3	3	2	3	1	-2
3b	Extended surveillance at thermonuclear weapons deployment sites	3	2	2	2	2	1
4a	UAP reports from ICBM sites	3	2	2	3	1	-2
4b	UAP low altitude aerial incursions at ICBM bases	3	3	2	3	1	-2
5a	UAP incidents associated with ICBM test launches (Canaveral/Vandenberg)	3	1	2	3	1	-2
5b	UAP incidents associated with rocket and missile tests (White Sands)	3	3	2	3	1	-2
6	UAP incidents associated with manned space launches	3	0	-1	-1	-1	-1
7	UAP activity at commercial nuclear power plants	3	-3	-1	-1	-1	-1
8	UAP activities suggestive of radiation/isotope monitoring and particulate collections	1	3	1	3	0	0
9	UAP activities suggestive of testing of physical security at atomic military bases (Exclude ICBM)	3	1	2	2	2	2
10	UAP activities suggestive of testing air defenses at atomic development facilities	3	3	2	2	2	2
11	UAP activities suggestive of testing of air defense capabilities at conventional military bases	3	2	2	0	0	-1
12	UAP activities suggestive of testing of physical security at conventional military facilities	3	-3	-3	0	0	-3
13	UAP activities at atomic weapons tests	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	UAP low altitude aerial incursions at conventional military bases	3	-3	-3	0	0	-3
15a	UAP incidents associated with atomic bomber alert missions	3	1	2	2	2	2
15b	UAP incidents associated with atomic bombing exercises	3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3
15c	UAP activity associated with continental air defense exercises	3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3
16	UAP activities associated with mobile atomic weapons platforms (submarines and aircraft carriers)	0	0	0	0	0	0
17a	UAP encounters suggesting testing of aircraft capabilities (speed, response times, maneuverability)	3	3	3	3	3	3
17b	UAP activity suggesting of false duplication of IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) radar responses to air defense radar facilities	3	2	2	2	2	2
17c	UAP incidents suggestive of jamming or other types of electronic interference with military aircraft radar systems	3	1	1	1	1	1
18	Detection and tracking capabilities reconnaissance (visual and radar)	3	3	3	3	1	1
19	Clandestine UAP activity	3	2	2	2	1	1
20	Overt UAP activity	3	2	3	3	2	-2
21	Direct engagement with military involving substantial risk or sustained damage, personal injury, or death	3	-2	1	1	1	-2

Figure 2. Indicator Rating Scenario Matrix

3. Indicator Assessment

3.1 UAP activity at all first-generation atomic weapons development facilities

Assessment: Very Strong Support

The pattern analysis indicated elevated UAP activity at atomic weapons development sites, including radioactive materials production, weapons design, and production

plants. That anomalous activity corresponded to a specific window of time, with the highest level of activity at the earliest development sites (Hanford, Oak Ridge, Los Alamos, and Sandia base/Kirtland AFB). Similar facilities that went into operation later (the Savannah River and Pantex plants) showed far less UAP activity. Killeen base (one of the five national atomic weapons stockpile sites) also showed an elevated level of UAP incidents during the initial window of activity, while the other four sites do not.

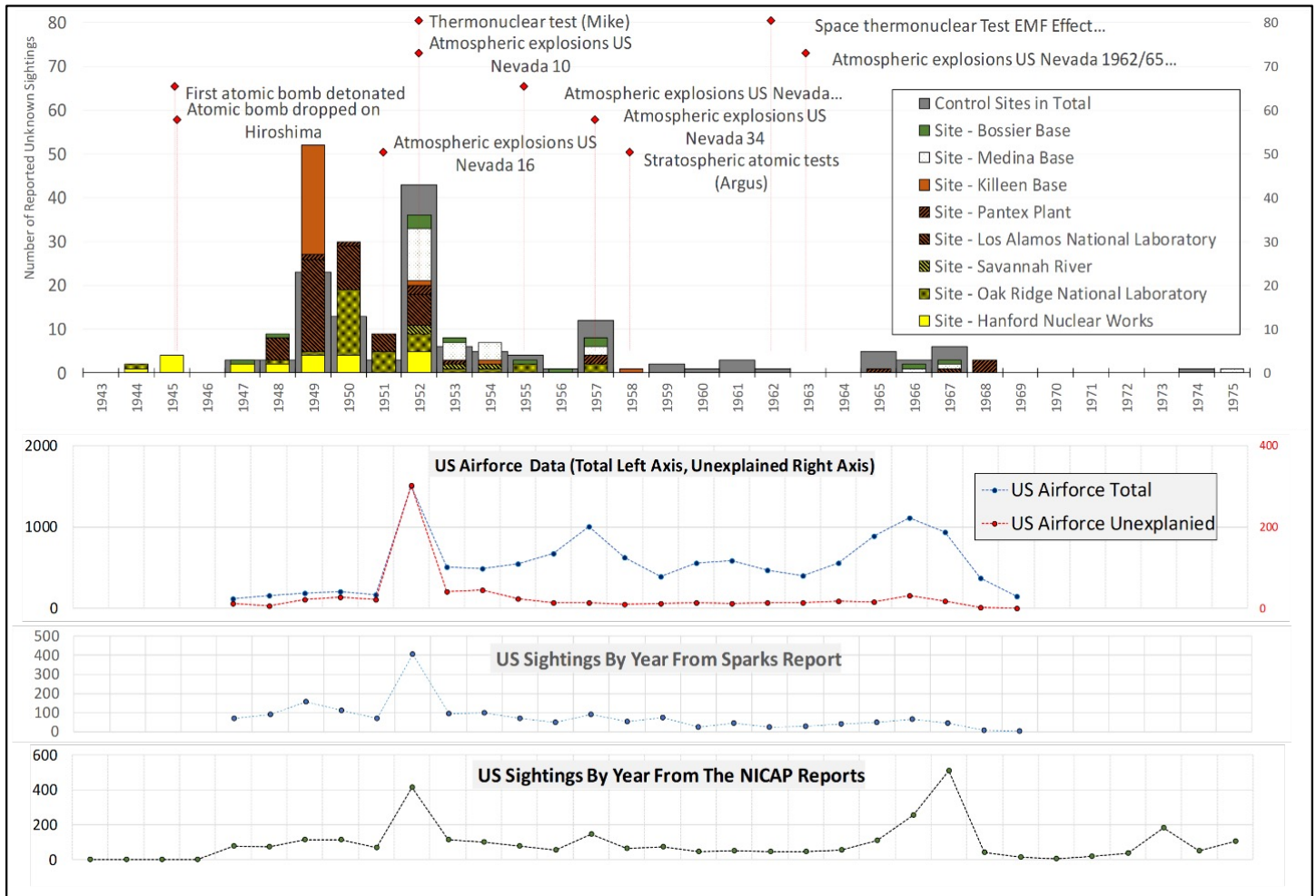


Figure 3. First-generation atomic weapons development facilities. US atomic weapons vs controls incident reports (Hancock et al., 2023a).

Figure 3 shows the degree in which the atomic warfare sites reported significantly more UAP encounters than the control sites (shown in total as a grey bar behind the atomic sites). The increase in activity at atomic sites was most notable during 1948 to 1951 when the atomic warfare facilities became operational. In 1952, atomic sites and controls were high in the overall reporting as seen in the US Airforce,

Sparks and NICAP reports (as shown in the line charts below the main bar chart).

Figure 4 Comparison of atomic and non-atomic facility types (Hancock et al., 2023a) also demonstrated an increased number of reported cases at the atomic facilities as compared to conventional, non-atomic weapons military bases.

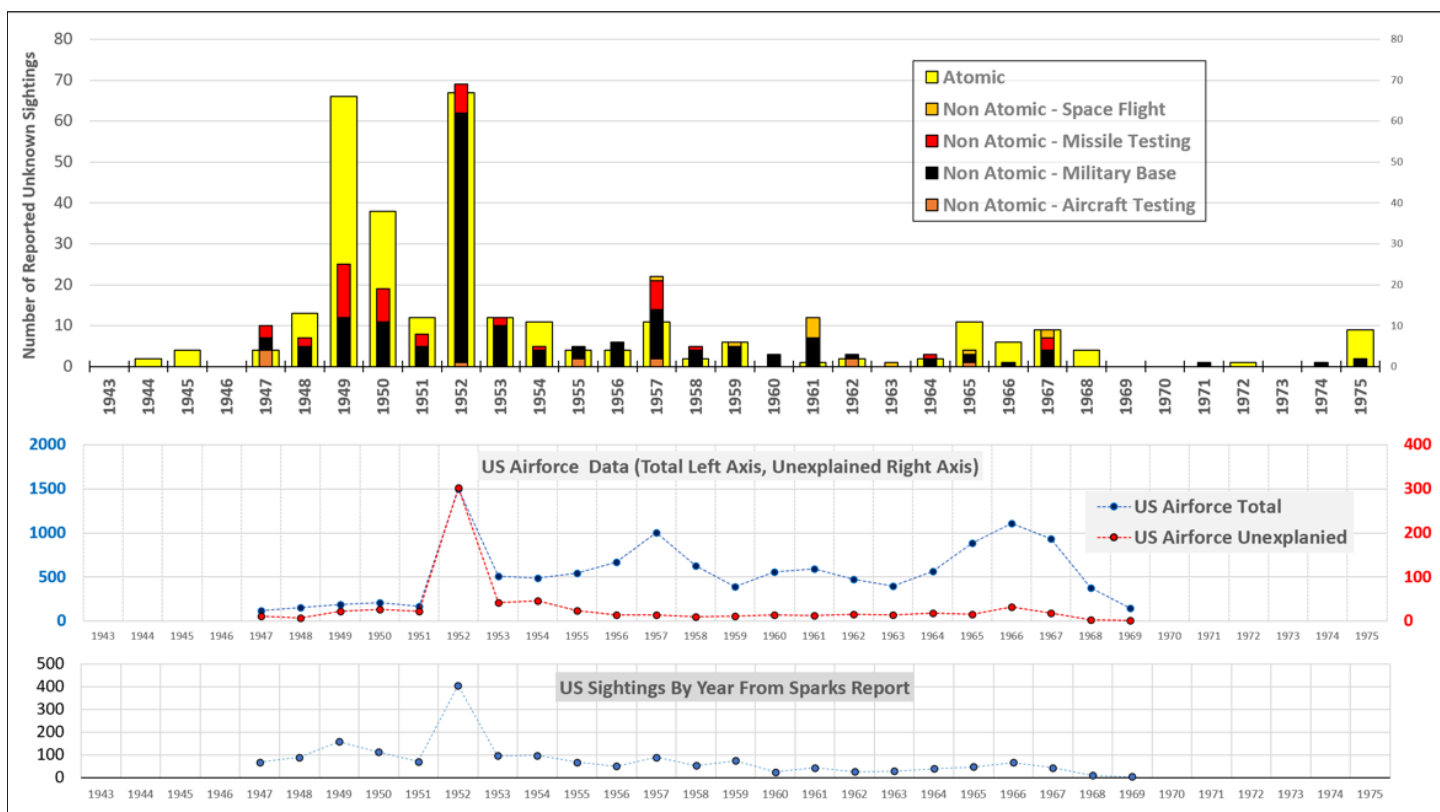


Figure 4. Comparison of atomic and non-atomic facility types.

Figure 4 shows the increase in activity at the atomic sites (yellow bars) during 1948 to 1951, most notable during 1949 and 1950, as compared with the general military sites (orange, red and black bars). Included in the general military sites is the White Sands rocket/misssile testing site. While not an atomic site, White Sands is a specialty technology test site associated with specific indicators. The difference between the atomic sites in yellow and the standard military sites in black is significant during the 1948 to 1951 period. There is also a period during 1965 to 1968 where the atomic sites show an increase in reports over the standard military sites, mainly at the ICBM sites (Hancock et al., 2023a). Increased reports at atomic warfare complex sites and air defense facilities may have been influenced by growing concerns over nuclear proliferation, as evidenced by the development of nuclear technologies in Russia during the Cold War.

Incident Examples

May 21, 1949, Hanford Radioactive Materials plant, Washington. A silvery, disc-shaped object was reported “station keeping” (hovering) within Hanford restricted air space. Radar confirmed a target at an altitude of 17,000

to 20,000 feet, and confirmed with visual observation by Hanford radar station personnel. A call for an interceptor was relayed to Moses Lake airfield but before the F-82 fighter was even airborne the disc suddenly took off at a speed “faster than a jet” (Sparks, 2020/232).²

February 24, 1950, Los Alamos, New Mexico. AESS security personnel sighted a shiny metallic or bright white silver white-saucer or sphere hovering at about 100 (feet) then moving erratically, then suddenly climbing vertically at possibly supersonic speed straight up out of sight. No sound was noted by anyone (Sparks, 2020/331).

March 21, 1950, Sandia Base, New Mexico. Personnel observed several silver-colored objects engaged in a series of aerial maneuvers described as “dog fighting” over the base. The objects performed right-angle turns as well as immediately reversing their direction of flight (Sparks, 2020/350, NICAP).

October 12, 1950, Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Personnel observed a saucer-looking object over the K-25 (uranium enrichment) area near the NEPA Project area. The object was reported to be as big as a four-room house, silver in color with a blister at the top of the saucer and windows. The object

2 References for the Brad Sparks Comprehensive Catalog of 2,200 Project Blue Book Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO) Unknowns are indicated as ‘Sparks 2020’ followed by the sequential number of the incident listed on the Sparks 2020 list.

rose slowly for about 100ft, moved forward, rose again about 100ft, and then disappeared at a high rate of speed (Sparks, 2020/410).

3.2 UAP activities at national atomic weapons stockpiles

Assessment: Very Strong Support

AEC Q sites were constructed and became operational through the period of 1948-1951. These Q sites were established to distribute the original atomic bombs from Sandia Base outside Albuquerque so that pre-emptive Soviet attacks would not threaten the entire American stores of atomic weapons. Q sites were used for stockpiling atomic weapons, testing high explosive detonators, and performing assembly and disassembly of training weapons for SAC. They were heavily guarded and located adjacent to major Army bases and SAC air bases. The Killeen site was one of the first Q sites to become operational. In 1949 the number of UAP incidents at Killeen Base/Fort Hood prompted the Army to establish instrumented UAP observations posts which produced specific estimates of size, distance, and speed. Data is strong for two of the earliest bomb depots (Sandia Base and Killeen National Stockpile site), however, no data emerged for the other stockpile locations.

Incident Examples

On May 5, 1949, Killeen base security zone. Two Army majors and a captain observed two oblong, highly reflective white discs, flying at an altitude of approximately 1,000 feet at an estimated speed of 200-250 miles per hour. Both objects then made a coordinated, shallow turn (Sparks, 2020/214).

On May 7, 1949, Killeen base. A brilliant, white diamond-shaped light at low altitude (1,000 feet) was tracked for 57 seconds for 3½ miles. No sound was heard (Sparks, 2020/220).

On May 8, 1949, Killen base. Three observation posts observed a similar brilliant diamond-shaped light at an altitude of 1,600 feet, slowly descending for some 9 minutes. Senior officers from the agencies involved in Killeen base security reviewed the progress on the observations and concluded “agencies were unanimous in agreeing that the new observation system instituted by Fourth Army provided precise results and definitively indicated that the unknown phenomena in the Camp Hood area could not be attributed to natural causes” (Sparks, 2020/222).

3.3 UAP activities at thermonuclear weapons deployment sites

Assessment: Very Strong Support

Several periods occurred where atomic deployment sites had greater sightings than standard military bases: 1949-1950 during the establishment of the atomic weapons development program, 1964-1967 after the deployment of the ICBM, and in 1975 with the deployment of the Minuteman III ICBMs.

Incident Examples

Between February and March 1967, Malmstrom AFB in Montana experienced an ongoing series of UAP incidents involving low-altitude unidentified lights. Reports include UAPs hovering adjacent to security gates and missile silos. On March 16, security alarms were triggered, and armed teams were dispatched to multiple missile locations. Maintenance and security personnel at multiple missile silos reported unknown aerial objects in their vicinity. At least one flight of 10 ICBMs (Echo flight) was officially recorded as having unexplainably gone off alert status (Salas and Klotz, 2005).

October 24, 1968, Minot AFB, North Dakota. Multiple radar tracks were observed, approaching both the base and an incoming B-52 aircraft. Security personnel reported an unidentified object landing and continued to observe it for some 45 minutes. Additional UAP reports were made from several sites of the 91st Strategic Missile Wing. In addition, a variety of anomalous electromagnetic effects were registered on radio and radar and security alarms were activated at outer and inner rings around silos. Official reports state that the outer door of one location had been opened, and the combination lock of the inner door moved (Sparks, 2020/1760).

October 1975, Loring AFB in Maine reported a UAP entering a high-security zone within 300 yards of the atomic weapons storage area. Wurtsmith AFB in Michigan also reported a UAP approaching and hovering over the weapons storage area. A series of UAP incidents, known as the “northern tier UFO wave,” were reported to NORAD, the National Military Command Center, the Air Force Chief of Staff, and Strategic Air Command headquarters. In response, a Security Option 3 message was sent to all SAC installations across the northern border – Pease, Plattsburg, Wurtsmith, Kinchloe, Sawyer, Grand Forks, Minot, Malmstrom, Fairchild, and Barksdale AFBs (Fawcett and Greenwood, 1984).

November/December 1975, Malmstrom AFB, reported multiple waves of UAP incidents which included an apparent physical incursion involving ICBM silo security gates and possible attempted access to one missile silo. One Air Force communication refers to a “Faded Giant” incident which is the term for tampering with or loss of control over a nuclear weapon. A Faded Giant incident had previously occurred on possibly two instances at Malmstrom in 1967. The UAP security incidents at “Northern Tier” Strategic Air Command bases are summarized in a Commander in Chief NORAD message of November 11, 1975, which refers to the series of UFO incidents at American and Canadian bases. The message expresses concern over possible press coverage and the need to come up with appropriate public responses (Fawcett and Greenwood, 1984).

3.4 Reports At ICBM sites

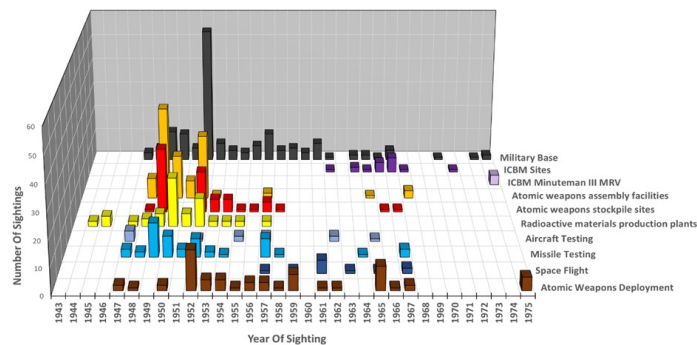


Figure 5. Number of reports based on military facility type at the time of sighting

Figure 5 shows the number of sightings at the various military facilities each year over the study period. The Military facility type is the facility type at the time of the sighting. The ICBM sites (in purple) did not become operational until 1959; therefore, any reports at the locations prior to becoming an ICBM site was captured under their facility type at that time. During 1964-1967 and 1975, the predominant facility types were ICBM and atomic weapons deployment sites.

Certain provisions with Air Force Reporting 200-2 allowed for the classification of incidents, which were not available for this study. Classification was based on association with certain military facilities, specified activities or observations that required additional study for threat assessment. Any additional data that was classified accordingly only enhances the indications of UAP activities with respect to military assets.

3.4.1 UAP reports from ICBM sites

Assessment: Moderate Support

3.4.2 UAP low-altitude aerial incursions at ICBM bases

Assessment: Very Strong Support

Incident Examples

August 7, 1962, Oracle, Arizona. Personnel at a Titan ICBM complex in Arizona (associated with the Davis-Monthan SAC base) observed a brilliant light descending and becoming stationary over the site. SAC fighters were sent to investigate but as they approached the object took off and rapidly moved out of sight before the actual arrival of the aircraft. The jets loitered over the site for a bit, then returned to their base, and upon their departure the UFO immediately returned. It once again descended towards the silo - only to take off vertically and disappear overhead (NICAP).

May 21, 1964, Altus AFB. Security personnel reported a large bright light which moved into to a stationary position directly over a newly constructed missile silo for eight to ten minutes (NICAP).

On August 1, 1965, more than a dozen UAPs were reported over various ICBM silos across FE Warren AFB. At one point nine objects were observed moving in formation (Hastings, 2008).

Between August 16 and 26 1965, unknown lights were reported in the area surrounding the base as well as directly over the Minot Minuteman missile complex. On August 16, two witnesses observed a football-shaped light at low altitude for some twelve minutes. Just over a week later, on August 24, a security strike team was sent to investigate reports of an object hovering at ground level, confirmed by radar. During August 25-26, multiple UAPs were reported from three different ICBM sites, with each observation confirmed by multiple observers and radar (Hynek, 1966). Radio interference was reported, which interrupted radio communications across the base to security teams and silos from the Launch Control Center. Interceptors were unable to engage, and objects lights went out whenever interceptors were in their area. UAP also paced B-52 inbound to Minot and radio communications with the aircraft was lost until the object departed (Salas and Klotz, 2005).

3.5 ICBM and Rocket/Missile Testing

Assessment: Very Strong support

3.5.1 UAP incidents associated with ICBM test launches (Cape Canaveral/Vandenberg)

Assessment: Limited Support

3.5.2 UAP incidents associated with rocket and missile tests (White Sands)

There was a relatively high level of activity at the test facilities during 1949 to 1951, when compared to non-atomic facilities. Missile testing sightings were high in 1952 but also corresponded to the general peak of activity during the 1952 UAP peak. There was a high number of reports at the missile testing during 1957 which was also during a smaller general peak of UAP activity.

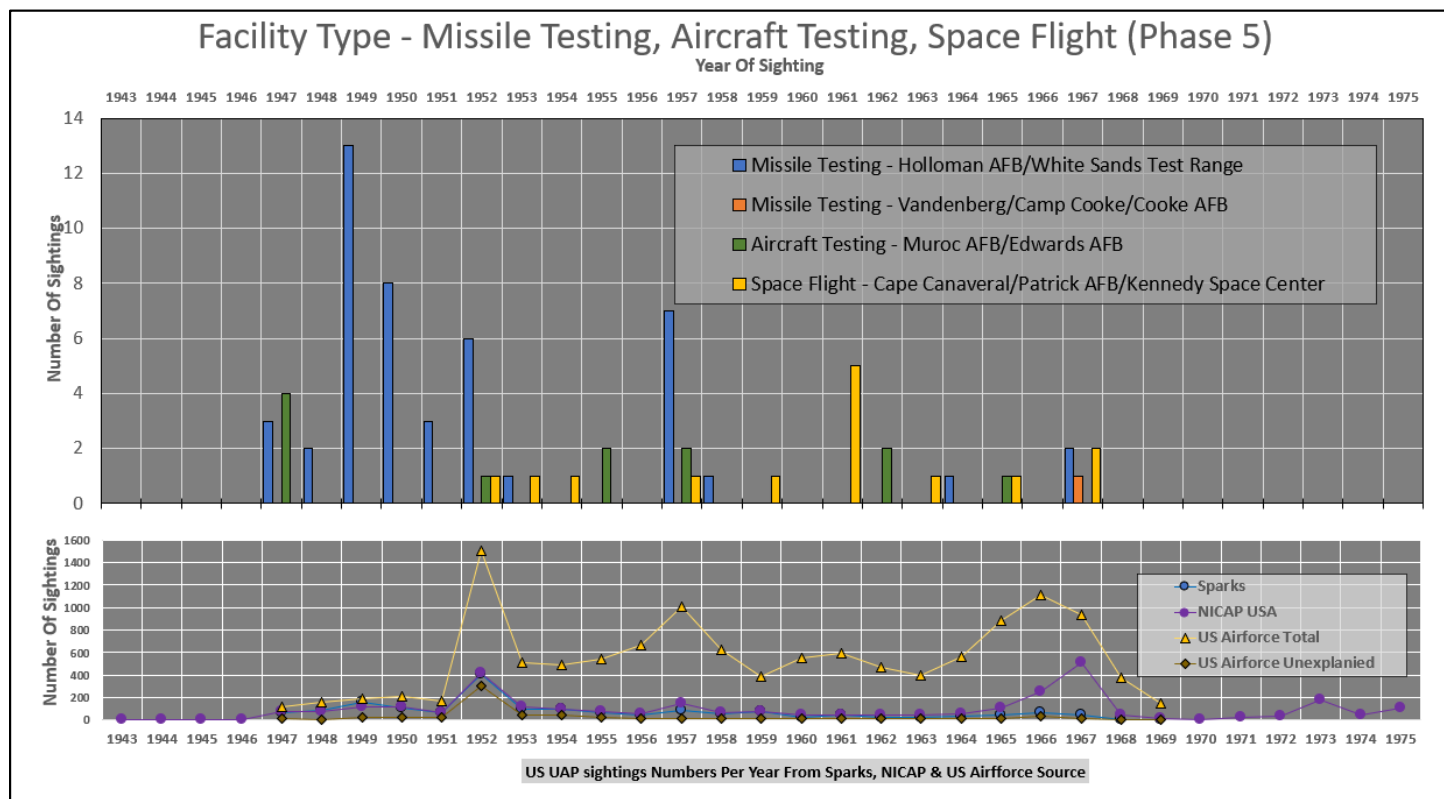


Figure 6. Missile Testing, Aircraft Testing, Space Flight (Phase 5)

Incident Examples

ICBM Launches at Cape Canaveral

Jan. 10, 1961. Cape Canaveral. During the tracking of a Polaris A-1 missile Test 5016, a continuous-wave (CW) radar, started tracking the “strongest target return,” on an “unidentifiable object,” instead of tracking the Polaris 1st stage to impact as intended. The Object alternately moved slowly and then moved fast (Sparks, 2020/1461).

April 11, 1961. Cape Canaveral. Polaris submarine missile scheduled for launch at 9:30 a.m. was delayed to Patrick AFB radar tracking a UFO in orbit pattern (Sparks, 2020/1475).

Rocket/Missile Testing at White Sands

During 1950, there were several observations of UAPs

“loitering” around high-level balloon test flights and in the area of missile and rocket test launches, demonstrating exceptional speed, and flying at extreme altitude. The observations were made by multiple crews using sophisticated optical tracking equipment.

On April 27 and 31, 1950, White Sands test range. On April 27, members of a crew preparing to record the test of a Bell Aircraft air-to-ground missile (MX 776A) observed and optically tracked four unidentified aerial objects flying very close together. The objects were recorded on film at one of the tracking sites. The objects were approximately 30 feet in size and flying at very high altitude, on the order of 150,000 feet. The objects were moving at a very high rate, well beyond that of conventional aircraft. On August 31, a series of photos and a video recording were taken of unidentified objects

which were sighted at different times over some four hours. The objects crossed over the Holloman base at high rates of speed and the base requested interceptors. The objects had a definite shape although their edges were not definitively distinct; they were clearly three-dimensional and seemed to rock or oscillate as they moved – at very high rates of speed (Sparks, 2020/367).

August 30 and 31, 1950, on two successive days similar unidentified objects were again observed in the vicinity of the White Sands range and over Holloman Air Force Base. On the first day, a B-50 aircraft was airborne, monitoring another Shrike MX 776A missile test. Ground observers reported that two circular/elliptical-shaped objects moved into the vicinity of the B-50 and remained with it for some thirty minutes. The objects were described as exhibiting a high speed during “sprints” (at some ten times the B-50 speed) over short distances, displaying exceptional maneuverability. While doing so, they maintained a consistent position with each other, and at other times the objects appeared to remain stationary. The UAPs appeared to be emitting their own light, not simply reflecting the sun (Sparks, 2020/400, 401).

3.6 UAP incidents associated with manned space launches

Assessment: Limited support

A total of 14 UAP reports were taken for Cape Canaveral/Kennedy Space Center, but they are generally associated with the launch of rockets and missiles, both in weapons testing and for scientific purposes. Weapons tests at Cape Canaveral far exceeded manned space launches until the 1960s. There was no UAP activity reported specifically for manned space launches.

3.7 UAP activity at commercial nuclear power plants

Assessment: Negative (Very Strong)

During data analysis, identification of UAP activity at any “named” commercial nuclear power plants did not emerge. The gap in data is possibly due to privately owned corporations conducting commercial power operations. Research did not identify any private corporations conducting operations at the time of these UAP encounters that had established protocols for reporting UAP events.

3.8 UAP activities suggestive of radiation/isotope monitoring and particulate collections

Assessment: Positive but Limited

Incident Examples

On April 27 and 28, 1949, southeast of the Killeen Base stockpile site, nine different sightings by security personnel reported an object metallic cone trailing behind it several hundred feet from them and about six to seven feet off the ground. Groups of lights moving in formation were described in multiple instances, one a formation of four, another of up to ten lights. Over two nights, these and similar UAP incidents had essentially blanketed the entire facility (Sparks, 2020/204, 205, 208).

October 12, 1950, Oak Ridge, Tennessee (Sparks, 2020/410).

3.9 UAP activities suggestive of testing of physical security at atomic military bases

Assessment: Moderate Support

Incident Examples

Between February and March 1967, Malmstrom AFB in Montana experienced an ongoing series of UAP incidents involving low-altitude unidentified lights. Reports include UAPs hovering adjacent to security gates and missile silos. On March 16 security alarms were triggered, and armed teams were dispatched to multiple missile locations. Maintenance and security personnel at multiple missile silos reported unknown aerial objects in their vicinity. At least one flight of 10 ICBMs (Echo flight) was officially recorded as having unexplainably gone off alert status (Salas and Klotz, 2005), (Sparks, 2020/1730,1731,1733).

October 24, 1968, Minot AFB, North Dakota. Multiple radar tracks were observed, approaching both the base and an incoming B-52 aircraft. Security personnel reported an unidentified object landing and continued to observe it for some 45 minutes. Additional UAP reports were made from several sites of the 91st Strategic Missile Wing. In addition, a variety of anomalous electromagnetic effects were registered on radio and radar and security alarms were activated at outer and inner rings around silos. Official reports state that the outer door of one location had been opened, and the combination lock of the inner door moved (Sparks, 2020/1760).

Between October and December 1975, Loring AFB,

Wurtsmith AFB and Malmstrom AFB reported multiple waves of UAP incidents which included apparent physical penetration of ICBM silo security gates (site security alarm triggered), hovering over the weapons storage area and possible attempted access to one missile silo (Salas and Klotz, 2005).

3.10 UAP activities suggestive of testing of air defenses associated with atomic weapons development

Assessment: Negative (Very Strong)

Data suggests UAP aircraft engagements were broadly associated with military interceptors rather than focused on the air defense of specific weapons development, assembly, or stockpile sites. The most involved incidents involving air defense were associated with SAC bomber and missile bases.

3.11 UAP activities suggestive of testing of air defense capabilities at conventional military bases

Assessment: No Data / No Assessment

3.12 UAP activities suggestive of testing of physical security at conventional military facilities

Assessment: Negative (Very Strong)

3.13 UAP activities at atomic weapons tests

Assessment: No Data / No Assessment

The study database contains no reports of UAP sightings in conjunction with atomic tests.

3.14 UAP incidents related to conventional military bases

3.14.1 UAP activities focused on conventional military bases/units

Assessment: Negative (Very Strong)

While the level of activity at conventional military bases pre-1952 was low relative to the high level of activity at the atomic warfare complex and missile testing facilities, the 1952 peak itself covered a wide selection of bases including the atomic, conventional, and testing facilities, as well as the wider public.

3.14.2 UAP low altitude aerial incursions at conventional military bases

Assessment: No Data / No Assessment

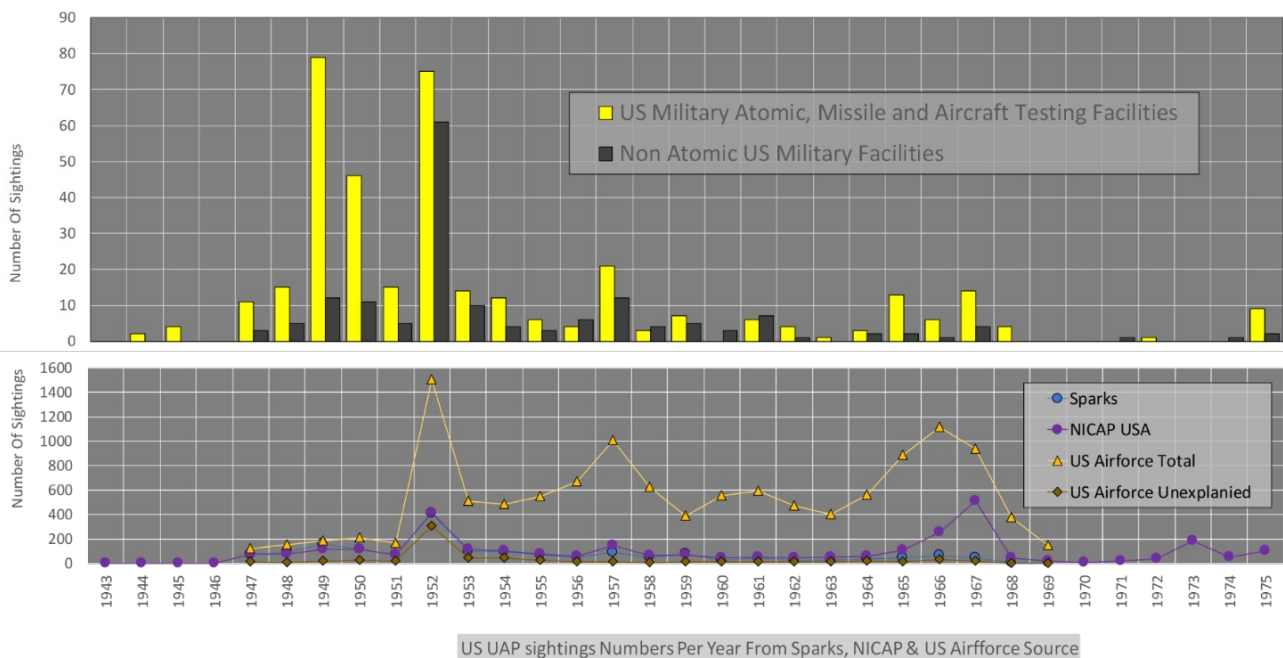


Figure 7. UAP activity at atomic vs. non-atomic military bases

Prior to 1952, UAP sightings were predominately around the atomic military complexes and the missile testing sites. From April 1952 to early 1953 UAP sightings were reported across a wide section of military facilities, both atomic/testing and conventional military. During this period April 1952 to March 1953 both types of facilities followed a similar pattern.

Conventional base activities overflight incidents

July 8, 1947, at Muroc Army Airfield, two disc-shaped or spherical objects, silver and apparently metallic, made a wide circular pattern at about 7,000-8,000 feet at an estimated speed of 300-400 mph. Before the first 2 objects disappeared a 3rd similar disc or spherical silver object reflecting sunlight made tight circles at about 7,000-8,000 feet at speeds beyond the capability of known aircraft (Sparks, 2020/33).

July 29, 1947, Hamilton Air Force Base, two witnesses observed two round, shiny, white objects, 15 to 25 feet in diameter; The first object was sighted as it headed right over a P-80 jet fighter coming in on a preliminary landing – in an approach at around 6,000 feet. A second object then appeared, flying a left-to-right “protective” maneuver over the first craft until they each passed southward toward Oakland and then out over the ocean. The objects appeared to be traveling 3-4 times the apparent speed of the P-80 fighter which they overflew. One of the objects flew straight and level while the other seemed to be weaving from side to side as if it were providing escort (Sparks, 2020/42).

August 15, 1947 – Rapid City (Ellsworth) Air Force Base, twelve discs, flying in a tight formation, approached from the northwest, descended to approximately 5,000 feet and made a shallow, wide radius turn over the base, and accelerated as they departed. Their apparent speed was 300-400 mph and their size was approximately that of a B-29 aircraft. No sound was heard but the objects did appear to have a type of luminous glow around them (Sparks, 2020/50).

April 18 and 27, 1952. Yuma Test Station (now Yuma Proving Ground) personnel reported a flat-white, non-shiny, circular object flying nearly overhead with an erratic non-perfectly-linear trajectory, emitting an intermittent non-persistent thin contrail or vapor trail, and no sound. On April 27, a similar dull-white, circular object was seen flying an irregular trajectory heading east, but with no contrail. Attempted to track it with theodolite but the object moved too fast and erratically (NICAP).

Feb. 2, 1955. Miramar Naval Air Station, a highly polished off-white sphere coloring, reflecting sunlight, fell erratically at 10,000-20,000 feet and stopped at about 3,000-5,000 feet. It suddenly changed from white to reddish brown and instantly accelerated to an estimated 1,000- 1,500 mph leaving short brown vapor trail. Estimated size 25-35 feet in diameter possibly as large as 100 feet (Sparks, 2020/1107).

June 20, 1958. Fort Bragg, North Carolina. 11:05 p.m. Battalion Communication Chief SFC A. Parsley saw a silver, circular object, its lower portion seen through a green haze, hover, then oscillate slightly, then move away at great speed (NICAP).

3.15 Bomber alert and bomber exercises

The nationwide Sky Shield air defense exercises Operation Sky Shield (Operation Sky Shield), involved Strategic Air Command bases, Air Defense Command bases, and anti-aircraft missile sites across the continent. Hundreds of aircraft and over 6,000 military sorties were involved. Commercial and general aviation air traffic was suspended for security purposes and military aircraft – both bombers and interceptors were the only aircraft aloft during the exercises. Exercises were conducted on: September 10, 1960, from 1:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. CDT (Sky Shield 1); October 14, 1961, from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. (Sky Shield 2); and September 2, 1962, 1:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. (Sky Shield 3).

UAP Activity Associated With SAC & Continental Air Defense Exercises

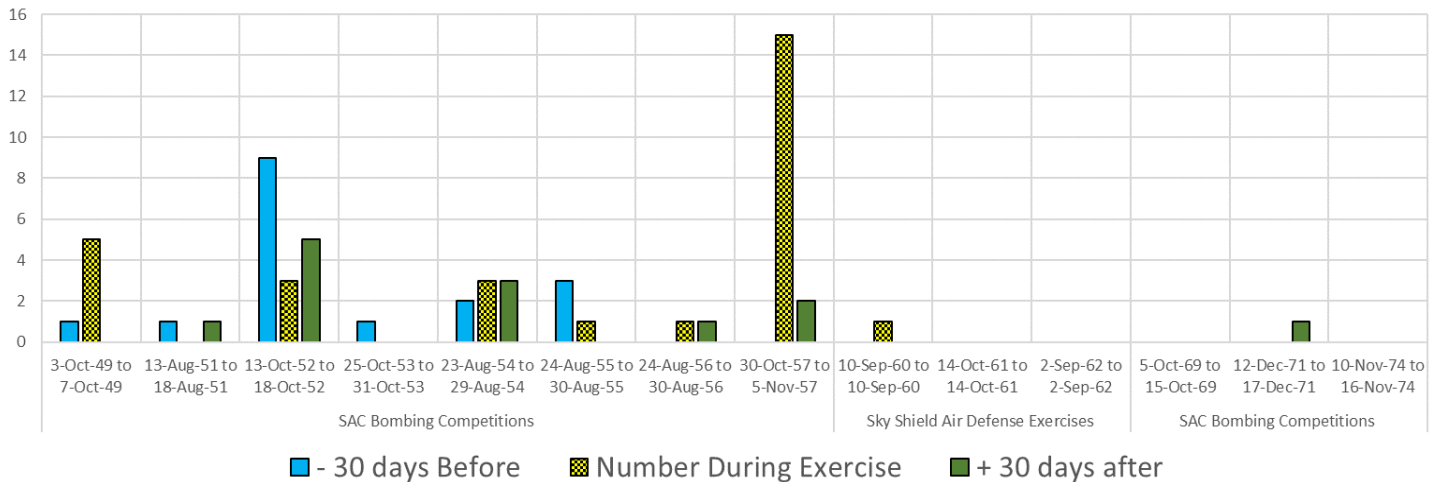


Figure 8. UAP Activity Associated with SAC & Continental Defense Exercises

To determine if there was an increase UAP activity related to the major SAC exercises, two approaches were used:

- Determine if there was a general increase in UAP activity at the time of the exercise; a comparison of UAP activity in the US during the exercise period was compared to the same period 30 days prior and the same period 30 days after the defense exercise.
- Determine if the UAP reports were directly related to the exercise; each report was reviewed to determine if the sighting could be directly linked to the defense exercise itself, either by location or by observation during the exercise by defense exercise participants/bases.

3.15.1 UAP incidents associated with atomic bomber alert missions

Assessment: Negative (Very Strong)

An estimated 6,000 bomber alert missions were flown as part of the SAC Head Start, Round Robin, and Chrome Dome programs, during the study period. A force of a dozen atomic bombers was aloft on alert 24 hours a day from 1958 into the early 1970s. (SAC Alert Program), (Airborne Alert Program). A limited number of encounters occurred between airborne SAC bombers and UAPs, half of them occurring before the alert bomber mission program was instituted. There was insufficient evidence to indicate anomalous activity focused on SAC bomber alert missions.

Incident Examples

May 1, 1952, at Davis Monthan AFB in Arizona, two objects approached from the rear, and overtook a bomber. They then moved to a position directly beside the aircraft and paced it in flight. The objects flew in formation with the aircraft for some twenty seconds, then sharply executed an 80-degree turn from its line of flight. They retreated some distance at which one stopped and hovered for some five minutes before departing (Hynek, 1997).

Sept 3, 1954, Carswell AFB, a B-47 was paced by a missile-shaped object for over one hour. No more than a hundred feet above them, the object alternatively paced and circled the bomber, and at times performed radical maneuvers. Ultimately it made a high-speed ascent and disappeared. Reportedly personal photos of the craft were confiscated upon landing and the bomber crew was not requested to file a standard report (Clark, 2003).

3.15.2 UAP incidents associated with atomic bombing exercises

Assessment: Negative (Very Strong)

3.15.3 UAP activity associated with continental air defense exercises

Assessment: Negative (Very Strong)

3.16 UAP activities associated with mobile atomic weapons platforms (submarines and aircraft carriers)

Assessment: No Data / No Assessment

3.17 Testing radar detection capabilities, false IFF and jamming

Assessment: Moderate Support

3.17.1 UAP encounters suggesting testing of aircraft capabilities (speed/maneuverability)

Assessment: Very Strong Support

Incident Examples – Speed/Maneuverability

December 4, 1949, Hammond, Louisiana, two USAF pilots and an engineer saw a bright silver sphere the size of a fighter approach their plane head-on, execute a turn, and take a station-keeping position with the aircraft. The sphere then made sudden starts and stops, maneuvering in all directions, and finally flew directly across the nose of the aircraft, departing at very high speed (Sparks, 2020/310).

July 9, 1951, an F-51 fighter pilot observed an oval disc about twice the size of his plane come out of the sun towards him, apparently flying at high speed in a head-on approach. At the last moment the object lowered its altitude and flew underneath the aircraft – then turned to pursue the fighter, positioning itself to the front again – and made a second head-on dive. That same maneuver was repeated several times until the object finally broke off and climbed out of sight (Sparks, 2020/458).

3.17.2 UAP activity suggesting of false duplication of IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) radar responses to air defense radar facilities

Assessment: Moderate Support

Incident Examples – Coded Radar Transmissions/IFF

July 16-18, 1957, an Air Defense radar station outside Las Vegas, Nevada (Mount Lemmon) tracked an extremely high-speed unidentified target (estimated at 6,200 mph) for a very short time before it became stationary. The UFO remained airborne and stationary for over 32 minutes, apparently hovering at 42,000 feet altitude. The target then departed at a

similar and possibly faster speed, until it disappeared beyond radar range. During the time in which it was acquired by the search radar, it appeared to respond to an encrypted military IFF transponder signal. The UAP was sent a command to identify itself from the air defense site. In turn, the UAP sent back coded elements of an appropriate IFF response. A similar incident had been reported two days earlier by the same crew at the radar site; the incidents of those two days were unique with no similar report either before or afterward (Sparks, 2020/1237; NICAP 57071; Hynek, 1972).

Nov. 24, 1964. Caribbean NE of Puerto Rico. 8:55 a.m. (EST). US Navy Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range (AFWR) radar tracking of unidentified object emitting encrypted IFF Mode 1 transponder signals. DF-8 fighter at Mach 0.99 (650 mph) at 45,000 feet vectored for intercept but object accelerated and flew upwards beyond the fighter's ability to follow (Sparks, 2020/1592).

3.17.3 UAP incidents suggestive of jamming or other types of electronic interference with military aircraft radar systems

Assessment: Moderate Support

Incident Examples

Sept. 17, 1951. Hudson Strait to Baffin Island, Canada. A USAF B-36 radar operator picked up radar interference which came from an unidentified aircraft seen visually on the right side of the B-36 at 18,000. The object had “unconventional running lights” all white instead of red-green, with twin white flashing tail lights, traveling about 30 knots faster than the B-36, crossed the front from right to left heading and was in view about 20 minutes. While the object was still visible, at 11:50 p.m. the B-36 autopilot and APQ-24 radar set went out, the latter returning after a few minutes about when the object disappeared (Sparks, 2020/474).

March 25, 1959. S Saskatchewan-N Montana. F-89 intercept of a radar-emitting UAP tailing B-52 at 375 knots (432 mph). Radar transmissions were then detected coming from the object, which continued to trail the bomber into Montana and the US Air Defense Identification Zone. An F-89 interceptor was dispatched and approached the UAP, at which point the object accelerated away and flew beyond engagement by the aircraft (Sparks, 2020/1371).

3.18 Detection and tracking capabilities reconnaissance (visual and radar)

Assessment: Moderate Support

Military reconnaissance is characterized as the focused observation of military assets to ascertain its defensive/offensive capabilities. The detection and tracking of unidentified aerial objects passing over or penetrating security zones associated with military bases, weapons testing installations or a particular type of weapons system would be considered an indication of reconnaissance. Such activities would often prompt radar tracking or the dispatch of interceptor aircraft in response to the presence of UAP. The immediate reaction of UAP to detection and tracking also suggest an initial intention of reconnaissance.

Incident Examples

Aug. 30, 1950. Holloman AFB, Alamogordo, New Mexico. 10:45 a.m. During a Bell Aircraft MX-776 Shrike missile test at White Sands Proving Ground (for the later Rascal air-to-ground strategic missile) USAF M/Sgt and 8 Bell Aircraft employees on base saw two glaringly bright circular to elliptical unidentified objects maintaining relative position to each other following the B-50 launch aircraft from above on both the dry run and hot run prior to missile release. Objects gave “strong glare at all times” not reflected sunlight, maneuvered at high estimated speeds up to 10x the B-50 aircraft speed – estimated as roughly 2,500 mph for short distances, left no vapor trails, hovered, accelerated rapidly, made abrupt “square” turns with apparent size changing to indicate ascent and descent (Sparks 400).

Oct. 7, 1956. Castle AFB area, Calif. 10:45 p.m. (PST). 2-3 USAF F-86D pilots, Lt Jerry Owen Robinett, Lt Alvin A. Akins, and possibly Lt. Donata Correa, Intelligence Officer, from 456th FIS, Castle AFB, were scrambled or redirected already in air about 11:10 p.m. to intercept a UFO reported by ground witnesses. Football-shaped or dome-shaped UFO estimated at 100-120 feet diameter and 50-60 feet high, dipped up and down vertically into an overcast cloud bank layer at 11,000 to 21,000 feet, playing “cat and mouse” with F-86 pilots stationed above and below cloud layer to catch the object. Akins got brief airborne radar contacts that immediately terminated as if the UFO was monitoring the radar beam (by ELINT) (Sparks, 1207).

3.19 Clandestine UAP Activity

Assessment: Moderate Support

During the study period, UAP reports associated with atomic weapons development and deployment sites shifted from being primarily daylight observations to nighttime reports. Nearly all UAP reports at the initial Atlas, Titan, and Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile sites occurred at night, even during the earliest stages of construction. In several instances, at both Strategic Air Command airbases and in the vicinity of ICBM silos, the UAP were directly over atomic weapons storage bunkers or over armed, megaton-class ballistic missiles. They were observed and reported for periods ranging from five to ten minutes to an hour. The UAP often hovered in stationary positions and at other times descended to low altitudes or even ground level. While the low-altitude activities did take them under radar surveillance, the objects usually displayed bright lights, which drew the attention of personnel at the sites, ranging from construction workers to armed security personnel. While such actions occurred at night, limiting physical descriptions, and preventing photography, witnesses universally commented on their anomalous performance and rejected conventional explanations such as private helicopters or off-course aircraft activity.

Incident Examples

October 24, 1968, Minot AFB, North Dakota. Multiple radar tracks were observed, approaching both the base and an incoming B-52 aircraft. Security personnel reported an unidentified object landing and continued to observe it for some 45 minutes. Additional UAP reports were made from several sites of the 91st Strategic Missile Wing. In addition, a variety of anomalous electromagnetic effects were registered on radio and radar and security alarms were activated at outer and inner rings around silos. Official reports state that the outer [silo?] door of one location had been opened, and the combination lock of the inner door moved (NICAP).

October 27-31, 1975, Loring AFB in Maine reported an incursion with a UAP entering a high-security zone within 300 yards of the atomic weapons storage area. Similar reports from Loring throughout October became part of what was known as the “northern tier UFO wave” and are documented in several NORAD and NMCC internal communications. In October 1975 in October Wurtsmith AFB in Michigan reported a base incursion with a UAP approaching and hovering over the weapons storage area. A series of UAP incidents were reported to NORAD, the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon, the Air Force Chief of Staff, and Strategic Air Command headquarters. In response

a Security Option 3 message was sent to all SAC installations across the northern border – Pease, Plattsburg, Wurtsmith, Kinchloe, Sawyer, Grand Forks, Minot, Malmstrom, Fairchild, and even Barksdale AFB in Louisiana (Fawcett and Greenwood, 1984).

3.20 Overt UAP activity

Assessment: Moderate Support

Incident Examples

On July 3, 1947, Navy petty officers observed a formation of three discs in a triangular formation circle the San Diego Navy Yard before heading back out over the ocean (NICAP).

On July 29, 1947, Hamilton Air Base personnel observed two rounded objects fly at low altitude over the base runway. On August 28, an intelligence officer at Rapid City Air Base observed a group of 12 discs fly in information, over the base runway (Sparks, 2020/42).

3.21 Direct engagement with military involving substantial risk or sustained damage, personal injury or death

Assessment: Negative (Moderate)

There are several incidents where UAPs engaged military interceptors, to the extent that the pilots perceived themselves as being under attack. In some cases, interceptors were lost in the process of being scrambled to intercept and engage “unknowns.” Orders were even issued to fire on unidentified objects – but those orders applied to any unidentified aircraft in the air defense zone that refused to communicate or respond to instructions to descend and land. In June of 1952, there were 100 aircraft accidents with 36 aircraft destroyed and 21 fatalities. In July of 1952 (peak of UAP reports), there were 135 accidents, 58 aircraft destroyed, and 30 fatalities (those figures included losses in Korea where combat in the Korean conflict was still in progress) (US Air Force Aircraft Accidents, 1952).

Despite these incidents, the United States Air Force consistently noted that it had been unable to determine a hostile intention as related to any of the reports, and determined the incidents to be accidents. All-weather, night-time interceptors had just come into general service and a great many of the incidents occurred either at night or under extremely demanding weather conditions – or both.

Unknown electrical and electromagnetic emissions reportedly associated with UAPs, have been reported to affect aircraft guidance and electrical systems. Such effects, possibly caused by proximity to a UAP, may have led to accidents but cannot be proven to have been either directed or intentional.

4. Conclusions

A set of 31 indicators was associated with possible intentions for the observed patterns of behavior found in UAP activities. Following a review of likelihood assessments for the listed indicators, the scenarios were ranked. These rankings were driven by the combination of indicators for each scenario, as well as the significance of indicators within the indicator set. Based on the frequency, type, and pattern of UAP activity, our assessment ranked the likelihood of each scenario as follows:

1. Focused Survey of Atomic Weapons / Warfighting Capability - Strong support (**Most Likely**)
2. General Military Survey - Moderate support (**Possible**)
3. Atomic Warfare Prevention/Preemption - Some Support (**Less likely**)
4. Military Aggression – Low Support (**Least likely**)

4.1 Atomic Weapons Survey

Rank number 1 – Strong Support

UAP activity patterns associated with a broad sampling of sites where atomic weapons were developed and deployed was compared to activity reported from conventional military facilities and bases. The comparison indicates a higher incidence of activity at atomic weapons bases. However, the levels and concentration of incidents at atomic development facilities as well as weapons deployment bases are clearly time delimited, with UAP activity decreasing substantially following the earliest years of the study period. The fact that anomalous levels of UAP activity are not ongoing at either the weapons development or deployment sites suggests a survey as compared to the other scenarios.

The most significant levels of anomalous UAP activity appear to be strictly related to the core facilities of the atomic warfare complex – weapons grade reductive production, atomic weapons assembly, and with the production and storage of atomic weapons during the years from 1945 to 1952. Notably, the first facilities in each phase clearly reported a level of UAP activity quite different from the last facilities to

be established in that class of atomic facility. These differences are seen in reports from the Hanford and Oak Ridge sites as compared to the Savannah River site, which went into operation several years later. It is also seen in the incidence of reports at the Los Alamos and Sandia weapons assembly facilities when compared to the Pantex installation which followed them some years later.

The most significant window of UAP activity occurred during the years 1948 to 1951 as numbers of first fission (nuclear) and then fusion (thermonuclear) weapons were developed and produced in quantities sufficient for stockpiling. Again, the notably higher levels of activities at the earliest facilities (as compared to facilities becoming operational in later years) suggest a time-delimited survey.

While there is no specific explanation for the very early activity at the Hanford site (which began as the facility was under construction), it should be noted that one well-established technique for identifying atomic weapons development facilities involves profiling specific physical and security characteristics which allow their identification. Those characteristics include large-scale power requirements at isolated locations, large water supplies, and extensive construction of special facilities for radioactive materials transportation and disposal (including large numbers of waste tank structures). The Hanford site would be especially visible in such surveys due to its location on the Columbia River in a flat, strictly agricultural area of Washington state; however, there was insufficient data to identify any significant UAP activity related to airborne isotope/particulate collection.

All weapons development facilities showed the same overall diminishment and virtual cessation of activity following a national surge of UAP reports in 1952. The anomalous patterns during the years prior to 1952 was never repeated, despite the surge in air defense radar and interceptor deployment of the 1950s and 1960s. Activity at the atomic study sites almost completely ceased over time, while overall UAP reporting across the United States continued through the end of the study period circa 1975.

The highest degree of anomalous activity was at the earliest developmental sites (Hanford, Oak Ridge, Los Alamos, and Sandia Base / Kirtland AFB), while facilities developed later such as Savannah River and Pantex show no comparable bursts of activity. Killeen base (one of the five national atomic weapons stockpile sites) showed an elevated number of UAP incidents during this pre-1952 window, while the other four sites did not. The paucity of data with respect to the early atomic weapons stockpile locations may

be a result of an absence of UAP reporting protocols for the Atomic Energy Commission personnel in charge of those locations. The reports from the Killeen base primarily come from the Army installation (Fort Hood) which was co-located with the weapons stockpile facility.

As a corollary to what appears as a “window” of early UAP activity at the first atomic weapons facilities, the study found a significant and comparable level of UAP activity associated with the earliest missile/rocket testing site, at the White Sands test range (1949 and 1950). This peak directly corresponds to the elevated level of UAP activity at the core atomic warfare complex.

Pattern study of the ongoing missile development as well as manned space launches revealed no comparable UAP activity patterns. The early focus on missile and rocket development suggests not only a survey scenario, but one focused on both the development of strategic (atomic) weapons of mass destruction and the capability of using them in global warfare. The most significant incidents were directly associated with Strategic Air Command aircraft carrying thermonuclear weapons on alert missions and with intrusions at both SAC bomber and missile bases.

Based on the frequency, type, and pattern of UAP activity for this study, a Focused Atomic Weapons/Warfighting Capability Survey was determined to be the most likely scenario.

4.2 General Military Survey

Ranked number 2 - Moderate support

An evaluation of patterns, as well as specific types of indicators for atomic weapons sites as compared to conventional (non-atomic) military installations, was conducted to determine whether there was any distinction between the two categories of facilities. While there is support for a general military survey, it was time-delimited and demonstrated a particular focus on atomic warfare capabilities. Indications of broad, continental-wide UAP activity did occur – particularly in 1952/53 but were not repeated over time. In contrast, the anomalous UAP activity focused on atomic weapons deployment was recurring, notably regarding the deployment of new and more capable generations of thermonuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles.

An examination of incidents of what appears as “engagement” with military interceptors shows them

occurring in the vicinity of atomic weapons installations as well as generally over the continental United States - with some relative focus over the strategic Northeastern Corridor as well as over the upper Midwest. Specific incidents occurred over atomic development facilities, at least one atomic stockpile site, and several strategic weapons deployment installations. Yet the study found no comparable patterns or series of incidents of that nature directly related to conventional military bases.

While speculative, UAP incidents from the highly anomalous UAP activity of 1952 did stimulate an exceptional amount of air defense activity, with much of it concentrated over the Northeastern Corridor which contains major metropolitan centers, some of the largest clusters of major Army and Navy logistics bases, and the nation's capital in Washington DC. While this would support the scenario of a general military survey, it was essentially a one-time event and in comparison, no similar levels of UAP activity were reported even during a series of massive continental-wide air defense exercises (involving thousands of aircraft simulating attack and defense of targets across the United States) which were conducted in the early 1960s.

Another point of contrast between focused atomic weapons survey – as compared to a general military survey – is the repetitive pattern of anomalous UAP activity associated with the deployment of new generations of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Those incidents include both low altitude and ground level intrusions into secured bases and even more highly secured atomic weapons storage bunkers and even missile silos. The types of incidents reported from conventional military was notably different, largely consisting of higher altitude overflights by rapidly traveling UAPs. Those reports are not at all comparable to the low altitude and ground level incidents reported from atomic stockpile and atomic weapons deployment bases. There are no similar security reports of such intrusions at conventional military bases, nothing like the multiple incidents at Strategic Air Command bases. Incidents which were serious enough to result in alert messages to the North American Defense Command and the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon.

Based on the frequency, pattern, and sequencing of UAP activity, it appears that surveillance has been conducted at general military bases to a lesser degree than facilities associated with the atomic warfare complex.

4.3 Atomic Warfare Prevention

Ranked number 3 - Some Support

This study does reveal a limited number of incidents of UAP activity associated with violations of physical security related to strategic atomic weapons deployment, as well as directed engagements with missile launch systems and military aircraft. There were also incidents of electrical and/or electromagnetic interference with both atomic bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles. While the reported incidents are themselves well documented and credible, the few that are on record are spread out over the full period of the study and exhibit no continual pattern of activity. They are observed to occur in “bursts” over relatively short periods of time, with one possible interpretation being the testing of UAP capabilities for interfering with new weapons delivery systems.

One particular series of incidents suggesting possible testing of preemption capabilities involved a series of UAP radar transmissions directed at both SAC aircraft and air defense facilities, occurring during a single week in 1957. Another short burst of incidents took place over five separate days in June 1955, where radar transmissions from UAP repeatedly jammed SAC aircraft. Short bursts of UAP intrusions at ICBM bases occurred during August 1965, with four major bases in multiple states reporting incidents at several individual missile silos. Security personnel reported radio interference which was so intense across such a broad spectrum of frequencies that intentional jamming of command-and-control capabilities was suspected by all involved. While these type of actions could be assessed as a demonstration of the ability to interfere with atomic bombers or with ballistic missiles, there are alternative interpretations, including possible messaging.

The possibility that such incidents were some type of attempted communications has to be considered, along with the fact that other UAP incidents present evidence that the objects are able to intelligently respond to encrypted interrogation requests from aircraft, ship and air defense installations with recognizable (and encrypted) Identified Friend or Foe (IFF) detection. The issue with interpreting these types of incidents as indicative of preparation for actual intervention to preempt strategic atomic warfare, or to neutralize missile launched atomic weapons is that it is simply not possible to determine whether the effects reported suggest intentional compromise of the weapons systems or are the result of close proximity to UAP energy systems.

While the incidents of interference with strategic bombers and missiles is suggestive, they are limited in number and appear to have been more in the nature of “sampling” of such weapons and their defenses. That sort of sampling activity, especially when repeated over time and with different types of weapons systems is more suggestive of a survey than prevention of atomic warfare.

Although some of these incidents may represent attempts to disrupt or prevent functional operations for atomic weapons delivery, our data indicates Atomic Warfare Prevention to a lesser degree than a General Military Survey, specific to the period of this study.

4.4 Military Aggression

Ranked number 4 - Low Support

Despite incidents of temporary disruption of Strategic Command Alert aircraft missions and of ICBM missile operations, atomic weapons deployments continued over the duration of this study, without any incidents related to actual aggression against the weapons themselves. There were also no instances of widespread interference with military surveillance radar or with the suppression of interceptors to engage reported UAPs—instead there were numerous and ongoing reports of radars tracking UAPs and the dispatch of armed fighter aircraft to intercept the radar targets. The ongoing generation of radar tracking reports, combined with visual observations of UAPs both during daylight hours, and as well lighted objects in nighttime observations, argues against clandestine operations in UAP activity and would support relatively overt survey scenarios rather than the clandestine intelligence collections that would be associated with potential military aggression.

There are several reports in which UAP actions resulted in both civilian and military aircraft taking evasive maneuvers to avoid what were perceived to be approaches that would result in mid-air collisions. In certain instances, military pilots felt that UAPs were actively involved in what might be considered as military engagement—however, there were no instances in which weapons appear to have been used against the aircraft and while aircraft have experienced problems with electrical systems or communications, it is possible that those may have been effects of UAP propulsion or related technologies. Instances in which military aircraft have been lost while attempting to engage UAPs are inconclusive and appear to have involved unrelated effects ranging from

weather to lack of oxygen at high altitudes (Randle, 2014).

The other factor arguing against the scenario of military aggression is the lack of repetition of interference with weapons systems or in what could be ‘considered’ aggressive engagements with military aircraft. The great majority of such incidents occurred over specific periods of time and—as with the early atomic weapons production facilities—either were not repeated at all or repeated very selectively as new facilities and weapons systems were put into operation. Reports included for this study did not show ongoing, broad-based military intelligence collections throughout the study period, another point that supports the scenario of some type of survey rather than planning for military aggressive action.

While alternative intentions may be indicated in a wider timespan for UAP activity, the progressive and logical surveillance of the atomic weapons complex during the period of this study (1945-1975) indicates a focused survey of US atomic warfare operations.

5. Key Points

- The results of the SCU UAP Pattern Recognition Study 1945-1975 indicated an elevated level of UAP activity at military facilities—activity reflecting both intelligence and focus.
- Focused UAP activity was most noticeable at the earliest facilities of each type: materials production, weapons assembly, weapons stockpiling, and weapons deployment.
- Elevated UAP activity occurred during a “window” of time in which the first weapons production occurred (from 1948-1951), continued during the national spike in UAP reporting in 1952 and then dramatically decreased, never to repeat the “window” levels during the remainder of the study period.
- Similar “windows” of focused UAP activity were noted at the primary rocket and missile test center (White Sands) during this initial period, as well as with the deployment of each new generation of intercontinental ballistic missile.
- No comparable level of “window” activity is seen at the radioactive materials production and weapons assembly plants which came into service in later years – specifically at Savannah River and Pantex.
- Elevated activities were noted at ballistic missile sites—with the introduction of each new class of missile including the introduction of multiple reentry vehicle warheads on Minutemen III missiles (those warheads

significantly elevated the number of warheads delivered by a single missile launch).

- *Despite on-going incursions at American Atomic Warfare facilities, nuclear weapons development continued for the duration of the study, and rose to the capability of global planetary destruction.*

The intentions study model presented in this paper provides a structured methodology for the assessment of UAP intentions based on high quality UAP reports associated with the US military between 1945-1975. This paper applied the intention analysis model specifically to the domain of the US military; however, other areas of study such as biological, psychological, sociological and technological, may be examined utilizing the pattern recognition and indications analysis process, subject to available data. For each domain, a variety of scenarios may be evaluated for likelihood of intention, and thus improve our understanding of an advanced intelligence yet to be identified.

Data Repository

The 874 incidents used in the study necessary to reproduce these reported findings is available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7758498>

The full content of the SCU study was edited for this publication and can be found at: <https://explorescu.org/post/uap-indications-analysis-1945-1975-united-states-atomic-warfare-complex>

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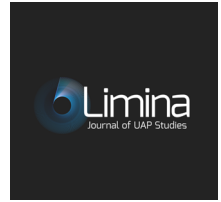
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How much time do we have before catastrophic disclosure occurs?

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ABSTRACT

Claims of the retrieval of crashed craft or vehicles from non-human intelligence(s) (NHI) abound in the popular culture and media. For this article, the number of unsubstantiated claims is utilized to estimate the time expected until a “catastrophic disclosure” occurs. The term was defined at the 2023 Sol Foundation’s inaugural conference as an accidental disclosure of strong evidence of the existence of NHI. The phrase refers to this occurring outside the control of major human institutions, such as governments and militaries. One possible example of this is the crash of a piloted (space)craft or ET probe in the middle of a busy metropolis (such as the city square, *e.g.*, New York City’s Times Square). The distribution of humans across the Earth’s surface, the population as a function of time, and the fraction of individuals owning a camera-phone, also versus time, are each taken into consideration as a foundation for a rigorous statistical analysis. This author adopts a skeptical and agnostic approach and does not conclude NHI or ET are real, but applies standard statistical distributions as educational examples of critical thinking to an issue which captures the imagination of the public as almost no other issue does. Making the extraordinary assumptions that sentient species other than humans exist, are capable of constructing vehicles for transportation, and are sufficiently fallible that their technology can malfunction, it becomes possible to quantify some potential answers to the question of how long it might be before smartphone imagery and/or video evidence appears on the web and becomes irrevocable via classification in the modern era. Results of simulations of numerous potential scenarios with varying degrees of optimism indicate that, if NHI are real, catastrophic disclosure may actually happen accidentally rather soon, with the mean expected year being 2040 ± 20 under the default assumptions.

1. Introduction, and literature review

The concept of the existence of conscious, sentient, and intelligent races of non-humans has captivated the collective imagination of humanity for at least a century, if not far longer (Thigpen, 2022). The issue of their exact nature(s), and the question of technological capability enabling visits to the Earth, are separable from the question of existence. UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects) and UAP (Unidentified Aerospace or Anomalous Phenomenon/a) are often conflated with the notion of spacecraft that are being piloted by NHI (non-human intelligence) including and especially ET (extra-terrestrials), in spite of these terms, especially the latter newer one, referring only to an unknown phenomenon, or phenomena, which may include anomalous atmospheric effects which are naturally occurring but are simply not yet understood (Szydagis et al., 2023). Such conflation happens for a good reason, however: the measured kinematics, specifically high velocities and accelerations, of at least some small fraction of observed, but non-identifiable, aircraft (Knuth et al., 2019). Since late 2017 especially, discussions about UFOs, as well as about aliens, have once again been thrust into the limelight, within the mainstream media (Cooper et al., 2017). 2023–2024 “whistleblower” claims served to reignite discussions. New and serious instrumented studies have appeared (Cloete et al., 2023; Szenher et al., 2023; Watters et al., 2023).

The ET hypothesis is arguably rational. Exploration of it can easily be justified by discoveries of many thousands of exoplanets, probably constituting only a small sample from billions or even trillions, with $O(10\%)$ potentially habitable according to an anthropocentric habitability criterion. That is based upon a host-star separation permitting the presence of liquid water, and oxygen in the atmosphere, thus not even counting life not-as-we-know-it, nor exo-moons (Gallet et al., 2017; Gonzalez, 2005; Kasting et al., 1993). A relatively recent example of discovery of multiple possibly human-habitable worlds, announced via a NASA press conference, is the TRAPPIST-1 planetary system (Gillon et al., 2017). They are a sample from an estimated 300 million (Bryson et al., 2020). While the relativistic time dilation and length contraction are known to work in favor of high-speed travelers, the problems of fuel and of propellant with sufficient thrust for long-term high acceleration, shielding against cosmic radiation and (fatally) Doppler blue-shifted starlight, and celestial navigation remain unresolved, at least

by contemporary human beings. A civilization comparable in age to the galaxy might become capable of overcoming all these engineering (not physical) difficulties involved, but that is purely optimistic speculation, with no complete explanation for a “hide and seek” type of behavior, so it is best to adopt a model-independent (non-Drake) approach to the question of NHI origin(s) and travel abilities.

As a result, this paper will make no assumption in that regard—NHI, if assumed to be real and able to reach Earth, may be traditional aliens, come from other dimensions or universes, or be intelligent lifeforms that co-evolved next to humans and are thus also native to Earth. Furthermore, we do not discount human explanations, *e.g.* time-travelers or present-day breakaway civilizations, nor the mundane explanations of many sightings. All of the quite wild hypotheses with no solid empirical evidence as yet for any of them are covered very well in other sources, such as (Sanderson and Childress, 2005) and (Puthoff, 2022). The only (extraordinary) assumptions being made for this research article are:

1. NHI (or, a very advanced yet unknown group of humans possessing extraordinary vehicles) actually exist.
2. Regardless of point of origin or motivations: they possess high-tech craft operating on or near Earth’s surface.
3. They possess some degree of fallibility, making accidents such as unplanned (*i.e.*, crash) landings realistic.

Given the 3 simple points above we can now ask the question of when good preliminary evidence would be captured by ordinary civilians, who have reported many thousands of strange sightings in the sky (Antonio et al., 2022). Our focus, however, will be on the catching of crashes with smartphone camera technology, through random chance, considering an additional, fourth assumption of an annual crash rate that can be grounded by a review of the literature regarding UFO crash claims. Though we failed to find any scholarly papers from (external and blind) peer-reviewed, high-impact researched-focused journals in the mainstream scientific community for this particular sub-topic (nor many on UFOs in general due to the enduring stigmas (Stahlman, 2024)), there is the initial effort of (Maristela, 2023). But the most useful resources for alleged crashes were: (Randle, 1995, 2010; Randle and Schmitt, 1994; Schmitt and Randle, 1991).

At the Sol Foundation symposium organized by Prof. Garry Nolan of Stanford and held on November 17–18,

2023, some (intelligence-community) speakers used the phrase “catastrophic disclosure” for the scenario where the military-industrial complex is not the player driving disclosure, but scientists, engineers, citizen-scientist researchers, and even ordinary citizens (with the unspoken postulate being that human governments know a great deal more than they are disclosing to date). Many of the Sol speakers claimed that in such a scenario the impacts upon our society (on politics, religion, etc.) of disclosure of the existence of NHI would be more catastrophic if compared to a slow, controlled, and planned version of it. This article will present skeptical but not debunking analyses. It should allow readers, including relevant politicians and lawmakers, to estimate when catastrophic disclosure could transpire on its own. On the other hand, it can serve to disprove the most extreme claims of crash rates, especially as time goes by without disclosure transpiring. The statistical methods employed here may be germane to setting upper limits on the rate of occurrence of many different kinds of “exotic” phenomena. The particular case of a publicly-confirmed crashed NHI craft would most likely constitute the single most important discovery in the history of science, if not all human history in general.

2. Methods

The mathematical formulae applied in the analyses presented herein, while findable in the code, are also summarized here, and demonstrated in Figure 1. They bear a marked similarity to those applied to camera captures of low-density wildlife (Loonam et al., 2021). First, the world’s population density profile probability density was empirically fit using:

$$\frac{-(x-\xi)^2}{e^{2 \times 1.711^2}} \left[1 + \operatorname{erf} \left(-2.4 \frac{x-\xi}{1.711\sqrt{2}} \right) \right]; \quad (1)$$

x is $\log_{10}(\text{density})$. $\xi = 1.5467 + 4.2773 \cdot 10^{-11}P$; P is overall pop.

$$P = 8.183 \cdot 10^9 e^{\frac{-(t-2049.1)^2}{2 \times 63.746^2}} + \frac{1.027 \cdot 10^{10} + \frac{2.96 \cdot 10^8 - 1.027 \cdot 10^{10}}{1 + \left(\frac{t}{2020.9} \right)^{56.388}}}{1.988}, \quad (2)$$

$$4.0181 \cdot 10^{11} - 4.7813 \cdot 10^8 t + 1.4014 \cdot 10^5 t^2,$$

with three P -increase scenarios indicated from left to right (low, moderate, and high) and t the time (in years). The base-10 log of the camera smartphone ownership fraction (dimensionless) vs. t was modeled as an asymptotic S-curve:

$$-0.26506 + \frac{-1.5883 + 0.26506}{1 + \left[\frac{(t-1999.5)}{12.387} \right]^{6.7706}} \quad (3)$$

where, e.g., -0.26506 means $10^{-0.26506} = 54.3\%$ phone ownership.

A radius R defined a circle (approximated as flat) on the surface of the Earth, within which at least one individual with a phone is located, based on a Poisson-varied number of people, based upon a mean density drawn from a skew-Gauss distribution (Equation 1). The default used was 0.150 km, or the Powell Radius, because of the crude approximation mentioned in (Powell, 2024) of 500 ft. for reliable eyewitness testimony (sans images), but for the sky, not the ground.

Not only the planetary population as a function of time, projected into the future based on UN projections (Raftery et al., 2014), but also the distribution of persons across the approximately 1.49×10^8 km² of land (Cohen and Small, 1998), were taken into consideration. An average person density is not used to represent the entire globe. This would be unrealistic for areas such as Antarctica at one extreme, and large, dense cities on the other (with New York city not even being the densest). No preference for visitation location was considered. The probability density function (PDF) for population density in units of people per km² was modeled as a skew-Gaussian function, skewed in favor of lower densities, and spanning 10^{-2} – 10^{+5} individuals/km². The PDF peaks at $\sim 10/\text{km}^2$, with an average of ≈ 30 – $60/\text{km}^2$, depending on the year being modeled. A robust density profile was required for this study, but the only scholarly one found was for 1998 (Cohen and Small, 1998). It was adjusted for later years by smoothly varying just the centroid of the skew-normal distribution to approximate new density distributions with time. This approximation, with all areas effectively going up in person density uniformly, was validated by integrating under the resulting curves and verifying that one recovers the correct total populations. Future work should account for the width and skew of the probability density changing over time as well, although adjusting these would be overkill for a zeroth-order analysis. (Note that, for reproducibility, all exact equations and numbers can be found in the downloadable C code.)

The fraction of people who own smartphones (with cameras) versus time was also necessary to model; however, for simplicity we ignored any bias toward greater ownership in higher-population-density areas, applying only a flat value. That said, a Poissonian distribution, the most common assumption in STEM for the modeling of rare events, was used to simulate local variation in density of phone owners, with a Poisson random number generator likewise implemented to simulate the number of events (on land) each year (2008 and later), with rate estimates discussed later used only to set the Poisson means. Even though the

Poisson function can be well approximated using a Gaussian or “normal” distribution (bell curve) at high rates, it has the advantages over that of producing only non-negative, integer values, and, because its mean and variance are equal, a separate value for width is unneeded, unlike with normal or log-normal functions, with the latter recommended by (Maccone, 2022) for simulating similar problems, but with a free-parameter variance. While the first “smartphone” was invented during the early 1990s (IBM), and the first camera-phones during the late 90s or in 2000, no year earlier than 2008 was considered in our analyses, a year after introduction of Apple’s iPhone, which led to a greater explosion in ownership, with competing companies also making phones with cameras.

To run Monte-Carlo simulations of random, smartphone-driven disclosure, three levels of close-by crash rates were taken as benchmarks constituting simplistic, order-of-magnitude, Fermi-problem-style estimates – 1, 10, and 100 per century. The lowest value essentially comes

from treating only the Roswell incident (Birnes and Corso, 2017; Randle and Schmitt, 1994; Schmitt and Randle, 1991) as a (potentially) real example of an NHI spacecraft crash, the sole one for the entire twentieth century, as suggested by K. Randle, who has stated that most other incidents were probably hoaxes and misidentifications. Our middle-of-the-road value of 10 stems from taking the claims of whistleblower David Grusch at face value (Kean and Blumenthal, 2023). The extremum of 100/century or 1/year originates from (Randle, 2010), which contains a list of 118, with most not NHI-related however, as already stated, thus making 100 not just the highest rate assumed within this work, but likely also the least realistic. That being said, (Wood, 2024) cites over 50 possibilities, using a rating scheme to judge the probabilities of their veracity, and Randle has written that lists of well over 300 alleged crashes exist. Therefore, 2 is a reasonable power of 10 for the upper end of our Fermi estimation.

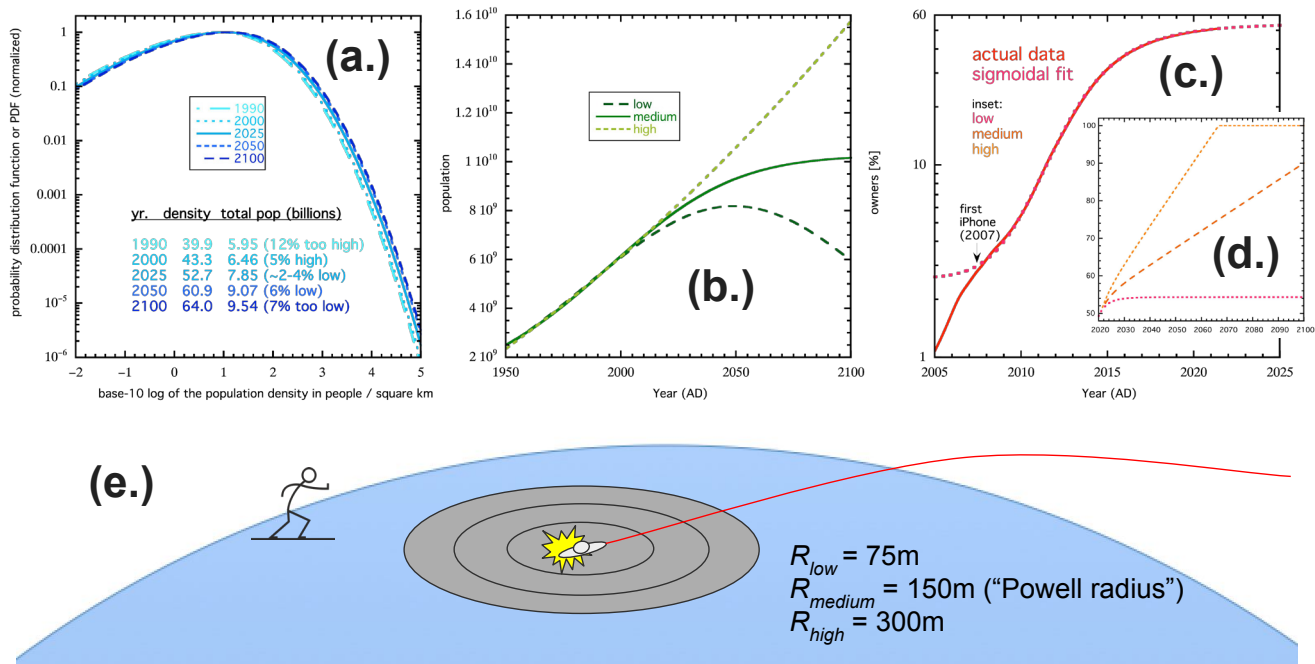


Figure 1. A summary of all of the numerical inputs to the results. (a.) An amplitude-normalized PDF for the population density at several example years. (When the PDF is normalized by area instead, its peak is at 1.56 not 1.00 on the y-axis.) Both plot axes are logarithmic. Because the x-axis is cut-off at -2, *i.e.* 0.01 people/km², there is a slight overestimate of total populations in the earliest years, although this is irrelevant since they are too early. A slight underestimate in later years was produced by cutting x off at +5, or 100,000 people/km², which exceeds Macao (in China) and Monaco’s present-day values, of about 20,000 people/km² (higher densities may be reasonable for the future, even if rare). (b.) The 3 United Nations projections applied to the non-normalized versions of the curves in the left graph, which uses only “medium” as an example, to set the proper totals. These correspond to the 3 formulae in Eqn. (2), a symmetric Gaussian (which unphysically collapses to 0 pop, but not for many centuries), an asymmetric sigmoid which asymptotes to just over 10 billion, and a quadratic polynomial, for the low, medium, and high cases, respectively. (c.) Actual data on smartphone ownership percentage as a solid red line (Sui *et al.*, 2021), with a symmetric-sigmoid curve fit to the log of the fraction in pink dots. When the data are plotted using a log-y scale, an inflection point which may be attributable to the introduction of the Apple iPhone is evident. Our sigmoidal fit unphysically asymptotes to 2.6% at left, but the fit is only applied to the post-2007 time period. (d.) The inset displays 3 possible futures: a value barely above 50% persists (pink dotted line again) and (linear) increases to 100% at 2 different slopes – a dark orange long-dashed line and light orange short-dashed line, the latter unrealistically reaching 100% in the late 2060s, but this is simply one, extremely optimistic, scenario, but justified based on publicly-claimed slopes (Jejdling, 2024; Laricchia, 2024) (e.) Differing radii used as low, medium, high scenarios to define minimum distances within which crashes are obvious and safely capturable. No thought is given to matters like object size or camera focal length, but a factor-2 uncertainty on radius should cover most such issues.

Other authors may consider different distributions like log-normal, but we start with Poisson here. The probability of 1 crash can be Taylor-expanded as r , but probability p^1 of k crashes in a given year is fully, correctly expressed as:

$$p = \frac{\langle r \rangle^k}{k!} e^{-\langle r \rangle} \quad (4)$$

where $\langle r \rangle$ is the expectation value for the annual crash rate, and $k = 0$ or a positive integer.

For instance, for the rate of 10/century or $\langle r \rangle = 0.1$ /year, the p of $k=0$ is highest, at 0.90 or 90%, with a 9.0% chance of $k=1$, and 0.45% for $k=2$, and so forth. The virtual dice can be re-rolled once a day, week, month, or year in code, by adjusting the units on r , with no substantive change in the ultimate results. We opted for the annual timeframe for computational speed, and performed 10^5 trials for each of our 18 ($3*3*2$) cases based on 3 possibility combinations (low, medium, high) from this section combined with 3 crash rates, and 2 different starting years, 2008 and 2024, for initializing the simulations. The large number of trials (10^5) ensured that statistical uncertainties would be negligible for our final results, dominated instead by the systematic uncertainties of our choices of the quantitative assumptions. A 2008 start was used to validate our work, checking the probabilities that disclosure should already have happened.

3. Results

The simulated year of an accidental disclosure of NHI existing is surprisingly soon for many combinations of inputs, or predicted to be a year from the past even, despite the decades-old prevalence of non-smartphone cameras, private satellite companies, and many other signal channels available to civilians all not having been taken into account: see Fig. 2. For pre-2024 results, we can use the strange outcome to rule out certain cases. 2011.4 ± 2.8 (mean plus/minus standard-deviation uncertainty σ) for violet implies that 1 crash/year paired with R_{low} is ruled out at a level of nearly 5σ . The green case (1 crash a year and R_{med} , the Powell Radius default) of 2013.7 ± 3.9 is nearly 3σ discrepant with our reality of non-disclosure. The expectation value for orange (1 crash/year and R_{high}) of 2017.9 ± 6.4 differs from 2024 by only $\approx 1\sigma$, so there is no tension with reality there. Remarkably,

the majority of the tested cases resulted in a 50% cumulative probability of catastrophic disclosure by 2050 AD. No distinction was made regarding air/space-craft with visually obvious “biologics” (Grusch) at UFO crash sites, versus the crashes of automated probes (or, some thing “in between” for which our human categories, like organic and living versus robotic, AI, and artificial, are inadequate).

We are, however, assuming for all of our simulation results that captured evidence is qualitatively conclusive, without attempting to quantify what is meant by “conclusive” evidence in terms of video and/or photographic quality, duration or number of pictures, etc. We also postulate that one eyewitness with a phone is sufficient, due to the fact that they can rapidly share data with friends and family via e-mail and by text attachments, and on public-facing video-sharing websites such as YouTube, TikTok, or Vimeo, before the military or other authorities can rush to the scene to remove all physical evidence, then classify the incident. (Such actions have naturally been alleged by UFO conspiracy theorists going back decades.) Furthermore, having one initial witness should be sufficient due to one’s ability to call to others in high-population-density areas and text friends within areas of any density (this criterion can be easily modified in the code, however, and the effect on the result explored). While humans have always been social creatures, there was no texting nor camera-phones in pockets in Roswell, NM in 1947, nor in Kecksburg, PA in 1965, for instance.

Figure 2 presents all the sim results, divided by annual probability and cumulative (integrated) probability vs. time, and also separated by start year, 2008 or 2024, with cases having the latter as the input essentially taking the current state of affairs (lack of proof on the web) as a (Bayesian) prior. In those latter situations, over-optimistic postulates can artificially generate enormous immediate peaks in probability, for 2024–2025. Using our “central” postulates, the predictions are 2038 ± 24 (2008 sim start) and 2049 ± 23 (2024 start) for the year of the initial but “incontrovertible” evidence being shared on the internet, assuming survival of strict checks of AI fakery. The errors (uncertainties) quoted here are non-Gaussian—they are simply raw standard deviations σ of asymmetric data. The mean expectations are not the same as the median, RMS (root-mean-square) or mode (peak in probability), with that last parameter having no value higher than 2068 even when others extend into the 22nd century, due *e.g.* to a global-population peak.

1 The very same form as Eqn. (4) can model the k people who see and successfully record an incident, replacing r with the mean number of people $N=10^{\alpha}\pi R^2$ multiplied by the camera-phone ownership fraction of Eqn. (3). (α is the log density, and $(\text{people}/\text{km}^2)\times\text{km}^2=\text{people}$)

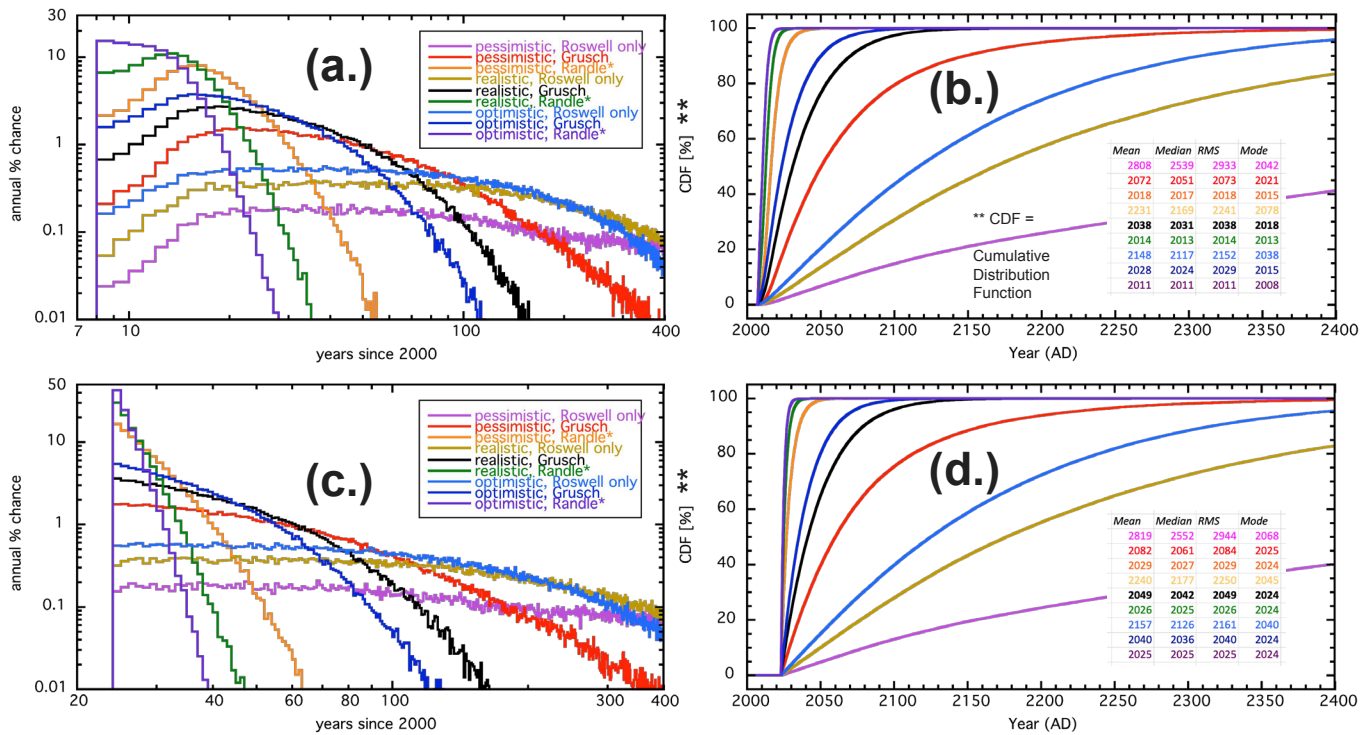


Figure 2. Odds of catastrophic disclosure by year at left (a,c) on log axes, and summed at right (b,d), beginning in 2008 (a,b), and 2024 (c,d). Pessimistic refers to all inputs “low” (Fig. 1), realistic medium, optimistic high. Roswell means 0.01 crash/year, Grusch 0.1/yr, and Randle 1, but * indicates Randle thinks that is far too high. Some statistics are tabulated at the right.

4. Discussion and conclusion

If NHI are real then the correct question to ask is not IF disclosure can be forced, but WHEN. Figure 2 right shows the probability always asymptoting to 100% eventually – when inputting the defaults, the chances (black curves) are 14–42% by 2027 and 39–59% by 2036. (Two values are quoted for each example year because of the differing beginning years.) This is because of the remarkable interconnectedness of the modern world, with cellular phones in individuals’ pockets and bags nearly everywhere, even in developing nations, even when one makes the conservative claim of only a fixed 54% maximum for the percentage of human beings utilizing camera-enabled smartphones. We have not accounted for people who have multiple phones and subscriptions, but this could be the cause of the significant tensions between the sources we cited earlier (~50 as opposed to about 75%). Because of the contradictions, it is important that distinct scenarios were studied. A further refinement to our study which readers can implement on their own, as the code has been provided with the paper, is the mixture of low, medium, and high inputs in place of an artificial correlation. It was done here for simplicity. Future work building on this paper

by this author and/or others could also account for daylight versus night-time hours, terrain type, attention spans, and other such factors (Medina et al., 2023), but these analyses presented here are a first stab in the literature as far as the author knows, in terms of a journal publication.

An unspoken assumption baked into every analysis within this manuscript is that we are referring to unmistakable, clear photos of crashes on land only, potentially less ephemeral than UAP in the sky, including if not especially over water (Dennett, 2018; Sanderson and Childress, 2005). The land accounts for only 29.2% of the surface area of Earth. Therefore, $\langle r \rangle = 0.1/\text{year}$ (our middle-benchmark crash rate) becomes $> 0.3/\text{year}$ for the entire globe, with $> 0.2/\text{year}$ for only the water-covered regions. If one equates all NHI with aliens and takes the estimated time frame of the first discovery of Earth by one space-faring race capable of interstellar travel as ~1 million years ago (Knuth, 2024), then this implies over 200,000 defunct (extraterrestrial) vessels sitting on the bottom of oceans, lakes, and rivers—if there was no change in technology over time. This is a surprising number motivating further searches like that described in (Loeb et al., 2024), and this could even be an underestimate: one species may inform others of Earth and humanity’s presence and progress,

possibly leading to a time-dependent r -value (increasing?) driven by others' scientific curiosity.

Although this work may read as if it is a warning to government officials with solid knowledge of some NHI (again— should they really exist) that their time grows short to maintain full control of the narrative, it should not just sound alarm bells. The mathematics is neutral, in the sense that one could also capitalize on the procedures contained here to debunk NHI and UAP crash retrieval claims, as more years without disclosure pass by. The statistical techniques employed in this article can and should also be applied to cryptids, orbs, Earth lights, ball lightning, and any sort of “paranormal” claim that presently can boast of no proof that has convinced the majority of the scientific community, nor the public at large. Using the dark matter as an example, a mainstream scientific topic with an enormous number of indirect *i.e.* observational clues coming from cosmology and astrophysics, but no conclusive, direct evidence in the laboratory as yet, we note one can set limits on the probability of the interaction of new particles with normal matter composed of atoms (Aalbers et al., 2023). A scientist can set a limit on the rate of occurrence of any rare phenomenon with similar techniques, but without necessarily ruling it out completely. Not all exotic claims are false, as our history has repeatedly shown (atoms, germs, continental drift, meteors, air/space flight, nuclear power/bombs, relativity,...)

That being said, it would be a mistake to state that all initially “crazy” ideas have eventually been proven correct in the history of science, as such a claim would be far from accurate. However, subjective experiences do not constitute unambiguous final evidence in the physical sciences, making the raw data sets of well-calibrated scientific instruments absolutely critical to possess, not just information from the “human sensor,” witnesses with potentially faulty memories (adequate for legal systems and useful in the humanities and the social sciences, but insufficient in a physical science).

A central argument herein is that a phone may generate adequate evidence of an anomaly. Yet it is not a scientific instrument, so that is a major weakness we recognize in our own argument. While evidence from a single camera may convince the general public, it is not likely to convince most academics who continue to be unmoved by the existent plethora of UAP imagery. Having a video instead of photo(s) of a nearby crash on the ground, with a witness moving around and achieving different viewing angles, minimizes the possibility of an AI-generated hoax as a solution at the very least, especially if signs with letters and human fingers are

also seen in the background (Mirjalili, 2023).

Moreover, a smartphone camera can collect what Prof. Garry Nolan referred to at the Sol Foundation 2023 inaugural meeting as “pre-data,” a step above anecdotal non-data at least, which can still be used for corroborating scientific data, and justify choices of sensors. But, without funding and publications in mainstream journals, progress will still be difficult. A “smoking gun” phone video could precipitate increases in both of those, but would probably not be a substitute for the study of crash parts in person, to look for evidence of NHI technology, such as advanced unknown alloys, or isotopic concentrations inconsistent with our solar system (Nolan et al., 2022). The latter could be observed using mass spectrometry, or non-destructively with NAA (neutron activation analysis) (Laine et al., 2023). An initially agnostic approach to data-taking is good (Szydagis et al., 2023) but scientists must be allowed, sans fear of reputation loss, to entertain exotic hypotheses (like NHI), considering if data favor them or not (Villarroel and Krisciunas, 2024).

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APPENDIX A: Supporting Code

The C++ file `catDisc.cpp` is part of a paper download for the benefit of the technically-minded reader with knowledge of computer programming. It can, for instance, be easily compiled on Unix with the terminal command “`g++ -Ofast catDisc.cpp -o catDisc.out`” assuming one has the `g++` compiler installed (the `-Ofast` optimization flag is optional). The interested reader is referred to <https://arxiv.org/src/2410.12738> for relevant files.

APPENDIX B: Supporting Plots

This appendix contains an additional figure, to explore a more fine-grained variation of the crash rate, as opposed to just looking at three orders of magnitude, and of R .

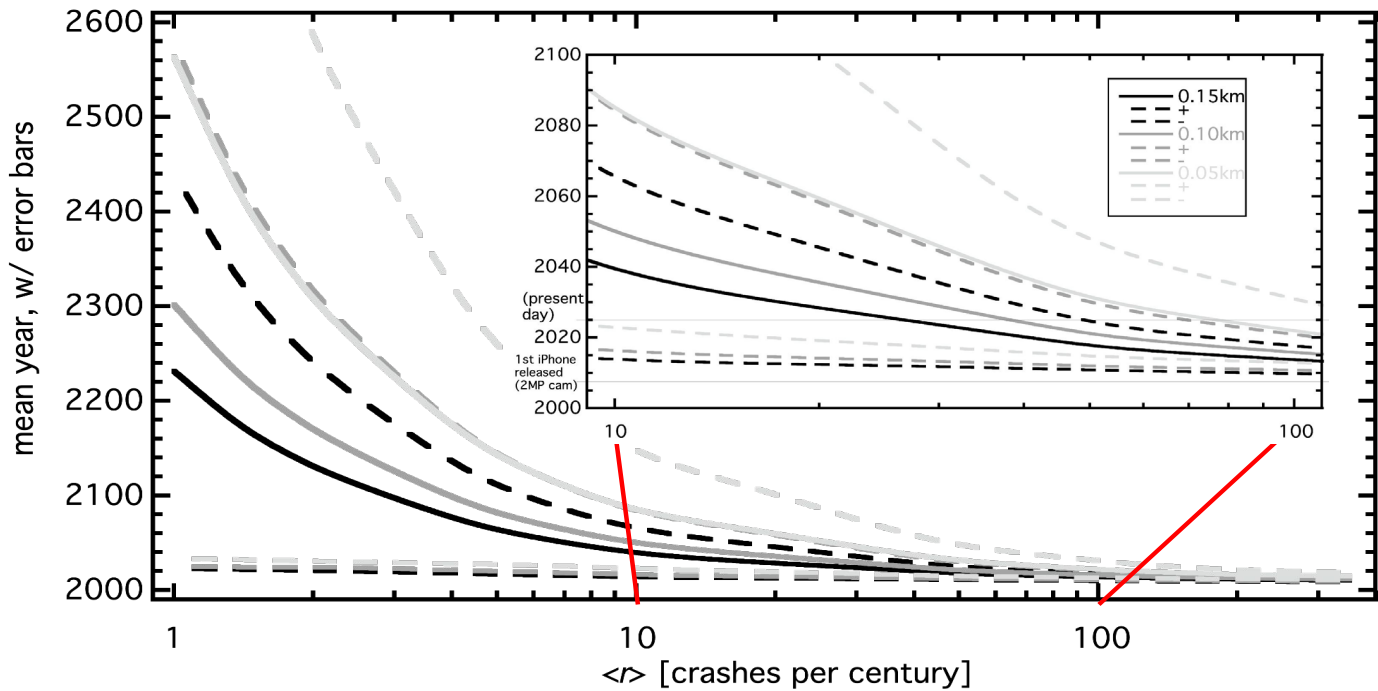


Figure 3. The year of accidental disclosure with uncertainty as a function of $\langle r \rangle$, with all other numerical assumptions held fixed, at their “medium” levels: for human population growth, smartphone penetration into the population, and visibility radius (in black: R is varied in gray). The inset is a zoom-in for 10–100 crashes/century. $r > 20$ is disfavored by sims at the Powell Radius (0.15 km). Discrete sim results are well fit continuously using $y = 2008 + m_1/r^{m_2} + m_3/r^{m_4}$, with both powers floating point. Smaller radii allow for the possibility of physical evidence retrieval by the crash witnesses, and may make hoaxing much harder, but the assumption of a single eyewitness was maintained: it is changeable to any number, however, in the code that is provided.

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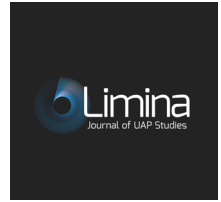
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Among the academic disciplines that have contributed to ufology / UAP studies over the years, philosophy can hardly be named a major player. Religious studies scholars, folklorists, and even pop culture specialists have been more prominent in their contributions to the humanities-oriented sectors of the field. The dearth of philosophical engagement with ufology is unfortunate, insofar as there are questions in the area which could benefit from the application of distinctively philosophical tools of inquiry. That fact is made clear in James Madden's thought-provoking and well-written new monograph.

Madden is probably best-known for his first book *Mind, Matter, and Nature: A Thomistic Proposal for the Philosophy of Mind* (CUA Press, 2013), which remains one of the better efforts at bridge-building between analytic philosophy of mind and Scholastic approaches to human nature. His new book is similarly eclectic and broad-minded, drawing on a deep knowledge both of historical sources (though Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Heidegger figure much more frequently in the present work than does Thomas Aquinas) and of more recent analytic and continental literatures. These are brought to bear on the questions of what we may be dealing with when it comes to UFOs, and of what our prospects may be for figuring that out.

Metaphysical and epistemological propositions are thus intertwined throughout, though the latter are especially central. That is evident from the opening lines of Madden's introductory chapter: "This book is mostly a cautionary tale, aimed in particular at counselling humility. The UFO stretches us to—and maybe even beyond—the limits of what humans can understand. Thus, as we approach the Phenomenon, we should mistrust ourselves simultaneously as we try to make sense of it" (*UFH*, p. 6). His reasons for advocating epistemic humility are gradually laid out and will

be summarized below, but it is worth highlighting the fact that right from the start Madden is signalling that he views the UFO phenomenon as veridical—i.e., not all UFO encounters are the product of perceptual error, mental illness, or hoax. (Such prosaic factors hardly press up against the boundaries of human understanding.)

In a bit of intellectual autobiography, he states that he began engaging with the ufological literature only after the 2017 revelation in the mainstream media that the US government had been clandestinely engaging in UFO

research for years (despite continual public assertions to the contrary). That revelation, and subsequent events (such as the Pentagon briefing of June 2021), prompted him to look into the phenomenon more closely. In the course of doing so he drew conceptual connections to his other areas of expertise:

I was deeply moved first by how good the evidence really is for the UFO phenomenon. As someone trained in the philosophy of religion, I was struck, in particular, by the fact that the evidence for the reality of the UFO (whatever it is) *is at least* as good as the evidence supporting the founding miracles of the major religious traditions. Whatever you think about those particular claims, I don't believe they completely lack evidential support, i.e., the traditional miracle claims have enough going for themselves evidentially that they cannot be ruled out. If that is the case, then it seems like we can't rule out UFOs either—and given the continued frequency and quality of UFO reports there are very good grounds to rule them in (*UFH*, p. 7, emphases in original).

He prudently refrains from delving into those grounds here; such an effort would distract from his chief concerns (which are philosophical) and would anyway be redundant, as there is no shortage of accessible introductions along those lines available already. Thus, for any readers who remain agnostic as to the reality of the phenomenon, Madden's work is best engaged with as part of a conditional exercise: *if* the phenomenon were real, what would be the likely metaphysical and epistemological implications? Such an exercise is interesting on its own account, and retains value for the agnostic inquirer as well. (I.e., if some of those implications prove to be highly implausible, then that will itself be a further mark against the reality of the phenomenon.)

Working from the assumption of the existence of UFOs, it is easy to see how a philosopher might make productive interventions into ufology, for instance by assessing common ontological claims or critiquing methodological assumptions or otherwise engaging in the sorts of analysis typical of philosophical engagement with the special sciences. And that is certainly part of what Madden proceeds to do, as we shall see presently. However, he also thinks that ufology has something to contribute to philosophy; historically, one of the tasks assigned philosophers has been that of developing a rationally defensible worldview that synthesizes discoveries

from across the academic disciplines:

We have various disciplines...each of which makes discoveries within certain recesses of the world. Notice, however, the more the chemist, the religious studies scholar, and the historian start to ask what chemistry, religion, and history have to do with each other, the less they are thinking specifically as chemists, religious scholars, or historians....The idealized version of this thinking of all the disciplines together is philosophy. That is, the philosopher attempts to put all the pieces of our various modes of understanding into a coherent picture of the world (*UFH*, p. 10).

Any genuine insights of ufology ought ultimately to be integrated into that overarching, comprehensive worldview; indeed to ignore ufology would be to risk leaving out something significant, perhaps even a linchpin of a completed philosophical system: "I believe the time has come that academic philosophy cannot ignore that the UFO is a significant piece to the puzzle, and we will fail in our role as the synthesizer of the disciplines as long as we continue to set it aside" (*UFH*, p. 11). Thus the potential benefits of a philosophical engagement with ufology work both ways: ufology may come to a better understanding of the phenomenon (and of the limits to our understanding of it), while philosophy may make better progress towards a truly comprehensive worldview.

Having spent most of his introductory chapter explaining the reasons for his engagement with ufology, Madden proceeds in chapter 1 to develop further his argument on behalf of epistemic humility in the face of the phenomenon. Drawing on recent work in cognitive science and psychology, he discusses three sources of cognitive limitation that are especially salient in this context: *relevance sorting*, *social conformity*, and *techno-cognitive extension*. The first refers to the innate human tendency to concentrate our attention on those aspects of our environment that are most relevant to us, and by extension to filter out what isn't. E.g., when having coffee with a friend your cognitive apparatus automatically homes in on the conversation more than on the whirring of the ceiling fan, or the feel of the hardback chair on your spine, etc. We cannot be equally aware of all of those factors (and others) simultaneously, such that there are facts about the environment that necessarily tend to remain opaque to us. Relatedly, the very structure of our five senses functions as

part of that filtering process. Thus we cannot see microwave radiation, or smell what a cat smells, etc. As Madden puts it, “we have to have prior projects, commitments, emotional attachments, cultural framings, and biological grounding before we can have a coherent experience. All of these factors narrow down the myriad of possibilities for thought and experience into a package that we can work with” (*UFH*, p. 20). This limit is closely related to another notion Madden will put to work later on, namely that of the *umwelt* (i.e., the environmental factors to which an organism’s cognitive and perceptual faculties are sensitive—for instance the colour spectrum is part of the human *umwelt*, whereas microwave radiation is not). The second source of cognitive limitation, *social conformity*, is fairly self-explanatory: we humans are social beings and inevitably take many cues about what to believe (or even what to *see*) from our social context. This has its advantages, but can also be constraining. The third, *techno-cognitive extension*, refers to the way in which our cognition is bound up with our ability to manipulate our environment using social and material tools (whether language or notebooks or crowbars). Our ability to think about certain things (and not others) is facilitated by the technology at our disposal.

All three of those factors play a role both in enabling and in limiting our cognitive potential, but it is the latter which Madden emphasizes here. For who knows what we may fail to pick up on in consequence of these (and other) cognitive limitations, what larger or deeper realities we may be mostly cut off from simply because we didn’t evolve to pay attention to them? In reflecting further on that last question, Madden brings in the notion of the cave:

We might think of this in terms of a *cave* as a metaphor and play on the fact that it seems many of our ancestors spent some time dwelling in caves. In fact, in this metaphorical sense, we are all still *cave-dwellers*. Human cognition works by and through carving out caves of relevance, social organization, and technological operation. We mine caves for ourselves, and those are the spaces of meaning and rationality we need in order to survive. Of course, the cave is real, and what goes on in it is important. Nevertheless, the caves we make for ourselves are convenient selections, caricatures of the fullness of reality (*UFH*, p. 27, emphases in original).

Naturally this also calls to mind Plato’s allegory of

the cave, and Madden spends time reflecting on its many meanings. One aspect of the allegory he seizes upon is the fact that Plato’s underground prisoner is liberated and gets out into the light in large part because someone or something (Plato doesn’t tell us what) drags him to the surface; i.e., some agency outside his normal experience and ordinary cognition intervenes in order to liberate him and to reveal to him the vastly larger world outside the cave—or rather, reveal to him as much of that world as his bleary eyes, unused to sunshine, can take in.

How does all that link back up to UFOs? Madden’s larger suggestion is that if the phenomenon is indeed real and *isn’t* extraterrestrial (and he will shortly review some of the reasons for rejecting the ET hypothesis), then it may well be a breach into our ordinary reality of something wholly other, something our cognitive apparatus has not evolved to take in properly. This may explain why the phenomenon is so elusive, and its manifestations so various and often so utterly bizarre. Our minds aren’t equipped to absorb fully what is being encountered, and so the object of perception may be distorted, misinterpreted, or misremembered (or, for a time, not remembered at all). This may help to explain the puzzling fact (long a subject of speculation in the wider literature on religious and paranormal experiences) that in cases where anomalous events are undergone intersubjectively, the reported details can vary from one percipient to the next, and in ways not easily explicable by reference to ordinary perceptual factors. E.g., Sally and Bill and Kareem may be looking at the same patch of sky at the same time, and Sally and Kareem see the anomalous glowing orb while Bill sees nothing (or sees *something* but with much less detail/definition, or *sees* nothing but instead hears a voice, etc.). To Madden, these features of human interaction with the phenomenon indicate that we are probably dealing with something our minds did not evolve to engage with, and by extension that we are *not* dealing with a mundane physical reality (like nuts and bolts craft from another galaxy). He sums up a key takeaway:

If we are going to start on the path of making some sense of the UFO phenomenon (supposing that is a path we can even begin to travel), *we must discipline ourselves against being too quick to trust any of our intuitions about what we are encountering*. What we are getting from our attempts to describe these encounters are as much expressions of our own presuppositions, self-images, and human limitations (and likely manipulations of these human limitations by those

among us particularly interested in maintaining a nicely managed cave) as they are accurate depictions of what triggered the events. There may be no final and complete way of teasing out what in the experience is really there from what is the product of how we happen to think about things (*UFH*, p. 33, emphases in original).

The reader may at this point be wondering whether Madden intends to defend a wholly transcendent, supernatural account of the phenomenon (for instance that we are dealing with contemporary manifestations of angels and demons), but by way of dispelling that notion he devotes chapter 2 to outlining the foundations of an ontological middle ground, one on which the phenomenon is understood as neither mundane nor supernatural but rather (borrowing a label from Jeffrey Kripal and Whitley Strieber) as *super natural*. On this view, the UFO (or whatever is sourcing it) may be an *immanent* entity dwelling within (or perhaps helping to constitute) the natural realm, but which is nevertheless *supernormal*, having a mode of being and/or range of causal powers radically different from what we are familiar with from ordinary life. Here Madden draws on Aristotelian cosmology to provide a historical example of the sort of model he is referring to, insofar as Aristotle defends the reality of thoroughly immanent gods (i.e., imperceptible intelligent divinities that are not themselves strictly physical, but which exist within the physical cosmos and play key explanatory roles in its lawful ordering).

With the requisite conceptual groundwork now in place, chapter 3 is where Madden outlines in greater detail his own account of what the UFO phenomenon likely is (emphasis on the *likely*—he stresses that his arguments are probabilistic and that we must continually bear in mind our epistemic limitations). First he argues against the extraterrestrial hypothesis, drawing on Jacques Vallée’s well-known five-point critique. Madden devotes particular attention to a biological worry surrounding the ETH, namely that the humanoid physiology commonly reported in close encounters cases is difficult to credit if what is being encountered are literal space aliens: “[T]he notion of an entirely separate evolutionary process producing bipedal, forward looking, oxygen breathing, featherless, rational animals is so improbable as to strain credulity. Maybe there are as-yet unknown principles of evolution that pipeline things toward bipedal, featherless, and very smart animals....[B]ut I do worry that without some independent evidence for these claims we are coming close

to rendering the ETH unfalsifiable” (*UFH*, p. 53). Problems of this sort lead some to entertain what Madden terms the *ultraterrestrial hypothesis* (UTH)—actually more commonly known in ufology as the *cryptoterrestrial hypothesis*—namely the idea that UFOs are an advanced physical technology deployed by earthlings (whether strictly human or some sort of humanoid offshoot) who are members of a long-hidden breakaway civilization dwelling underground or in the oceans. That hypothesis might help account for the biological convergences, but it raises many unanswered questions of its own (like how or why these alternative earthlings have remained hidden for so long, why they are acting as they are today, etc.). And the more bizarre aspects of ufology (so-called ‘high strangeness’ events) may also be a poor fit with this hypothesis. Having already dismissed conventional supernatural explanations (e.g., positing angelic/demonic origins for UFOs), Madden then proposes the *Uber-Umwelt Terrestrial Hypothesis* (UUTH), the key claim of which is that “we are bumping into something real and *sui generis* with respect to our other ontological categories when we encounter the phenomenon—the UFO is something from outside our cave” (*UFH*, pp. 54-55). In other words, the phenomenon is not transcendent in the physical sense of ‘transcendence’ (again, it is in some way a part of or partially constitutive of the natural realm) and yet it belongs to an ontological category beyond those we are familiar with both from ordinary life and much standard philosophical reflection. It is real but radically Other.

Madden thinks his UUTH hypothesis more likely than either the ETH or UTH, as it sidesteps the aforementioned criticisms of both while readily fitting in with the high strangeness data (we would expect something so different from us to manifest itself to us in bizarre ways we have difficulty comprehending), and also accords with the vagaries of intersubjective experiences noted above (where different people come away from the same encounter with quite different subjective perceptions of what happened). The UUTH also has the virtue of encouraging continued epistemic humility, recognizing as it does the limits placed on our randomly-evolved, socially conditioned human cognitive faculties. “In short, the UFO realist adopting the UUTH is employing a type of explanation that already has some good evidential support. Moreover, we would expect our encounter with these *Uber-Umwelt* beings to be uncanny. UFOs are indeed beyond *our world*, not our planet but our *Umwelt*.... Thus, our marginal encounters with the beings from the *Uber-Umwelt* don’t make much sense to us. In fact, our unconscious

sense-making systems likely distort more than they reveal about the beings encroaching on our cave” (*UFH*, pp. 58-59, emphases in original).

Madden concludes his third chapter by suggesting that the UUTH might have broader application, functioning as a kind of theory-of-everything for the paranormal: “This proposal allows us to bring all orders of supernatural and paranormal phenomena into the mix, and explanatory unification is a good sign for a model. What are ghosts, fairies, DMT elves, etc.?...We might do well to investigate all well-evidenced ‘paranormal’ phenomena (UFOs and otherwise) as irruptions of the *Uber-Umwelt* into our *Umwelt*” (*UFH*, p. 59).

Chapter 4 is also metaphysical in orientation and further fleshes out the UUTH. After some initial scene setting in which he summarizes broadly Aristotelian common-sense ontological categories (especially the distinctions between substance versus accident, and natural versus artificial substance), Madden introduces some metaphysical ideas from contemporary continental thought, drawing in particular on Graham Harman’s work concerning ‘object oriented ontology.’ One of Harman’s accusations against traditional metaphysics (including the Aristotelian variety) is that it has unjustifiably privileged the analysis of ordinary objects (like boulders and tables and people) and micro-objects (like the elementary particles) over and against larger natural and social entities, or what he terms *hyperobjects* (like solar systems, cities, businesses, economies, etc.). Hyperobjects may initially seem like odd, spatially and/or temporally disjointed entities, but the claim is that they nevertheless are irreducibly causally relevant, and that causal relevance is a reliable criterion of genuine existence. Madden appropriates this idea of a hyperobject and incorporates it into his UUTH, suggesting that “hyperobjects mostly exist in the *Uber-Umwelt* with respect to us. The *Umwelt* is the perceptual environment an organism selects out of the fabulously rich set of possible framings of things based on its perceptual capacities and strategies for coping. Our human *Umwelt* is tuned for dealing with moderate-sized dried goods (relative to us!)...Beings far surpassing that scale in size, time, or complexity exist almost entirely or completely in the *Uber-Umwelt* relative to us, outside the cave” (*UFH*, p. 70). This implies that whatever experiential contact we have with a hyperobject will always constitute an incomplete exposure; we cannot directly encounter the entire hyperobject, but only a part or aspect or manifestation of it. As a prosaic example, Madden references the hyperobject that is Pizza Hut: no single individual ever encounters the corporate hyperobject

Pizza Hut in its full reality, but only parts of it (e.g., by entering particular franchise locations) or aspects of it (e.g., by reading shareholders’ correspondence) or manifestations of it (e.g., seeing its logo/symbology). This example also goes to show how a single hyperobject may be encountered in many distinct objects or events—Pizza Hut is a unified (hyper-) reality lying behind its diverse manifestations. Madden then links all of this back to ufology: “What if the UFOs aren’t many, but one? Suppose we’re not dealing with the UFOs, but THE UFO. Maybe THE UFO is a singular hyperobject that we can only encounter at its edges, just like we can only encounter the economy or the environment at its edges. That is not to deny the existence of the individual craft or what have you. Nobody denies the reality of your local Pizza Hut...We might make better progress in understanding THE UFO if we conceptualized the ‘individual craft’ less like discrete individuals, and more like manifestations of a single hyperobject” (*UFH*, p. 72).

Reflecting further on the relationship of the ‘hyperobject’ category to the aforementioned natural versus artificial distinction of ordinary ontology, Madden notes that while some hyperobjects appear to be wholly natural (the solar system) and others wholly artificial (Pizza Hut), there are still others that appear to be hybrids (like climate change)—products both of natural processes and human intervention. He further suggests that the UFO could theoretically belong to any of these three classes. In other words, perhaps the UFO is wholly independent of human beings, pre-existing us, or perhaps we somehow collectively called it into being, or perhaps it is some complex combination of both independent and humanly conditioned factors. Commenting on that third, hybrid option, Madden writes: “Just because we don’t know what’s going on outside our cave does not entail that our activities cannot have profound effects on what is going on, or even exists, out there beyond our pale. In short, we might do well to consider whether we unwittingly contributed to the inception of THE UFO, though now we are forced to share our environment with this new-fangled hyperobject” (*UFH*, p. 73).

Modelling the intellectual humility he preaches, Madden concludes his fourth chapter by noting again that he has no decisive argument in favour either of the truth of the UUTH or of the reality of hyperobjects. He also concedes that these ideas are liable to seem strange and counter-intuitive to some. But he thinks that the present state of ufology warrants the consideration of out-of-the-box (or cave) options: “When our questioning keeps ending up in dead ends, we need

to examine our fundamental assumptions, especially the dichotomies that seem to be giving us the most trouble” (*UFH*, 73). In this case, that means re-examining widely assumed splits between natural versus supernatural, and natural versus artificial.

In chapter 5 Madden brings his UUTH / hyperobject proposal into more direct dialogue with the thought of Jacques Vallée, in particular the latter’s *control hypothesis*: essentially, the claim that the UFO phenomenon, for all its oddness, is meaningful—it is intended to communicate something to us or affect us in some specific way. On this view then, one of the paths to insight into the phenomenon is to pay attention to how it influences us, both those of us who directly encounter it and those of us impacted by its wider socio-cultural (even religious?) influence.

What might that message or communication ultimately consist in? Here Madden declines to speculate. He is more concerned that at this point the language of ‘meaning’ and ‘communication’ and ‘intention’ is liable to mislead, perhaps giving the impression that we are dealing with something like a single conscious mind lying behind the phenomenon. While Madden does not wholly rule out that suggestion, his own preference is for a more organic model. The hyperobject that is THE UFO or that lies behind the phenomenon needn’t be a consciousness in our sense of ‘consciousness.’ As he puts it, things “can have lives of their own without being conscious, and the temptation to think otherwise is part of our humanistic tendency, i.e., we assume that *being* is primarily *to be like us*” (*UFH*, p. 85, emphases in original). A bit later he adds (now using Vallée’s old label of Magonia in place of his own hyperobject): “Maybe Magonia is cognitive, but that is something for which we would need an additional line of argumentation, and the risk of anthropocentrism in these matters is grave. On this view, we (and much in our world) are constituents of Magonia, which maintains itself by regulating our cognitive function (and the behaviours that follows thereupon), but beyond that we don’t get insights into the inner life of this hyperobjective entity” (*UFH*, p. 86).

By way of further clarifying what sort of thing we might be talking about here, Madden goes on to suggest that “we might do well to revisit Plato’s notion of a world soul in the *Timaeus*, according to which the universe is a living organism composed of a hierarchy of lower-level living beings” (*UFH*, 87). In this Madden is likely influenced by the work of Jeffrey Kripal, whom he frequently quotes and who has himself suggested the possible utility of a world-soul cosmology for thinking through the ontology of the paranormal. Madden

adds that such a perspective on the UFO phenomenon would contribute towards a salutary re-enchantment of the natural world whereby the cosmos is viewed as inherently a realm of life and intelligibility. Ufology might thus help to lead us away from the dead mechanism of outdated (but still wildly influential) early modern physics and back towards those aspects of the Platonic worldview that retain both an inherent appeal and a resonance with contemporary science. Madden concludes the chapter with some tentative gestures towards ontological optimism: if the UFO is a hyperobject, and that hyperobject is akin to a Platonic world-soul that is in some way rational (if far beyond our mode of rationality), then the very fact that it apparently seeks to engage with us experientially is promising. Apparently we matter to it: “[W]hatever Magonia’s intentions, it takes us as worth managing (talking to!)” (*UFH*, p. 89).

The 6th chapter is a philosophical reflection on Diana Walsh Pasulka’s work at the intersection of ufology and religious studies. The overarching question pursued in the chapter is whether or to what extent the phenomenon challenges the truth status of orthodox religious ideas. For ufology seems to supply the ingredients necessary for a Nietzsche-style genealogical critique of religion—i.e., maybe the foundational narratives of faith traditions take their origin from contact with the hyperobject lying behind the UFO phenomenon (rather than from God or the Buddha etc.). More broadly, recognition of the limits of human cognition in the face of the phenomenon, and the resulting call for epistemic humility, may itself be seen as undermining a rationally confident religious faith. Madden seems to grant some force to these worries, while pointing out that Pasulka and scholars like her are not seeking to undermine religion deliberately. Indeed, to the extent we take UFO reports seriously, we should take seriously the miracles and revelatory encounters associated with the founding events of the major religions. It is just that we must maintain a degree of epistemic humility regarding the ultimate meaning and import of such events, recognizing that as finite human beings with imperfect cognitive faculties we are ill-suited to grasp the larger realities underlying them. Madden, following Pasulka here, cautions both the religious believer and “the UFO believer that he or she, as a human, is subject to epistemic vulnerabilities.... We are natural cave-dwellers, and our current technological situation leaves us more vulnerable to put-ons than ever before in our history.... We can ask dark questions about our most closely cherished beliefs, admitting that they might be, to some degree, *put-ons*. That is merely to

admit the epistemic vulnerability of the human condition. This...however, if far from conceding that our beliefs are just put-ons, for they are occasioned by the experience of something real, memories of something uncanny that really did show up here” (*UFH*, p. 106).

Chapter 7 makes use of Heidegger’s philosophy of technology to draw out some further epistemological difficulties that might need to be worked through in pondering the phenomenon. This is a significant chapter for grasping Madden’s overall perspective, in particular for getting some hints as to how he might see the UFO phenomenon as tying into normative questions of societal import. It also underscores the major influence Pasulka’s work has had on his thinking (something he happily acknowledges).

Recall that the preface to Pasulka’s first book in this area, *American Cosmic*, speaks of Heidegger’s well-known essay ‘The Question Concerning Technology.’ With reference to that preface (and some unpublished material), Madden draws attention to Pasulka’s interpretation of Heidegger, whereby the latter’s warnings concerning technology can be linked to past traditions of thought, traditions which view technology (and its risks) as bound up with the sacred (e.g., the myth of Prometheus) and/or mystical. Technology, in other words, has existential implications. Madden writes: “On this reading, which is most certainly central to what Heidegger was really doing, technology is not understood in terms of just the devices we use to structure or manipulate our environment, but as a way of *being-in-the-world*, an implicit attitude or cognitive background that frames all of our explicit understandings of things. For Heidegger, technology is not a collection of beings we happen to have possessed or mastered, but an attitude toward Being, which partly determines the beings to which we are attuned...” (*UFH*, p. 110). Of course this ties back to Madden’s claim in chapter 1 to the effect that among the key sources of our cognitive framings (and thus intellectual limits) is techno-cognitive extension. Our thinking abilities are substantially impacted by our technologies (and, in recent decades especially, the *intensification* of our engagement with those technologies).

The remainder of his seventh chapter consists in Madden’s attempt to build on and expand Pasulka’s reflections concerning Heidegger. Part of this consists in careful exegesis of Heidegger’s essay and some related works by him and by Jacques Ellul. I won’t try to summarize all that here, as I am no Heidegger scholar (and in fact am beset by an allergic distaste for the man and his work); moreover what is more significant for present purposes are the upshots

Madden takes from him.

A key upshot is, again, epistemic. Technology often seems to be getting away from us and in a way *manipulating* us even as we (ironically) seek to use it to gain greater mastery over our environment and ourselves. This tends to circumscribe our cognitive horizons in a negative, materialist manner: “Maybe there is more that can be in our *Umwelt* than what can be manipulated and controlled (or understood in terms amenable in those ways), but we have closed ourselves off to it by our recent technological obsessions. Maybe there are things from outside our cave that are subtly trying to awaken us to their ambiguous presence” (*UFH*, p. 123). Madden goes on to suggest that this technologically-imposed self-limitation of our own thinking might explain why the Hyperobject is often manifesting itself in ways that appear to many (for the moment) as technological in nature, as literal nuts-and-bolts saucers (or massive black triangles or whatnot). In our technology-obsessed age, maybe that would be the best (only?) way to engage with many of us. And indeed some are interested in the phenomenon principally on grounds of the (essentially Promethean) prospect that from it we will be able to glean technological insights. (This notion has of course figured prominently in recent public debates, sparked by the David Grusch whistleblower claims.)

At the same time our tech-informed cognition may yet be blocking us from interacting with other aspects of that same Hyperobject (or other Hyperobjects, if we are dealing with more than one). Madden thinks that this particular epistemic limitation has practical and normative implications, something Vallée is also keenly aware of: “Unless we take up that arduous burden of re-thinking our thinking, we will remain ignorant of a vast world, the *Uber-Umwelt*, that is trying to make itself available to us. Such a cognitive reorientation is our only chance to save ourselves from ourselves. Vallée, along with Heidegger, worries that the essence of technology has made us oblivious to Being, and we need to learn to listen again” (*UFH*, p. 128).

Madden’s concise concluding chapter offers up some final remarks, re-emphasizing the importance of philosophical engagement with ufology: “The value of our philosophical encounter with the UFO is then the revelation of our own limitations; it shows us that a completed philosophy is an ideal, and not a concrete reality, because there is something lurking just outside our cave that defies our comprehension” (*UFH*, p. 132).

The preceding summary has of course skipped over a good many details, but hopefully it suffices to give the reader

a decent idea of Madden's core claims and central lines of reasoning. I will now offer some brief evaluative comments.

To repeat what I said at the beginning, this is a thought-provoking and well-written book. It deserves a wide readership both among philosophers and those working in ufology. Moreover, Madden's modesty is refreshing—he is offering his arguments as probabilistic, tentative first stabs at the truth. Still, I have some reservations, both with Madden's UUTH and with the general approach he takes to the phenomenon.

Let me start with the latter worry. Madden never quite clarifies what sorts of events he thinks fall under the rubric 'the UFO phenomenon'—in other words, it's never clear what data set he is asking us to work with in theorizing about UFOs. While he is right not to spend a lot of time reviewing empirical evidence for the reality of UFOs (as that would have been redundant), the book would have benefited from more engagement with actual case studies. The only UFO encounters that figure in the book are one of the more bizarre events relayed to Whitley Strieber by his correspondents (*UFH*, pp. 30-32), and an alleged craft retrieval recently written about by Vallée (*UFH*, pp. 128-129). That's it, and they are not especially representative reports. Madden spends no time discussing Hynek's close encounters (CE) hierarchy, or the distinctions drawn between contactees and abductees, or the issues involved in discerning what sorts of evidence regarding the latter should be included in theoretical speculations as to the nature of the phenomenon (e.g., should hypnotically retrieved memories ever be counted as reliable evidence?). We simply don't know what data set Madden is employing in developing the UUTH.

Though one does get the sense that he means it to be a *very* wide data set; as we've seen, he intends his UUTH to be a generic theory of the paranormal, covering not only UFOs but any well-evidenced anomalous phenomena. And he makes substantive reference to the works of Strieber, Pasulka, Kripal, and Vallée, each of whom tends to oppose the ETH in favour of more broadly paranormal or interdimensional theories in ufology (though Strieber has been circling back and forth on the ET question for decades); correspondingly, each tends to see the UFO phenomenon as in some way continuous with a broader range of paranormal entities and events.

The thing to notice here is that *inevitably* such a syncretic, all-encompassing view of the phenomenon will encourage epistemic pessimism: all this bizarre stuff, taken seriously and run together, is surely going to seem beyond our ken.

Pair a massive and chaotic data set with the (highly selective) findings of cognitive science marshalled by Madden, and indeed it is liable to seem as though we are to be numbered among Plato's imprisoned cave dwellers.

The obvious risk is that Madden is making the task more difficult than it needs to be by allowing items into the data set (and hence the set of things demanding explanation) that really oughtn't to be there. It's hardly surprising that the task of developing a plausible unified theory of UFO contactee cases (e.g. psychic mediums channeling messages from beings claiming to be space aliens), abductee cases, military sightings of glowing orbs moving at anomalous speeds, the Loch Ness monster, poltergeists, and werewolf sightings will seem an overwhelming one demanding great epistemic humility. But what if, for instance, we opt to drop most of the contactee cases (say, we either don't buy the reality of psychic mediumship or we think it is real but fits within an existing explanatory paradigm), exclude the Loch Ness monster (maybe real but merely exotic fodder for future National Geographic documentaries), leave out poltergeists (can be shoehorned in with the psychic mediums as part of an existing paradigm), cut out werewolves (alas), and include only the military sightings of glowing orbs plus a tiny percentage of abductee cases? Well then we might have something more manageable, and less apt to require a resort to hyperobjects or Magonia or (as Jerome Clark wryly used to put it) the goblin universe. Madden's general approach to the UFO phenomenon (and is it even a *single* phenomenon?) is tailor-made to lead to a high degree of epistemic pessimism; but it is a pessimism that may not be strictly necessary.

Now, Madden might reply that even a more carefully narrowed focus (say, just on the best military sightings of a CE1 and CE2 variety plus a selection of the most compelling UFO-with-humanoid-occupant encounters, whether CE3 or abduction cases) will still suffice to indicate a reality so strange as to call out for a radically new paradigm. Combine that recognition with the rejection of the ETH and cryptoterrestrial theories (on account of their longstanding problems) and a rejection of spiritual/religious models (too supernatural), and we again find ourselves in need of the UUTH or something like it.

That reply seems to me too quick, in part because the dismissal of supernatural models is too quick (more on that momentarily), and in part because the vagueness of the UUTH renders it a problematic alternative—in particular, it makes it difficult to make predictions on the basis of the hypothesis. Essentially what the UUTH is saying is that

behind UFOs there is a Something or Somethings that break the mould of our standard ontological categories, such that the nature and intents (if any) of the Something or Somethings can scarcely be known by us (except by reference to their effects on us, and even that will be perennially sketchy). What exactly are we to do with this hypothesis? How can it help us address concrete questions about the UFO phenomenon?

Consider for example the fact that entities in well-evidenced CE1 and CE2 reports move in ways that appear to violate the known laws of physics. Assuming the accuracy of such reports (and I agree with Madden that at this point we can reasonably make that assumption), we are left with at least three alternatives: (a) The known laws of physics do not represent the complete, *actual* laws of nature, which are not being violated—this tends to be the approach taken by advocates of the ETH and the cryptoterrestrial hypothesis, who hold out hope that future science will confirm the physical possibility of UFO behaviour (e.g., discovering wormhole networks will show that teleportation of macro-level objects is perfectly feasible); or, (b) the known laws of physics are correct and we are dealing with physical entities that can somehow violate them; or, (c) we are not dealing with physical entities at all, and so their behaviour needn't be thought of as violating natural laws (because they are not covered by those laws in the first place).

The UUTH is consistent with (a), (b), and (c), and so can contribute nothing to the effort to decide between them. The reason is that the UUTH does not of itself tell us whether the hyperobject and/or its individual manifestations are subject to the laws of physics. The hyperobject is supposed to be part of the natural realm (or partly constitutive of it, especially on the Platonic world-soul reading of the UUTH entertained by Madden); but where it falls on the physical versus non-physical divide, or whether that division is just another categorial dichotomy the UUTH is intended to overcome, we are not told. If the latter, then it remains unclear whether or to what extent UFOs (manifestations of the hyper-object) are subject to natural laws, and again we are left unable to make testable predictions (e.g., that UFO behaviour will eventually be found compatible with a mostly-completed physics).

There are various theoretical virtues and deficiencies to be considered when assessing a hypothesis. I don't deny that Madden's UUTH boasts some of the former (e.g., sidestepping notable problems facing some existing models and accounting for some of the data not easily accommodated by those competing models, etc.). But its high

degree of vagueness must be counted a deficiency.

To return for a moment to Madden's dismissal of supernatural models of the UFO: since Madden's core overarching abductive argument for the UUTH amounts to an argument from elimination (i.e., UFOs are real but the ETH and cryptoterrestrial and supernatural models are probably unworkable, so we should entertain the UUTH as the only remaining viable option), it is important to ask whether the eliminated options have in fact been convincingly cast out. In the case of supernatural models, the answer is no.

To clarify, by 'supernatural' one needn't intend just the specifically Christian theories that have long persisted at the periphery of ufology (e.g., UFOs are mostly demonic and genuine alien abduction is simply demonic oppression under a new guise). For one might also speculate on other supernaturalist options, including: (i) the animist UFOs-as-nature-spirits hypothesis (entertained at least for a time by John Mack, particularly as his interest in shamanism and indigenous faiths grew in the latter years of his involvement in ufology); or, (ii) the related view of some western esotericists that UFOs are manifestations of elemental spirits or the products of ceremonial magic (as per the fevered conjectures on the doings of Jack Parsons and a youthful pre-Scientology L. Ron Hubbard); or (iii) the Taoist or Shinto or Neopagan (etc.) idea that UFOs are gods or their lower-level spirit messengers; or (iv) the New Age idea that UFOs are higher-level spiritual beings or the representatives of ascended masters; or indeed (v) one might run with a more thoroughly developed (less vague) 'UFOs as emanations of the Platonic world-soul' hypothesis that Madden himself considers as one possible reading of the UUTH, etc. Or one might go eclectic, and accept multiple spiritual explanations. E.g., Christianity is not incompatible with a belief in some forms of animism (indeed animism has in recent years been the subject of respectful discussion within theology and Biblical studies). Moreover, historically many important Christian scholars have entertained the idea of a non-divine roughly Platonic world-soul, among them St. Augustine, Isaac Newton, and Sergius Bulgakov (one of the most important Russian Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century). Maybe a complete account of anomalous phenomena would have to reference God, angels, demons, nature spirits, and a world-soul? Or just the first and the last? Or just the last two?

It is not my goal to defend any of these supernatural hypotheses regarding the UFO phenomenon; I simply wish to point out that Madden's argument from elimination is not as compelling as it could be, insofar as he has not done enough

to rule them out of contention. And whatever their (many) faults, supernatural hypotheses at least have the advantage of being less scientifically revisionist and thus a better fit with existing background knowledge (an important theoretical virtue), insofar as their view of UFOs need involve no clash with our best current physics. (Non-physical entities aren't governed by natural laws and so can't violate those laws.)

A further worry for the UUTH's dismissal of supernaturalist options is that its epistemic pessimism ends up begging the question against some of those options. Madden seems to be assuming (at least for the sake of argument) that the human cognitive apparatus is the product of purely naturalistic Darwinian processes. But to those already sympathetic to non-naturalist worldviews (including religious worldviews), that assumption will not be granted. If instead the human mind is held to be the product of design by benevolent intelligence(s), and design specifically with a view to higher-level cognitive abilities and spiritual insight, then it is rational to have faith in the human ability to gain some sort of cognitive access (however incomplete) to higher-level realities. If we were created in the image and likeness of such realities and designed to know them, then we needn't fear having to blunder about in Plato's cave forever. (Indeed Plato himself seems to have accepted just such a creation story—at least if one reads key passages of his *Timaeus* and *Laws* literally—and the ultimate epistemic optimism accompanying it.) At times, Madden's tentative descriptions of the UFO hyperobject inevitably remind one of the ineffably transcendent conceptions of the divine adopted by some religious traditions (e.g., it exists beyond our standard ontological categories, its manifestations can never adequately unveil its nature, etc.). But those traditions often combine apophatic theology with an equal emphasis on divine grace and the humble condescension involved in revelation to humanity (revelation enabled in part by a human nature created with a view to receiving it). The *goodness* of the transcendent thus matters a great deal, epistemically. Madden is noncommittal with respect to the moral status of the UFO hyperobject (or even whether moral terms can properly be predicated of it), and this too feeds into his epistemic pessimism. (Though he seems cautiously optimistic that the hyperobject is at least interested in engaging with humanity.)

A final observation on a moral matter: it is interesting that Madden's philosophical engagement with ufology is almost entirely via the sub-disciplines of metaphysics and

epistemology. He says little about ethics (though some normative issues are broached in the Heidegger chapter). But surely if the UFO hyperobject is engaging us in a control system (to use Vallée's terminology again), such that the *meaning* of the phenomenon (even if not its *nature*) might be partly discernible by analyzing its effects on us, then we ought to be worried—or at least, we ought to be worried if we include the alien abduction phenomenon within our UFO data set. Perhaps we shouldn't, as the abduction phenomenon is highly questionable on multiple fronts. Still, if we do—and I take it that Madden does, given his approving citations of Strieber—then we ought to take note of the fact that much of what is reported within the abduction literature is horrifying. I do wonder whether Madden has delved into Strieber's full corpus, or only his most recent books. Strieber started his literary career as a horror novelist, and for better or worse his skills in that genre carry over into his recounting of abduction experiences, which are frequently terrifying and disturbing (the anal rape he reports in *Communion* being among the milder incidents). And Strieber is not an outlier on this front; the abduction literature is loaded with comparably disconcerting narratives. If abductions are properly included in the UFO data set, and thereby serve to convey a meaning or message from the hyperobject (or whatever might be behind the phenomenon), the message I take is that the hyperobject is unambiguously evil.

Much more could be said about Madden's important and engaging book, which I enjoyed very much and will continue to reflect upon. But, ethics being the most important branch of philosophy, it seems fitting to end this review essay on a note of moral reflection (if a potentially discomfiting one).¹

1 I would like to extend my sincere thanks to two anonymous referees for *Limina*, insightful comments from whom have certainly improved the final product.



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Review of: Robert Powell, *UFOs: A Scientist Explains What We Know (And Don't Know)* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2024, 209 pages, appendix, footnotes, references, and index. Hardcover, \$32.00.

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With this book the author has filled several basic needs of ufology and filled them admirably. UFOs entangle with a sprawling cultural mythology composed of alleged facts, rumors, tales, beliefs, popular entertainment, cultural tropes, and conspiracy theories; but what are the real facts? Multiple byways and subfields like crash-retrievals, UFO abductions, crop circles, Mothman, and ancient astronauts lead interested parties this way and that, with little sense of direction or guidance through the maze. The UFO literature is enormous. I measured my own collection of books and periodicals and found it covered 135 feet of shelf space, give or take a yard or two, and Amazon offers far more for sale, countless sources of theories, claims, and realities of varied credibility. How does anyone, especially a newcomer, sort them out, catch up on nearly eighty years of history, and distinguish the true from the false?

Not all UFO literature is bad. Far from it, excellent treatments of individual cases, clusters of events, in-depth investigations, and provocative theories have accumulated over the decades. A few classics have undertaken to lay out the key facts about UFOs and a basis for their study, among them Richard Hall's *The UFO Evidence v.1-2*, Jacques Vallée's *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* and *Challenge to Science*, J. Allen Hynek's *The UFO Experience*, and Allan Hendry's *The UFO Handbook*. Jerome Clark's *UFO Encyclopedia* (now in its fourth edition) presents magisterial coverage of nearly everything ufological, while in *UFOs and Government*, Michael Swords and Robert Powell accomplish the same on their topic. The skeptics also earn a grudging bow for a literature that challenges UFOs with conventional and psycho-social explanations, assuming the necessary role of gadflies against intellectual complacency.

Still, the years have slipped by without an up-to-date book that returns to fundamentals like the very reality of UFOs and their reported characteristics...until now.

Robert Powell has written this book, one that is concise, authoritative, accessible to all audiences, and grounded in scientific purpose. It serves as a worthy introduction to the basic issues of ufology and leads everyone from green recruit to seasoned veteran toward a scientific approach to the subject. He brings impeccable credentials to the job, having trained as a chemical engineer and spent a career in management in the semiconductor industry. He served as director of research for the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) for ten years and became a founding member of the Scientific Coalition for UAP Studies (SCU). In sixteen years he has investigated, interviewed more than 200 witnesses, researched,

and authored in-depth technical papers on significant cases, among them the famous U.S.S. *Nimitz* encounter of 2004, that draw the benchmark for current understanding and future study.

The book begins with a brief history, primarily of governmental and scientific responses—or lack thereof—to the hundreds or thousands of sightings reported every year by witnesses from all walks of life. With military efforts usually superficial and any scientific treatment dismissive and disparaging, civilian organizations filled the void. They investigated, researched, and communicated UFO events, commonly on shoestring budgets and by amateur volunteers, but they kept the records of an ongoing mystery and recognized outstanding cases such as the ones Powell summarizes throughout the book for purpose of illustration.

Since the subject of the book is the science of UFOs, much baggage accumulated along the way has to go. UFOs as cultural phenomena, issues of psychology, sociology, and religion, and complex accounts of encounters with aliens and government secrets serve only to complicate and confuse inquiry into whether a unique UFO phenomenon exists. Even more misleading is the striking 90% or more of reported UFOs that are really Venus, satellites, aircraft, balloons, drones, and all the other confusing sights in the sky that fallible human observers repeatedly mistake for something unknown. These too drown out any genuine UFO signal.

Drawing on his experience as research director for MUFON, Powell recognizes that UFO reports and investigations are frequently inadequate. But contrary to the prevailing scientific attitude that anecdotal evidence is mere junk, he defends it as essential data for scientific study of UFOs. Reports from good, preferably multiple observers under favorable conditions and with instrumental support, with descriptions that are rich in information; reports that run the gauntlet of investigation and undergo criticism and still survive as unknowns: these are robust cases worthy of scientific attention. One helpful technique to separate accurate from fanciful reports is a Natural Language Processing program. It distinguishes value-free descriptive terms from emotional and belief-laden language, enabling rapid analysis of large samples. Though only a small percentage of total reports, the few that pass these tests amount to a sizeable number. Some eventually prove conventional, but even an impure sample of prospective unknowns will have a richer concentration of true unknowns, if any, than a body of unvetted reports. If a genuine UFO phenomenon exists, its indicators have the best chance to

emerge from study of these unknowns.

Meaningful scientific work can begin once this refined sample of cases is in hand. Powell starts with gathering basic facts like high-veracity versus low-veracity differences in reported UFO shapes and times of day for sightings. A finding that triangular shapes outweigh saucer shapes among high-veracity cases belies the argument that UFO descriptions simply echo cultural influence like flying saucers in the movies. He finds reported traits that stand out as both distinctive and recurrent, among them a “falling leaf” descent, an unusual barbell shape, extremes of acceleration, and accounts of electromagnetic interference associated with UFOs that shuts down automobile engines. Out of the varied descriptions a pattern emerges, as the pattern grows a phenomenon takes shape.

By now he has our attention, and as the climax of this journey through the sample of unknowns he dares to introduce the strangest properties associated with UFOs. High strangeness is a term that can designate the least credible UFO stories, and this book eschews them for due cause. But a list of UFO characteristics built from best cases includes some events that enter the realm of the highly strange, impossible according to known physics yet apparently all in a night’s work for UFOs. Beams of light that bend, fail to illuminate whatever they touch, or retract toward their source like solid objects; time that seems to slow or to stop and restart during a close UFO encounter—these are extraordinary, unaccountable experiences yet they are not one-offs. They recur in reports from around the world and deepen the impression of a complex singular phenomenon. Its origin and nature remain unknown but call for an explanation that, unlike the blind men and the elephant, considers the whole mystery and not just separate parts.

Powell’s face-to-face experience with witnesses and investigation of cases equips him with insight into human reactions to a strange but stigmatized phenomenon, how witnesses process the event, cope with it and the challenges of communicating it to others. Much more could be said about the personal and social dimensions of the UFO experience. An understanding of the shortcomings of observers, the mistakes they can make, the influence of expectations, the pliancy of memory, the social pressures on anyone who shares an experience all demand close study. So does how the media, military, government, and scientific community treat the subject. Powell raises the issues and summarizes them so any reader can gain a basic understanding, but he wisely leaves deeper discussions for other venues.

One emergent issue he discusses is the current renaissance of interest in UFOs. It dates to 2017 when the *New York Times* published articles about spectacular Navy sightings and an obscure, congressionally funded group designated the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program. This attention blew the lid off of UFO secrecy and shook up the established culture of ridicule surrounding the subject. Witnesses, including numerous Navy personnel, now speak in public without fear of possible threats to their careers; scientists too have broken the long-standing taboo against professional involvement, even organizing groups to study the phenomenon in defiance of disapproval from influential colleagues. Congress has taken interest and demanded both investigation and transparency; media attention has been mostly respectful and public fascination intense. Powell's experiences with these events and their key figures provide him with some good stories to tell, while his summary of these unfolding events pushes this book to the forefront as a record of a major new chapter in UFO history.

Despite this hopeful outlook, some disappointing trends continue to surface. The mandated reports to Congress show tactics of delay and avoid, with boasts of explaining a hundred reports out of two or three hundred received in a year, ignoring that ufologists identify a much higher percentage every year and without cost to taxpayers. We hear nothing about the most outstanding cases. In fact, standard procedure is said to assume inability to explain a case is due to insufficient information. If so, this practice equates "I saw a funny light in the sky a few years ago, must have been a UFO," with an object witnessed at close range in broad daylight by two F-18 crews and tracked on several Navy radar systems.

Powell's course is not indignation but trust that science, done rightly, finally wins out over prejudice, however stubborn. Throughout the book he maintains a focus on the practical study of UFOs as a physical phenomenon and builds his case step by step: How do we identify the subject matter, how do we gather the worthwhile examples, put to use the less than perfect reports gathered over the past decades? What do the unknowns tell us, are they consistent, do they suggest a coherent phenomenon? The evidence says yes. It suggests a great deal more—not only is the phenomenon real, but it confronts us with extraordinary characteristics unlike anything natural or man-made.

Here the reader stops to tremble on the edge. Powell's measured treatment has appealed throughout to rational thought, but even without trumpets and drums he admits

that whatever UFOs are, their main interest lies in the possibility that they are visitors from space. As soon as the conversation turns to aerial objects with uncanny properties, the inescapable alien enters the room. An effort to dissociate the phenomenon from aliens led to rebranding UFOs as unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP), though just as the aliens made a smooth transition from the term flying saucer to UFO, this latest dodge seems unlikely to dislodge them from their popular connection. Science has long considered the possibility of life on other worlds. The count of exoplanet discoveries grows exponentially, SETI continues to listen for messages from beyond, and a multitude of responses attempt to answer Enrico Fermi's question of "where are they?" Reasons for and against alien visitors nourish continued arguments, but an unearthly origin for UFOs is the direction in which Powell's research leads.

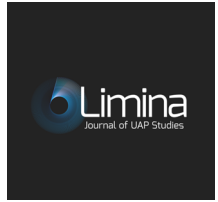
Again without fanfare, he acknowledges that acceptance of alien visitation will set off a revolution in our thinking, replacing paradigms we have taken for granted with new and perhaps uncomfortable understandings of our place and importance in the universe. Scientists and academics, government officials and every member of the public will face a change more shattering than the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions, and more immediate, if the answer to Fermi's "where are they?" hovers right over our housetops as we sleep—"they" are already here.

Robert Powell has given us a timely and readable book that strips away sensationalism and humbug from a subject long dismissed in its entirety as tin-hat nonsense. He redeems UFOs as a subject for scientific study, showing that quality evidence reveals some eye-opening facts and clearing a path for future study. With crisp, lucid writing he introduces an audience unfamiliar with the subject to a crash course in what ufology should be about and why it is important, while an audience already familiar will find a corrective to errors and misinformation, also an antidote to any sense that the subject has stagnated. Every reader who follows his systematic argument will likely feel a chill as they follow him to the threshold—of space perhaps, but certainly to a purposeful new era of discovery. This book comes as a refreshing oasis in the desert, a renewal of the ufological enterprise on a sound scientific footing, from which everyone interested in UFOs stands to learn and enjoy. And yes, there is much wonder left over, this time founded on evidence hard to deny.



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Review: “Greg Eghigian. *After the Flying Saucers Came: A Global History of the UFO Phenomenon.*” New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. Xi+400 pp. Hardcover, \$29.99.

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For instance, Eghigian is frank that he lacks the technical expertise to make a scientific judgment about what UFOs might be. But, as a historian, he can point out that it’s interesting that so many people have assumed that science is the right way to answer the questions UFOs raise. He can, and in this book does, shed a great deal of light on what I think is an especially interesting problem: Given that these things are by definition unidentified, why have we humans chosen the tools we have—scientific, religious, psychological, governmental, among dozens of others—to try to identify them? And what do we do when those tools have—as they all have—inevitably failed to do so?

His subject then is less UFOs per se than the people who study and experience UFOs. This is a different approach than many other books on the topic take, but it’s common among scholars like myself or Eghigian or Jodi Dean or many others.

Greg Eghigian and I came to the study of UFOs for similar reasons. We’ve enjoyed some friendly interactions, and as I read his new *After the Flying Saucers Came: A Global History of the UFO Phenomenon*, I found myself nodding again and again. He is asking the sorts of questions that interest me. That shouldn’t be surprising because we’re both trained as historians, which means we’re interested in exploring the context and influences that might help us understand the causes and direction of particular events. The questions we ask about UFO have to do with what these things are in the cultural, rather than material, sense.

The standards of our trade rely on footnotes that direct our readers to sources they can go and look at themselves, and UFOs—as Eghigian paraphrases sociologist Arnaud Esquerre—are notable for their resistance to being gathered into archival drawers where they can be secured, to be taken out and held up to the light again and again. Scholars of religion, of which I am one, face the same problem when it comes to claims about angels and God.

But it’s also that very elusiveness that makes these things tantalizing and infuriating, and, frankly, so important to the modern world. UFOs show us where the limits of modernity are. Early on in the book Eghigian writes “Science, engineering, medicine, organized religion, professional expertise, universities, government, mass media: UFO devotees have never tired of disputing the authority and integrity of each.” (10) Over and over, people who

saw something strange in the sky—and people who had even more extreme encounters with things they could not explain—turned to such conventional authorities for help and explanation and found themselves disappointed.

Eghigian's global approach is one of the major strengths of the book, because in comparing differing countries and cultures we can see the same patterns happen again and again. He shows us how extensive the intellectual and institutional resources human beings have marshalled to confront the UFO have been; how many possibilities and options have been explored across the continents; and how frequently UFOs have prompted human beings to challenge conventional authority, whether it be in the hands of the state or academia or even other UFO believers as those authorities have failed to solve the problem.

It is significant that Eghigian begins the book with—as we might expect—the story of Kenneth Arnold and the strange discs he saw near Mount Ranier in the summer of 1947. It's even more significant that he then turns to a story much less well-known in the United States, the ghost rockets that plagued Sweden in those same years, resuscitating old Second World War fears and almost immediately throwing poor Swedes into consternation when their military could not promptly solve the problem. He then takes us back to the frustrated Arnold, who spent many years after his sighting trying to solve the problem of what he—and others like him—had actually seen. The challenge consumed Arnold.

And it's not till then that Eghigian flashes back into time, to strange lights the Romans saw and apparitions of the Virgin Mary. The order of these arguments is meaningful. Other histories of the UFO phenomenon begin with such stories, but that Eghigian puts them where he does, at the very moment when Americans and Europeans were searching for answers, shows something about how humans in the period thought. Reaching back to history, as UFO thinkers began to do in earnest in the 1960s, showed a group of people stymied by the failures of contemporary science and the military to solve such problems. So they went to different sources. Even to the occult and ancient past.

For instance, in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s the contactee George Adamski thumbed his nose at professional scientists, claiming that his own mystical encounters with extraterrestrial intelligence equipped him to warn the nation of the destructive potential of Cold War science. Adamski's story is well-known, but Eghigian points us to his less-known tremendous influence in Asia. He shows us how European UFO investigations were in many cases born

in that continent's esoteric traditions. Adamski's approach was popular in the United States, but it was increasingly shoved aside as the US military tried to wrangle the UFOs for its own concerns. And yet, neopaganism enjoyed a tremendous revival in Germany and Britain and Scandinavia after the Second World War, and many UFO investigators there saw the question of flying saucers as a fundamentally spiritual and even occult problem. In the United States figures like the writer Donald Keyhoe and even the dour figures of Projects Sign and Grudge and Blue Book tried to slap down the influence of the George Adamskis, insisting that UFOs were a scientific and military issue not to be besmirched by talk of dimensions and magic and fairies. Such battles were present, and if anything more bitter, in Europe.

Eghigian's comparative approach bears him much fruit, and on top of that, the second half of the book is perhaps the best blow by blow of the history of the American UFO scene since the work of David Jacobs and Curtis Peebles. Unlike Garrett Graff's recent (and exhaustive) book, Eghigian's cast ranges far beyond the so-called "official" world of American universities and government agencies and defense contractors; to Adamski and European occultists we might add Soviet cosmists, American premillennial evangelicals, and Brazilian farmers, all of whom claimed that their particular worldview was essential to determining what these strange things really were.

Of course, for many of these figures, the technologically-obsessed, militarily-paranoid world of the Cold War inspired similar readings of UFOs across the globe. There was worry they were emissaries of some state or other, or if extraterrestrial, equally dedicated to conquest or destruction. That was as true in Brazil as in Boston. But at the same time, the sheer diversity of the communities Eghigian visits shows us that UFOs are perhaps most powerful when they are least explained. Lights in the sky could be anything, and exploring how these varied interpreters struggled to resolve them allows Eghigian the opportunity to make sense of how humans make sense of the world.